Hanover (King George I.) was held in check by the duc d’Harcourt on the Lauter and finally retired to the lines of Stoll- hofen, while a smaller allied corps under the imperialist general Count Mercy was defeated with heavy loss by Harcourt’s second in command, Du Bourg, at Rumersheim in Upper Alsace (Aug. 26). On the Alpine frontier Berwick, abandoning the fashionable method of “ lines,” prepared a remarkable system of mobile defence pivoted on Briançon, on which Victor Amadeus’s feeble attacks made no impression. These affairs were little more than diversions. The main, indeed the only, attack was Marlborough’s and Eugene’s, and the Malplaquet campaign is one of the few episodes of 18th century warfare that retain a living and passionate interest.

Long before this Marlborough had proposed to dash straight forward into France, masking the fortresses, but this scheme was too bold even for Eugene, who preferred to reduce the strong places before going on. Lille having been successfully besieged, Tournai was the next objective, and—while Villars and his lieutenants Montesquiou and Albergotti lay inactive in their entrenchments at Béthune, Douai and Denain on the Scheldt, training their thousands of recruits and suffering severely from the famine that followed upon this bad winter—the allies sud­denly and secretly left their camps before Lille as if for an attack on the Douai lines (June 26-27). But before noon on the 27th they had invested Tournai. A few days afterwards their siege guns came up from Menin by water (down the Lys and up the Scheldt) and the siege was pressed with intense vigour. But it was the 3rd of September before the citadel capitulated. Then Marl- borough, free to move again, transferred his army secretly and by degrees to the river Haine, beyond Villars’s right. East of St Ghislain Villars’s long lines of earthworks were but thinly held, and after a march of 50 m. in 56 hours through rain-sodden country, the allied advanced guard passed through them un­opposed (Sept. 6th). Mons, too, was weakly held, and Marlborough hoped by the rapidity of his operations to take it before Villars could interrupt him. Based on Mons and Brussels, he could then, leaving the maze of fortresses in the Arras-Valenciennes region to his right, push on (as eighty years afterwards Coburg attempted to push on) straight to the heart of France. But Villars also moved quickly, and his eager army was roused to enthusiasm by the arrival of Marshal Bouffiers, who, senior as he was to Villars, had come forward again at the moment of danger to serve as his second in command. Thinking that the allies were somewhat farther to the east than they were in fact, the French marshal marched secretly, screened by the broken and wooded ground to the south of the fortress, and occupied the gap of Aulnois-Malplaquet (Sept. 9), one of the two@@1 practicable passages, where he set to work feverishly to entrench himself. Marlborough at once realized what had happened, and giving up the siege of Mons brought his army to the south-east of the place. Preparing, as at Oudenarde, to attack as rapidly as his brigades came on the scene, he cannon­aded the French working parties and drew the return fire of all Villars’s guns. At this crisis the duke submitted the question of battle—unwillingly, as one may imagine—to a council of war, and Eugene himself was opposed to fighting an improvised battle when so much was at stake. Others thought the capture of the little fortress of St Ghislain was the best solution of the problem, and it was not until the 11th that the allies delivered their attack on the now thoroughly entrenched position of the French. The battle of Malplaquet *(q.υ.)* was by far the most desperately contested of the war. In the end Bouffiers, who took command when Villars was wounded, acknowledged defeat and drew off in good order, the left to Valenciennes, the right to Bavay and Le Quesnoy. Eugene was wounded, and Marlborough, after the most terrible experience in any soldier’s lifetime, had only enough energy remaining to take Mons before he retired into winter quarters. The loss of the French is given variously as 7000 and 12,000. The allies sacrificed no less, probably more, than 20,000 men, and if the English and Austrian survivors could count themselves the bravest soldiers alive, one

considerable part of the allied army at least, the Dutch contin- gent, was ruined for ever. Even at Fontenoy, thirty-six years later, the memory of Malplaquet made them faint-hearted. From his bed the wounded Villars wrote triumphantly to Louis: “ If God gives us another defeat like this, your majesty’s enemies will be destroyed.’’

In 1710 Villars lay entrenched behind a new series of lines, which he called *Ne plus ultra* and which extended from Valenciennes to the sea. Marlborough made no attempt to invade France from the side of Mons, for Villars at the head of the army which had been through the ordeal of Malplaquet was too terrible an opponent to pass by with impunity. In England, too, the anti-Marlborough party was gaining the upper hand in the queen’s council. So Marlborough took no risks, and returning to the Lille side, captured Douai (June 26) and Béthune (Aug. 26). No attack was attempted upon the lines. In Dauphiné, Berwick again repulsed the Austrians and Piedmontese.

1711 was Marlborough’s last campaign, and it was remarkable for the capture of the *Ne plus ultra* lines by manoeuvres that must be recorded as being the *ne plus ultra* of the 18th-century way of making war by stratagem. In May the sudden death of the emperor completely altered the political outlook, for his successor Charles was the coalition’s claimant to the throne of Spain, and those who were fighting for the “ balance of power ’’ could no more tolerate a new Charles V. than they could see Louis XIV. become a Charlemagne. Before the allies could agree upon any concerted action, Eugene’s army had departed for Germany, and Marlborough alone was left to face Villars’s great army. But in pursuance of the policy of passive endurance the marshal remained on the defensive behind the lines, and Marlborough determined to dislodge him. What force could not achieve, the duke trusted to obtain by ruse. The lines extended from the sea along the Canche, thence to Arras, and along the Sensée to Bouchain on the Scheldt. Marlborough held Lille, Tournai, Béthune and, in front of these places, Douai, while Villars’s strong places, other than those in the lines, were Valenciennes, Condé, Le Quesnoy, &c. As the western part of the lines, besides being strong, were worthless from the invaders’ point of view because their capture could not lead to anything, Marlborough determined to pass the barrier between Arras and Bouchain. Here the front was difficult of access, because of the inundations and swamps of the Sensée valley, but two causeways crossed this valley at Arleux and Aubanchoeil-au-Bac respectively. On the 6th of July Marlborough, who had encamped in the plain of Lens, sent a detachment to capture Arleux. He then marched away to the west as if to attack the lines between Arras and the headwaters of the Canche. Villars followed suit, but left a corps behind, as Marlborough had expected and desired, to retake Arleux. The commander of the garrison then sent urgent messages to say that he could not hold out, and Marlborough sent off Cadogan to relieve him. Cadogan, the only officer in the army in the duke’s confidence, moved slowly, and the garrison had to surrender (July 22). Villars razed the defences of Arleux. The plot of the comedy now thickened. Marlborough lost his usual serenity, and behaved in so eccentric a manner that his own army thought him mad. He sent off one part of his forces to Bethune, another back to Douai, and ordered the small remainder to attack the lines between the Canche and Arras, where, as every one knew, Villars’s whole army was massed. On the 24th of August he personally reconnoitred the lines with a large staff, and calmly gave his generals instructions for the lines to be stormed. But Cadogan was hastening to give the duke’s real orders to the corps at Béthune and Douai. In the night of the 4th-5th of August the main army set out for Aubanchoeil-au-Bac, at the highest possible speed. The Scarpe was crossed, the Béthune column came in punctually, and the word was passed down the ranks that Cadogan had crossed the lines at Arleux. Thereupon the pace was increased, though thousands of the infantry fell out and scores died from exhaustion. Five hours ahead of the French

@@@1 The other, scarcely less celebrated, is that of Jemappes.