

FLIGHT

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The Outlook

Christmas in Wartime

ON December 25, 1914, troops in the front line trenches in France and Flanders spontaneously declared an unofficial truce, and British and Germans (Saxons, it was understood) met in No Man's Land in the evening and fraternised. Now there is little inclination on either side for such manifestations, nor is there much opportunity for them, except round beleaguered Bardia. But, for one reason or another, there was little carnage on Christmas Day. On both sides of the English Channel the thick weather may have been responsible; in the Mediterranean area there may have been little need for it after the considerable activity of the day before. There is no good reason why the British should sacrifice lives by storming Bardia, as the place must soon fall in any case, and one quiet day does not strengthen the Italian position, while it uses up the normal quantities of food and water. One energetic German bomber crew set out for the Orkneys on Christmas Day, perhaps thinking that the trip would be a safe one, and would find the British airmen and seamen so busy with turkey and plum pudding that they would not interfere with the visitor. That crew was disappointed; the Fleet Air Arm and R.A.F. fighters shot the bomber down, and four of the crew were taken prisoner. Perhaps, after all, they got a better Christmas dinner than they would have had in Germany. A solitary raider over Sheppey did no harm, and another was shot down off Gibraltar.

It was left to the Italians to make the worst possible use of the day. They bombed Corfu, killing 15 civilians and wounding 30 others—a manifestation of the Christmas spirit which was certainly not made necessary by the exigencies of war. We offer our deep sympathy to the islanders. For the rest, we may all be glad that this Christmas Day passed without many wartime tragedies.

Night Defence

THE Air Ministry has blown alternately hot and cold about the prospects of finding a device for defeating the night bomber. One usually well-informed newspaper proclaimed in an announcement which appeared to be officially inspired that the new British defence measures would become effective about Christmas time. At other times a subsequent date has been hinted at in official quarters. The Prime Minister, in his speech on December 19, seemed anxious to dispel any optimistic illusions. He mentioned the efforts being made to find a remedy by brilliant scientists and others, and he alluded, somewhat mysteriously, to "a considerable improvement in various directions" which has been noticed. But he did not hold out anything tangible in the way of hope that the night bomber would be mastered, remarked that so far we had not reached any satisfactory remedy, and concluded that passage of his speech with the words: "We must expect a continuance of these attacks and must bear them."

It is always Mr. Churchill's way to prepare the country for the worst, knowing that the country is fortified by knowledge and candour. In consequence, when he announces good news, he is always fully believed at once. Nobody ever suspects him of hiding a dubious situation behind specious words. He, like other people, was no doubt impressed by the folly of the French censorship in not allowing the French people to be prepared in mind for the possibility of defeat, with the result that the reaction, when it came, was overwhelming. The consolation which Mr. Churchill offers is that the Germans are equally unable to stop British night bombers. These latter do not waste effort and bombs on attempts to terrorise the civil population, but always aim at German war production, and suchlike. Their continued blows must be producing an effect, even on so highly developed and widespread an industry.