

James W. B. 1914

## OUR ARMY IN SALONIKA.

### A GALLANT FORCE.

#### TESTIMONY OF THE BISHOP OF LONDON.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE TIMES.

Sir,—I have completed the task entrusted to me and have reached here at Sofia the *ultima Thule* of my expedition. Assisted by glorious weather, and helped at every point by the never-failing kindness of the Commander-in-Chief, I have addressed every fighting unit of the Salonika Army still left in Macedonia or Bulgaria. I have read them the King's message of congratulation, which was cheered with equal enthusiasm in the valleys of Macedonia or the rocky fastnesses of Bulgaria. I have given each brigade a message from home of love and affection, and, as in duty bound, have added to each and all to the best of my power a message from God. St. Paul, who toiled, *not* in a motor-car, along some of the many roads on which I have travelled, would have been ashamed of the 108th Bishop of London if he had not at least attempted the last. From first to last, my threefold message has been received with a touching welcome by the whole Army, from the generals to the youngest private.

But now, before I turn my face homewards, I want to say a word, Sir, through your paper to my fellow-countrymen at home. We have not appreciated at anything like its full value the fortitude, courage, and wonderful success of the Salonika Army, and they have a sore and disappointed feeling that they are neglected and despised. A music-hall song, which ought never to have been allowed to be sung:—"If you don't want to fight, go to Salonika," has been gall and wormwood to those who had almost reached the limits of endurance before. The few who have got home on leave found the opinion common among their friends that they have been spending their time a few miles outside Salonika, with frequent opportunities of visiting on most evenings the cafés in the town. Now what are the facts of the case? To start with, large numbers have had no leave for three years, and are in many cases greatly distressed as to what may be happening in their homes; so far from spending their time near Salonika, the lines which they have had to hold have been 60 miles from the town, and most of the soldiers have never been able to visit Salonika at all. Malaria and influenza have been so rife and universal that I found on arrival, on October 16, that there were 31,000 sick in the doctors' hands, nursed by 1,600 of our splendid nurses, whose services are beyond praise. I have examined in detail on my way here the positions which were opposed to them, and I have never seen positions of such terrific strength. From the summit of the Grand Couronné, which is 3,000ft. above the plain, a full view could be obtained by the Bulgarian Army of Salonika harbour, and of every road of communication which led from it to the British lines.

In spite of this, and the fact that their numbers, always comparatively small, had been depleted by sickness, they carried out the attack so elaborately planned with consummate courage. No one wishes to depreciate the magnificent dash of the Serbian flank attack on September 9, or the onset of our Greek Allies, but what is not generally known is that this was only made possible by the great bulk of the enemy's forces being gathered opposite our lines by elaborate camouflage and feint attacks from September 1 onwards. In this operation one brigade alone lost very heavily indeed. But it was not until September 18 and 19 that the great attack came which decided the issue. The Grand Couronné and the Pip Ridge, which had frowned down upon our men for three years, were stormed by direct assault to draw away attention from the flanking movement of the Serbs and French. Every man, as he went up, went up humanly speaking to certain death, but not one turned back. One sergeant was found dead 20 yards from the summit, and a very great proportion of those who attacked were killed or wounded. But this sacrifice was not in vain. They had held the main body of the Bulgarian Army long enough for the flank attack to succeed. The retreat began; our flying men swept over and attacked the retreating enemy in the deep gorges through which alone they could attempt to escape, and the fact that I was able to motor through Bulgaria at night, alone with my chaplains, within a month after the battle, and should be writing this as quietly in Sofia to-night as I should be in London, will attest the completeness of their victory. But they have won a moral victory as well. They are leaving Macedonia now for enterprises of which I must not speak, but the Governor-General of Macedonia endorses the opinion of the whole of Macedonia that the best piece of propaganda for the British nation has been the conduct of the Salonika Army. They are leaving with the enthusiastic affection of the whole country. The clean-limbed, clean-living, courteous British soldier who saved them during the fire, and who has never interfered with their women folk or their goods, has won the heart of his Allies at the same time as he has been the first to make his enemy surrender.

May I plead for full justice to be done at home to the work of the Salonika Army?

Yours faithfully,

Sofia, Oct. 24.

A. F. LONDON.