



## DECISIVE BATTLES OF THE WORLD

### (4) The Battle of Tours

**T**HE Battle of Chalons, discussed last week, like the Battle of Marathon, decided whether the East or the West would dominate Europe. At Marathon, the Persians were stayed in their westward march. After Marathon the Mediterranean peoples fought amongst themselves to decide, virtually, which should move west and north into uncivilised Europe. To Rome came this task, and in turn to Arminius came the task of halting Rome to make the Rhine the frontier for Germanic tribes rising into new nationhood. Rome's last major effort in Europe was to assist the Visigoths of what is now France to halt Attila at the Battle of Chalons.

#### The Empire of Charlemagne

When the Hun had been driven back along the route he had taken into Europe from Central Asia, the events of history began to centre themselves about the Rhine and the river valleys of France. Charlemagne built up his Empire between 768-814. The Roman Empire was no longer in any state to give a lead in affairs. Charlemagne took its place. His power extended from the coasts of the North Sea and the Atlantic down to the Pyrenees and east as far as Vienna. Germanic tribes about the present location of Sudetenland he conquered and civilised.

But, as was the case with all his great predecessors in a world which relied for its rulers on the power of personal prestige, when Charlemagne died his Empire was divided among quarrelling descendants. Between 900 and 1000 A.D. it sorted itself out, roughly, into the separate kingdoms of Germany, France, and Italy. Across the Channel at this time the Anglo-Saxon races were in turn fighting among themselves for supremacy and fighting against invaders from Scandinavia. While they were working out their history the dukedom of Normandy was growing in power. By 1035 A.D. William had succeeded to Robert of Normandy.

#### The East Threatens Again

But before Charlemagne, before the creation of Germany and France, before England, before Hastings, European peoples had to face another determined attempt by the East to subjugate them. It came this time from the southern shores of the Mediterranean. It came with the force of a great religious feeling behind it. It came from Persia and Arabia and Egypt. It swept across North

Africa and up through Spain. It crossed the Pyrenees, and advanced into France.

Its inspiration was Mahomet, who first conquered Arabia and then, with the Arabs, conquered Persia. He died in 632, but his power increased as he became sanctified. United by their fanaticism, the Saracens carved up the remains of the Roman Empire in the East and by 709 A.D. had established themselves over Syria, Egypt, and all North Africa. Four years later they had invaded and conquered the Iberian Peninsula and Spain was their stepping-off place for the conquest of northern and western Europe.

#### Charles Martel's Achievement

They might easily have been successful. Nationhood was still a vague enough ideal in Europe. The different tribes were still shuffling themselves into national entities, and still breaking down through internecine strife whatever unity they temporarily achieved. But once again they were saved by the personality and prowess of a great man.

Charles Martel, or Karl Martell, was of Germanic origin. It was fortunate that such a bold figure should at that time have been head of a more or less dominant people. Martel was duke of the Austrian Franks, the most energetic part of the Germanic nation. By the time of his greatest testing at the Battle of Tours he had benefited from long experience in wars with his neighbours and against marauders from pagan races outside.

His achievement is all the more to be admired because he won his battle with an army liable at any moment to pack

up and go about its business, or to divide itself in quarrels. His Franks were men of great independence. If they were not satisfied with their leader or the results of their campaigns, they left and went home. Martel had to gather them in unusually large numbers, and keep them interested in his plans by offering them the prospect of immediate and successful battle.

Against him was the Arab general Abderrahman.

Abderrahman was appointed Moslem caliph in Spain in 729, and it was he who made the final decision about advancing Moslem territory over the Pyrenees. By the year 732 A.D. he had ready an army more than 80,000 strong. He crossed the Pyrenees, swept the armies of the Count of Aquitania in front of him, and hurried on to ravage France itself.

But by now Eudo of Aquitania had sent messages to Charles Martel, and Martel came up in time to see the Arabs sacking Tours under the very eyes of its rescuers.

#### Defeat of the Saracens

The Saracen army was hindered by its spoils, and Abderrahman feared to discipline them more strongly in case greed for what they already possessed persuaded them to leave the field. However, he managed to draw them up and made use of their vigour in battle by initiating the attack. The Franks stood firm, and the first day of the battle gave the decision to neither side. In the early morning of the next day the Saracens returned with renewed vigour and had soon cut through to the centre of the Frankish army. It seemed as if they were about to win the day, when a cry went up that their camp was being plundered and their booty removed by a band of Franks. Whether the rumours were true or not, many of them broke away from the main battle and hastened back to their possessions. Abderrahman tried to check them, but the ranks were broken, the Franks came through, and Abderrahman himself was killed.

His death hastened the disorder of the Arab forces. They broke and fled, and many died running away.

No further attempts to cross the Pyrenees were made by the Arabs. In their chronicles of the battle they admit an overwhelming defeat. The East had tried again, and failed again.

## THE OLD FRONT LINE

**A** NEW ZEALAND officer of the last war who visited the battlefields of Northern France and Belgium three years ago found little evidence of the former conflict. He had been in the Ypres Salient when the New Zealand Division went back into the line after Passchendaele, and wished to find again the old front line beyond the Butte. It was impossible; no trace of the trenches could be found, though the whole countryside, for hundreds of miles, was a vast network of them.

That sea of mud and desolation had been transformed into a land of neat farms. Except for concrete pillboxes dotted here and there among them over the old battlefields, there was little to mark the signs of four years of conflict. Gleaming tarred roads cut through the country, covering the pavé which defied years of bombardment and on which the German shells made little or no difference. Hooze Crater, once Brigade Headquarters during the Division's spell in the line, was not even visible, though it was deep enough in 1917 to take dug-outs burrowed into its dripping banks. Nor was there any sign of other craters which lined the duckboard track all the way to the Butte de Polygon.

#### The Butte de Polygon

The Butte itself, he said, was a picturesque sight and beautifully kept as a memorial to the 5th Australian Division. This great mound, which dates from about 1870, is visible for miles across the gently undulating country which stretches from Ypres to the coast. Perhaps, during the rearguard action fought by the British Expeditionary Force of 1940, that same Butte, which sheltered many New Zealanders during the last war, became both a refuge and a target once more.

One feature of the countryside astonished the New Zealand visitor. On all the roads branching out from Ypres to various parts of the old salient, roads along which the New Zealanders wearily tramped, the old war sign-posts had been preserved to remind succeeding generations of the ravages of war. "Hell Fire Corner," on the Menin Road, for instance, was still there, along with others equally famous in that dreary region.

The visitor found that the war cemeteries were tended with the greatest care and that each was surrounded by beautiful gardens. He wished to find his brother's grave and, such is the organisation and accuracy of the records, that he was able to go to the exact spot in a few minutes.

Many New Zealanders will remember the large hotel on the hill behind Boulogne which did duty as a hospital during the last war. Thousands of our men found comfort and relief there. Three years ago that hotel was a ruin. Every window of its grey front overlooking the coast had been broken, and gave the building a most desolate appearance. When the war ended and the hotel was emptied of its last patients, it was left to the bats and the elements, since the owners were no longer in a position to go into business again.

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