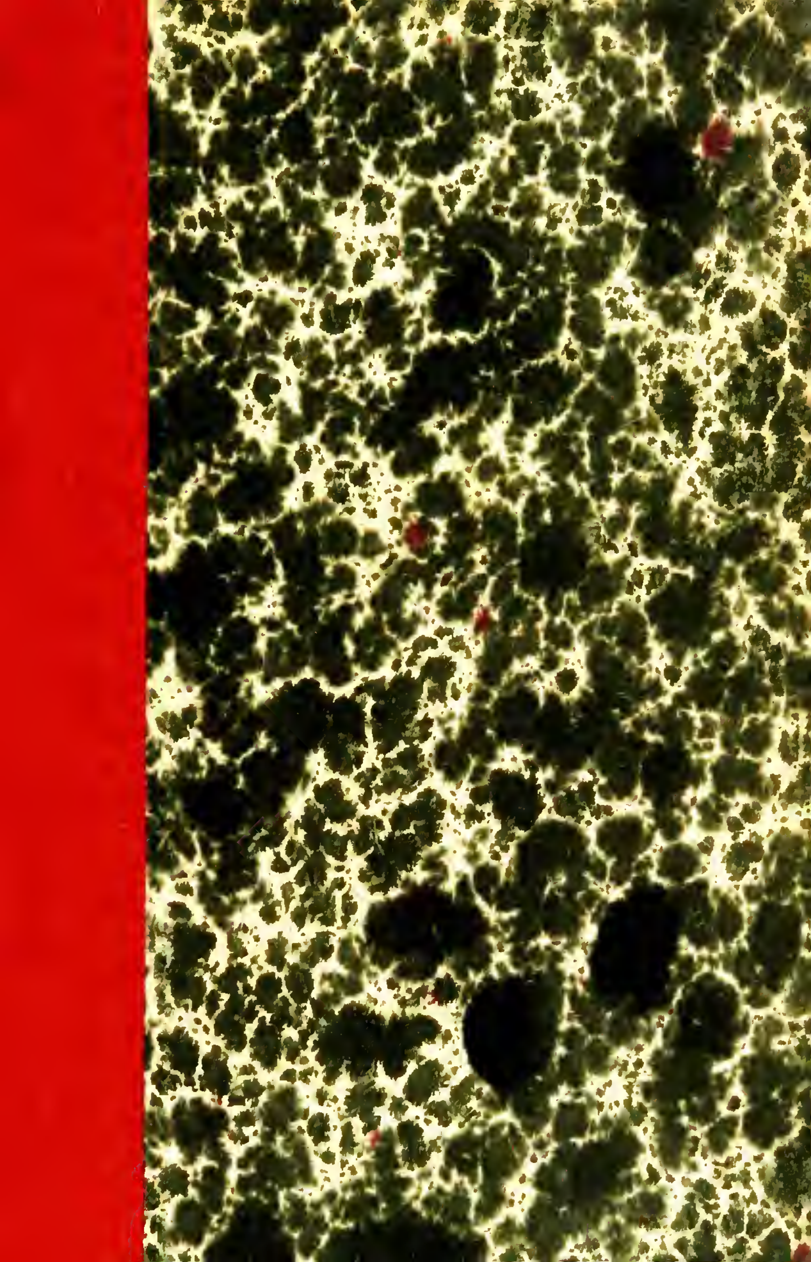

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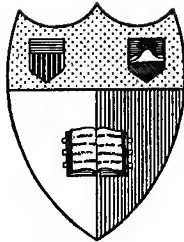

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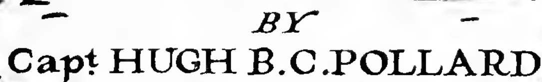
THE STORY OF YPRES

BY

Capt. HUGH B.C. POLLARD



The Story of Ypres

THE STORY OF YPRES

By
HUGH B. C. POLLARD
(*Captain the London Regiment*)

Illustrated by
THOMAS DERRICK

Cover Design by
R. P. GOSSOP

SOME of us laid down our lives at Ypres; there, too, many of us said farewell for all time to our careless youth. No one of us will ever regret his sacrifice or forget the terror and the splendour of those days.

Of those who have fallen, write only upon their monuments,

"THEY FELL AT YPRES"

—it is immortal honour.

NEW YORK
ROBERT M. McBRIDE & COMPANY
1917

Preface

YPRES en FLANDRE

JADIS, en pays Flandre, il était une ville, belle parmi toutes les antres villes belles du pays Flandres; Cent clochers la veillaient et cent villages s'etaient groupés á son ombre; l'été des moissons d'or à dix lieues à la ronde, houlaient vers elles leur vagues lumineuses, et il semblait que des voix invisibles bruissaient dans l'air pour proclamer sa beauté.

Hélas! aujourd'hui elle est morte, heröique et martyre, et il n'y a plus en Flandre— ni clochers, ni moissons, ni villages.

Le vent qui passait au large a entendu sa clameur de souffrance, et le vent l'a emporté à l'autre bout du monde, et ce fut par la terre entière un sanglot violent.

Les étoiles qui pavaient le ciel, ont vu de leurs yeux d'or et d'éffroi, la rage démentée du feu et du sang, se disputer les pauvres membres torturés, et les étoiles ont pali d'épouvent, et elles ont fermé leurs paupières, pour ne plus voir—

Mais quand Ypres exhala son âme, que, dans un dernier brasier elle s'éffronda rouge, la terre Flamande en tréssaient si fort qu'au loin du plus lointaine cimitière son frisson étreignit les os des morts qui se dressèrent épouvantés et blêmes,—comme si se venait de sonner l'heure du Grand Jugement.

Autrefois, il était en Flandre— . . .
Vous m' avez fait l'honneur, Mon chèr Capitaine Pollard, de me demander pour votre étude historique sur Ypres, quelques notes limitaires et vous me voyez fort embarrassé;

Je viens d'achever la lecture de votre travail si intéressant et si documenté à la

fois, et je constate que vous avez dit tout ce qu'il fallait dire, et aussi que vous l'avez dit mieux que je l'aurai pú.

Pendant que nos "Jasses" à l'autre extrémité de la ligne, luttaient et mouraient stöiquement à l'Yser, vous étiez là, avec les vôtres, les chevaleresque et nobles "Tommies," qui mouraient et luitaient superbement pour défendre ce qui nous restait encore de notre pauvre petite Belgique.

Vous avez personnellement vécu cette mort d'Ypres. Avec le vent vous avez entendu, avec les étoiles vous avez vu, et un large frisson d'horreur poignante a secoué vos vertebres et est entré dans vos möelles.

Vous ne connaissiez peut-être pas cette Flandre dont vous étiez un des ramparts d'heröisme.

C'était un si lointainement lointain pays, mais á la voir souffrir vous l'avez aimée et toute son âme est entrée dans votre âme.

La révolte a battue dans vos artères, la

haine a monté dans vos tempes et, comme elle levait les moignons de ses bras en un appel suprême,—vous avez eu la vision merveilleuse d'un passe plus merveilleux encore, surgir entre les ruines, et toute l'Histoire de Flandres vous est apparue magnifiquement perpétuée.

Votre sang généreux a coulé sur la terre flammande, et la terre a bû votre sang avec le sang de nos ultimes défenseurs.

Aujourd'hui elle en est impregné et—quand plus tard les blés nouveaux se lèveront sur nos champs, ces blés seront riches d'une sève commune, car vos morts et nos morts dorment confondues en une fraternelle et même étreinte.

MARCEL WYSEUR.

THE STORY OF YPRES

HERE is no name connected with the European War that will live longer in men's minds than that of Ypres. It is a word that carries its suggestion of deathless heroism, its sad symbolism of sacrifice, and its glorious tradition of victory to all

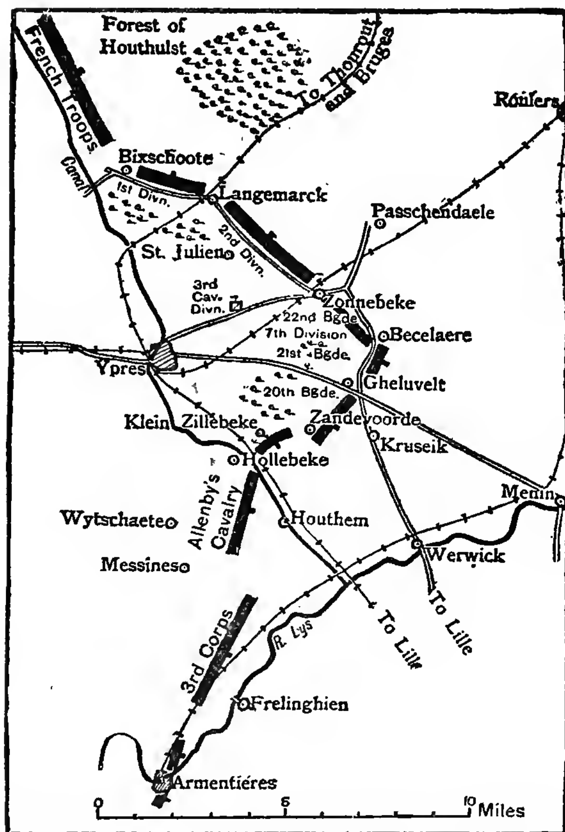
corners of the earth where the Anglo-Saxon tongue is heard.

Ypres, Ypres "la morte"—a City of the Dead—but deathless for all time.

To hold the city the best blood of the Allies has been shed. British and Belgian, French and Canadian, Turcos from Algeria, and Indians from the banks of the Ganges and Indus, all have given their lives, dying to maintain the position upon which depended the whole fortunes of the Western war.

There were two separate battles of Ypres in the first year of the war, each critical, each costly, but both victorious. Out of the medley of contemporary accounts, sketches, and stories of the war in Flanders, tales of the salient of Ypres take premier place, and no other battle name can assail the majesty of the Dead City.

It is in this very breadth and spaciousness of the images that the name evokes that



THE FIRST BATTLE OF YPRES—THE LINE ON OCTOBER 21.

clear idea of the city itself is lost. Ypres means so much to us that it is hard to realize it as a little Flemish town, the kernel of those lines of defence that twice withstood the stupendous onslaught of the German legions. The city is ashes, but its name will live for ever. The story of its death is the story of the collapse of the German offensive in Flanders.

It is difficult to convey an idea of the size or extent of a strange town to people who have never seen it, but Ypres was a city of some seventeen thousand inhabitants—a little quiet country town about the size of Durham, St. Albans, or Bridgewater.

Established in the fourteenth century, it was for long the centre of the woollen trade, and had much traffic with our English towns. The prosperous burghers took pride in their city, and its wonderful Cathedral of Saint Martin and its celebrated Cloth Hall were among the finest early Gothic build-

ings in Flanders. With the passing of time and the decay of the wool trade, Ypres became a sleepy little backwater, whose indolent calm was occasionally disturbed by the various French wars; but in those days it was seldom that the fabric of a city suffered hurt from siege or leaguer.

In 1914 it stood but little touched by time, as quiet and serene as, let us say, the Cathedral Close of Wells. It was rather out of the way for tourists' visits, and still maintained its character as a religious centre, the population being for the most part devoted Catholics and much of the life of the town centering around the religious communities and the Cathedral. The people were mainly industrious middle-class Belgians, and the leisurely manufacture of hand-made Valenciennes lace was their chief source of income. Little did they dream of the martyrdom that they would suffer before the close of the year.

Events move swiftly, and the German advance, driven back from the line of the Marne to the positions upon the Aisne, changed its nature and began to stretch out toward the sea coast. The German High Command anticipated an attack in great strength along the line of the La Bassée Canal, an assault that never came. This imaginary concentration they endeavoured to outflank. Had this plan been successful, the whole British and Belgian forces would have been hemmed in against the coastline between Antwerp and Calais, while the main German attack would have swept through Arras to Boulogne.

So soon as this design became manifest, the Allies carried out the evacuation of Antwerp, which was no longer tenable, and the Belgian Army retreated through Ghent, covered by the British 7th Division and the Naval Division, and preceded by the 3rd Cavalry Division. By October 15, 1914,

the retreat had been safely accomplished, and much of the Belgian Army, very weary and disorganized, lay in the Forest of Houlthurst near Ypres. The remainder lay round Ostend. The city of Ypres itself was full of wounded, and four miles away towards Armentières the English cavalry patrols were in touch with the enemy, and with the remainder of the British forces that had been fighting round Armentières, checking the westward expansion of the German line while the retreat from Antwerp was in progress.

This, then, was the position when the British first entered Ypres. The Belgian Army, exhausted but safe, had gained the line of the Yser Canal. The British force that had been separated—part at Antwerp, the other at Lille—had joined again, and both French and British were straining every nerve to pour up more reserves of troops to hold the line of the Yser from

Nieuport to Ypres. It had been a race against time, and the Allies had won.

As yet Sir John French had no knowledge of the vast forces the Germans were bringing against us, and on the 19th of October Sir Henry Rawlinson with the 7th Division was ordered to seize Menin and, as soon as the 1st Corps under Sir Douglas Haig could reinforce him, pivot upon Menin and endeavour to outflank the German right at Courtrai. It was impossible—the Germans had brought no fewer than four new reserve corps straight from Germany toward Courtrai. On the evening of the 20th the Allied forces were in the position that they have held ever since, and the stage was set for the first battle of Ypres.

It is difficult to set a period to a modern battle, but authorities agree that this battle lasted from the 20th of October to the 17th of November, a period of twenty-seven days. Field-Marshal Viscount French him-

self specifies Saturday the 31st as the most critical of all.

The long drawn conflict had varying periods of intensity. A close analysis of it from a purely military standpoint can subdivide it into a series of successive actions and plot it out into a rhythmic series of thrust, parry and counter thrusts as the contending armies were manœuvred by their master brains. Such an exposition is bewildering to the lay mind, and cannot be achieved within the limits of space allowed me in this little book. I must therefore treat of the battle on broader lines, viewing it as a whole and only sub-dividing it into its essential phases.

The whole purpose of the Germans was to break through at Ypres and so clear the way to Calais and the Channel ports. The Allies used every man they could spare to stop the thrust of these vast masses that enormously outnumbered them, and the

first battle of Ypres splits into two phases The first of these was from the 20th to the 31st of October—the crisis and turning point of the battle, the second from the 31st of October to the 17th of November. The three days of paramount importance were the 29th, 30th and 31st of October, during which period the fate of the Allied cause trembled in the balance.

The first battle of Ypres was a contest of giants, for the pick of the German armies was concentrated upon the adventure. Opposed to them they had the trained British soldiers of the Old Regular Army, units brought up to strength after mobilisation by calling up their reservists, and in the later stages of the battle they met crack British Territorial units.

The strength of the British lay not only in their indomitable spirit and magnificent discipline, but in their terrible musketry efficiency. The Germans had an over-

whelming preponderance both in men and in artillery, they attacked with magnificent courage and methodical precision, but they were not a match for either British or French troops. Man to man the Allies were immeasurably superior, and all through this period of bitter sacrifice, despite terrific casualties and weariness to the point of exhaustion, their courage remained undaunted, their morale superbly unshaken. The world has never seen better troops.

By the 20th of October the 1st Corps had arrived at Ypres, and relieved the pressure of the existing 7th Division and the Cavalry who together with the French who were holding the Yser Canal bank north of Ypres, formed the Allied force in the Ypres sector.

The first series of actions in the battle took place in the northern sector of the Salient, then gradually extended round the centre and culminated in the terrific attacks

along the Menin road and to the south which characterised the critical period.

During all the period of fighting round Ypres a fierce contest was taking place all along the La Bassée-Messines line further south, and the British troops there were so fiercely engaged that no reinforcements could be spared. Action was continuous, and practically speaking, fighting raged with more or less intensity from Dixmude to La Bassée, in an unbroken line of fire.

On the 21st of October Haig's First Corps took up its position to the north of Ypres and attacked towards Poelcappelle. Their left flank was supported by the French Territorials of the 87th and 89th Division, their right by the British 7th Division. This movement was promptly attacked by the whole of the German forces concentrated under General von Fabeck, and the 21st and 22nd of October were days of the fiercest fighting the hearts of soldiers could desire.

The Germans still held to their idea of massed formations, and endeavoured to overwhelm the twin Allied line by sheer weight of men and a stupendous concentration of artillery fire.

The Allies spread out over a wide range of country, they had nothing but extemporised cover, and mere ditches rather than trenches, and they had no reserves. It was a Homeric contest madly, resolutely fought out, a soldiers' battle.

The grey swathes of Germans lay dead before the British positions. Our shallow fire trenches were choked with dead Germans who had fallen upon our bayonets, and the incessant German assaults were broken by concentrated magazine fire and driven back to cover by counter attacks with the bayonet.

Men fought and had no time for thinking, wounded men loaded for their comrades and the waving tide of battle fluctuated

backward and forward over the narrow firing zone until the ground was thick with dead and dying.

In the meantime the French on the left had suffered heavily and had been forced back towards the canal. To reinforce them the 1st Brigade; Scots Guards, Cameron Highlanders and the Black Watch in reserve, had been moved round to this flank and the junction of the defensive line between the Scots Guards and the Camerons was a horseshoe of trenches round the Pilkan inn.

This point was attacked by the German volunteer corps, the Einjahrige, a unit composed of young lads who were serving their year of probation in the ranks before receiving commissions as officers. These cadets advanced in mass formation singing patriotic songs, and despite terrific losses succeeded in carrying the position. It was a brave fight and the spirit of the cadets

called forth unstinted admiration from our own seasoned troops, but even this reckless sacrifice of their best young blood availed them nothing. The position was retaken next day.

This fighting in the northern sector had proved terribly costly for the Germans. Every foot of ground had been contested, no advantageous points had been wrested from the Allies and the carnage had been hideous. In the meantime the centre sector held by the 7th Division had not been heavily attacked, for the Germans supposed that it was very strongly held. On the 23rd the French 9th Army Corps arrived—a very welcome reinforcement, and during the 23rd and 24th they took over the northern sector of the Salient while the British were withdrawn to reinforce the lightly held south and centre.

The ring of fire was drawn tight round the whole Salient. During the fierce battle

in the Northern sector minor attacks and constant bombardment had been the lot of the centre and south. It was a difficult position, for there were neither reserves nor reliefs, and had either of the flanks given way the tide of battle would have swept through to the rear, leaving the other defenders isolated among the hordes.

So thinly was the line held that, even as it was, the enemy on occasions penetrated the line. Such an event occurred on the 24th when the line near Reutel was pierced and the enemy poured into Polygon wood. For a moment it was touch-and-go, but the Divisional Cyclists and the Northumberland Hussars Yeomanry, though hugely outnumbered, succeeded in holding the enemy. It was brave work dependent absolutely on musketry, and there the British markmanship had a chance to assert itself, and the Germans, unable to advance in solid masses through the trees, suffered badly

through their lack of training in individual skill at arms. The 2nd Warwicks were speedily brought up and cleared the wood with rifle and bayonet, killing an enormous number of Germans with a marvellously light toll of casualties among themselves. It was Indian fighting, quick snap shooting and rushes from cover to cover. The bewildered Germans died in droves.

The Germans now called more or less of a halt in the battle and proceeded to change their point of view of assault, the North having proved invulnerable. The fighting in the future was to be directed along the Menin road and against the southern sector towards Hollebeke.

The natural position of Ypres made it no easy position to attack, for it lies girdled upon the East and South by a ridge of high ground. These low hills were held by the Allies, and in addition to giving them a superior position for artillery fire and

direct observation, the hills were thickly wooded and only pierced by the main roads that radiate starlike out of the city of Ypres to Menin, Lille and Roulers.

The German attack depended upon overwhelming the Allies under mass attacks. The odds in favour of the Germans were about ten to one, but such was the nature of the position that they could only attack in mass formation along the roads and open spaces. Among the woods their formations could not keep touch, or move unbroken, yet nothing but masses of men and reckless disregard of carnage could hope to subdue the terrible superiority of the British fire.

The Kaiser came in person to Courtrai and Thielt. Sir John French visited the British Headquarters at Hooge, and upon our side, too, advantage was taken of the pause to re-arrange and re-adjust. The line was concentrated and stiffened. While Sir John French worked the Kaiser inspected

and made speeches to the picked German troops, heartening them to die willingly for the triumph of Kaiserdom and German arms. On the 29th of October the first of the three Great Days began.

The 2nd Division held the line from Zonnebeke in the north to Reutel, the 1st Division held from Reutel south to Kruiseik Hill, and the 7th Division held Kruiseik Hill itself and thence south to Zandvoorde. The cavalry held the trenches from Zandvoorde to the Lys Canal. Such was the British line of battle, a girdle of heroes round the city of Ypres.

The action opened at dawn with a terrific bombardment by the massed German artillery, and was succeeded by an attack straight down the great Menin road by the vast mass of the German column. Simultaneously the Germans advanced minor columns to the attack along the roads to Reutel and Zandvoorde and such inter-

mediate by-roads and spaces that converged upon the British line.

The main attack had as its objective the seizing of Kruiseik Hill, and despite the ghastly slaughter of Germans that took place along the fire-swept Menin road, the surviving masses, pressing forward literally over mounds of their dead and dying comrades, succeeded in seizing the hill at about two o'clock in the afternoon, having endured that merciless blizzard of death for some eight hours.

Everywhere else along the front they had been repulsed and had not succeeded in reaching our trenches. Braving the most appalling losses they attacked again and again, but each time the merciless British fire consumed them.

Then came Sir Douglas Haig's order for a general British counter attack. Our men swept forward, cheering as they flashed their gleaming bayonets, and the German attack

was everywhere hurled back broken upon its lines. Kruiseik Hill was stormed and regained with a vast slaughter of the resisting Germans and the fortunes of the day were again favourable to the Allies.

In the night the Germans received a very strong reinforcement of no less than three corps, the Fifteenth and Thirteenth German, and the second Bavarian Corps. The attack next morning came not along the Menin road, but south at Zandvoorde and Hollebeke. No less than five Army Corps, some 300,000 men attacked the low hills held by the 7th Division and the Cavalry Division. Odds of more than ten to one, but not too great for our sterling fighters. The German troops had received the Imperial Order, they had been told that upon them depended the vital issue of the campaign, and in truth this was so, for their failure was no less our lasting victory.

The field grey masses swarmed the lower

slopes under a blaze of crackling, unerring rifle fire from the trenches, while the vault above them was trashed by shrapnel from the guns. Wave after wave of men surged on to meet with annihilation. The dead men hampered the living, and when at last the inestimable mass of survivors reached the trenches held by the Cavalry Division, the British, who had suffered few casualties, simply melted away in the woods behiud and withdrew to another position in the rear.

The Germans did not dare face those deadly woods from which the incessant ripple of skirmishers' musketry still flayed them. They halted on the Zandvoorde ridge to reform, and during the pause Sir Douglas Haig was able to withdraw the whole southern line and reform it along the Klein Zillebeke ridge from Gheluvelt to the canal. The French, ever ready in co-operation, were able to send over to the

right flank three infantry battalions and a cavalry brigade from the 9th Corps. Meanwhile the thrust at Hollebeke had been held by the Cavalry of the 2nd Division, and they had inflicted terrible losses upon the attacking columns whose hopeless task it was to turn Hollebeke to ease the attack upon Zandvoorde. The situation was critical, but there were still some small reserves in hand for emergency, and the position was still tenable.

The failure of the Zandvoorde-Hollebeke turning movement was manifest, so on the following day, the memorable 31st of October, 1914, the German assault was renewed on the original line down the Menin road, while at the same time a simultaneous attack was delivered from Zandvoorde.

At daybreak a French reinforcement that had come over from the 9th Corps counter-attacked south-east of Gheluvelt,

but the masses of enemy were impenetrable and the attack was halted. The fortunes of the day centred upon Gheluvelt, and despite all efforts the 1st Division was at last driven in and its flank forced to retreat down the road toward Ypres.

The attack from Zandvoorde had also been pressed home so that the 7th Division had not only their left flank enfiladed at Gheluvelt but their right flank on the Klein-Zillebeke ridge turned. They too had to retreat through the woods toward Ypres.

At this critical juncture Sir John French was at Hooge and in personal touch with the march of events. As the Germans drove their huge column along the Menin road into the British Salient they exposed an ever-growing vulnerable flank. Sir John French seized his opportunity. This flank was promptly attacked from the North by all troops that could be mustered from the 1st Army Corps and 27,000 men—the 1st

Division and part of the 2nd Division—were hurled against this weak point.

It was a master stroke. The enemy were held, the retiring British troops rallied, and the great mass of the German thrust attacked from front and flank was mown down wholesale. For a brief moment they held together, then the rout commenced and the broken masses streamed back through the deadly woods toward their own lines.

Despite the incessant three days' fighting the victorious British pursued with rifle and bayonet, while the 6th Cavalry Brigade cleared the woods of little isolated bodies and stragglers.

It was a grim bit of work, that rout of the German masses, when the débris of the vast broken fighting machine tried to escape back to their own lines. That belt of woodland and hills round Ypres proved the last

resting place of many thousands of Germans.

The battle was destined to drag on another fifteen days, but the great effort was over. The Germans had suffered a hammer blow from which they could never recover. The crisis was past, for Sir John French's master stroke had brought victory. The pressure on the Allied line slackened and the road to Calais was still closed.

The bombardment of the city began on the 1st of November, for the Germans had seized Messines and Hollebeke, and the slight hills gave them the necessary gun positions. Then began the agony of the townsfolk.

For ten days the guns had roared in the woods around the city. Refugees had poured in from burning farmsteads and driven in terror down the soldiery-choked roads.

The weather was the merciless, dispiriting

"THE CIVILIANS' FLIGHT."

damp of a Flanders autumn, cold, dreary, and miserable. The refugees who had fled before the horde of Uhlans spread ghastly tales of outrage and infamy. Here and there one came across a vivid picture of the persecution. A high-wheeled country cart piled with hastily packed gear and masses of furniture, the outside of the cart decorated like a gipsy caravan with still more bundles of poor peasants' goods. Propped against the furniture in the cart was a dingy, shapeless feather mattress, on which lay a young girl, her face so pale and transparent that the grey shadows of death beneath her eyes seemed black and shocking, like corrupted flesh. Her bosom was bandaged, and the blue cyanide gauze of an Army field dressing showed clotted with the rust of blood. Beside the cart trudged the relations, and an old priest in flapping black soutane and little bib of clear white beadwork. An old bowed man led the heavy

Flemish cart-horse and pulled aside obediently to clear the road for gun-limbers hurrying up.

A wounded French territorial, limping down to a dressing-station near Vlamertinghe, paused and asked the old curé a question. The answer came in short, burning sentences and gesticulations that were poignant in their wealth of expression. They told the tale of a Belgian girl and a Uhlan officer.

The arches and cellars of the municipal offices beneath the Halles were filled with refugees. Children separated from families, mothers from daughters. The whole place a fantastic medley of nightmarish sounds and signs of misery.

Through the masses flitted the white-cowled nuns, Sisters of the Irish Convent, Poor Clares and other Orders. They worked unceasingly to help, comfort, and alleviate distress, but all the religious buildings in

the town were full of refugees, of wounded soldiers, of billeted troops, and the bitter but essential things of war. Ypres was no haven of refuge—all must take the road again.

Then came the first shells—large, long-range, howitzer projectiles that whined and wailed as they fell. The houses round the Port de Lille and outside the ramparts were the first to suffer; then the bombardment became general. Shells exploded in the Grand Palace, and this square into which every main street in the town led became a shambles.

People took refuge in their cellars, but the shells swept through, bursting in the basement and bringing the building down in murderous cataracts of brick upon the poor wretches beneath. The women wept, prayed, and crowded for safety into the Cathedral and the Church of St. Nicolas. They did not know the German in those

days, and the poor fools thought the House of God would be a sanctuary against the shells. On the second day of the bombardment a shell fell upon some school-children playing in the Rue de Temple. A second shell destroyed the house where a dressing-station for wounded civilians had been installed. Dead soldiers and dead civilians lay side by side among the débris.

To add to the terrors of this desultory bombardment, fire broke out in the streets of mean dwellings and spread unchecked, consuming an outlying portion of the town. Rumours flew from mouth to mouth as the fortunes of the day wavered, and the townspeople, who dared not leave, eagerly questioned the haggard wounded who poured in from the front. Day after day the battle continued, now dulling down when the countryside was wrapped in wet fog, then beginning again with redoubled fury when the languid breeze lifted the veil.

Down the railroad line stood an armoured train mounting a single large-calibre gun, and all through the days of battle this duelled steadily with the distant German mortars. On the 15th of November the first news reached us that the sluices had been opened, and that Flanders from Bixchoote to Dixmude was under water. As if in revenge, the German artillerists turned their attention to the sluices and lockgates of the canal in Ypres, and vast shells fell, demolishing these water controls. Their demolition but added to the inundations and general misery.

New regiments arrived, marched out to Hooge and Zillebeke, and were seen no more but as tattered handfuls of wounded—the skeletons of companies, commanded by a corporal.

The enemy were held; Bavarians and Wurtembergers alike were broken and exhausted. In desperation the High Com-

mand brought up the Prussian Guard, the Emperor's Own 1st and 4th Brigades, and marched them to attack the point of the Salient at Gheluvelt.

Day and night minor attacks and incessant bombardments had gone on. The Germans had almost given up hope but persisted in these wearing down attacks, for their whole military reputation was at stake. Their failure in the great three days and the decisive Allied victory was echoing to the corners of the civilized world, and the myth of German military supremacy, damaged by the previous defeats upon the Marne and the recovery by the Allies of the power of the offensive, was still further demolished by their definite defeat at Ypres. There was still one more attempt to come.

On the 11th of November, after a preliminary bombardment of unparallelled intensity they launched the two Brigades of the Prussian Guard, some 1,300 men of the

picked soldiers of the German Army, pledged to victory or death. The Guard charged North of the Menin road, while the other line troops delivered a parallel assault along the Southern side. This made their line of advance almost parallel to the British front. Only the Guard attack reached our line, the other was withered by our fire, but the Guards came on magnificent in their steadiness, moving in mass formation as if on parade and dying methodically in ranks and companies.

Despite their casualties, so vast were their numbers and such the momentum of their mass that they penetrated the British line at several points and passed through into the woods. Once in the woods their mass broke up and the superiority of the individual British fighter against the herd of trained Germans told once more. Volley firing and individual man shooting took a terrific toll. Even so, scattered units of the

Guard penetrated through the woods almost to our gun positions, but every spare gunner and regimental fatigue man that could be hastily scraped together took up a rifle and helped to bring the advance to a standstill. A counter attack was delivered which once more cleared the woods. There were deadly hand to hand grapples with revolver and bayonet, and dusk fell upon the victorious remnants of the British force still holding their positions before which the Guard lay dead in wide piled swathes and knots.

With the collapse of this culminating effort, the enemies' bombardment of the city was intensified. It seemed as if they knew that they would never gain it, but were determined to wreak their vengeance upon the defiant town. Day and night the guns roared ceaselessly, the sullen mutter of their rage audible right down to Picardy. The woodwork of the Cloth Hall and the

Cathedral roof blazed and burnt in spark-shot veils of smoke, and the great Church of St. Nicolas lay part in ruins.

Wrapped in its shroud of smoke the city endured its agony, and its old-world beauty passed away beneath the iron hail. Most of the inhabitants had fled, and none but military remained. The dull clash of the falling masonry, and the shrill whine of shell splinters ricochetting from the roofs, echoed and re-echoed in the deserted cloisters of the church. Inside the Cathedral, all lay piled in disorder—crosses, marble statues from the tombs, the old oak choir-stalls, rags of burned canvas that once were priceless pictures—all lay scarred and smashed beneath the masses of fallen masonry and plaster from the roof. Broken beauty was everywhere—here a carved angel's head, here a fretted pinnacle, and over all the whole mass glittered with the sheen of many jewels, the broken lozenges

"THE BURNING OF THE HALLES," NOVEMBER, 1914.

of many-stained glass that once had made the Cathedral windows glow with sumptuous colouring.

The tall twin turrets of the Halles Tower stood battered and flame-scarred against the sky, and the memory of Ypres that many hold is the night view—a rolling crimson sky shot with the orange flashes of the falling shells, and projecting in silhouette against the flames the tall towers of the Cathedral and the Halles.

Sometimes a burst of sable smoke would obscure the view and then would float away, disclosing the towers as before; or perhaps the eye of a native could discern a new wound—a missing pinnacle or a black bulk of roof that had changed to a red and angry gap against the lurid background of the fire. So finished the first phase of the martyrdom of Ypres. Shell and fire, the mad vengeance of the disappointed German,

had raped the beauty that had lasted for six hundred years.

But Ypres still stood, some houses still intact, and the spirit of Ypres endured to drive back the Germans once again. Six months later began the second battle of Ypres.

* * * * *

II

HE first battle of Ypres had died away in the snowstorms and blizzards of the third week of November, and as if dispirited by the violence of the elements, the bombardment of the city weakened to a desultory fire of a dozen or so shells a day.

The rain quenched the smouldering embers of the fires, scoured the white drift of plaster and ashes from the buildings, and washed the poor faces of the dead.

The fierce fighting had settled to the long slow misery of trench warfare, and in place of the open give-and-take of field operations, Germans and Allies alike were bound by the conditions of climate and flat terrain of Flanders. Both sides dug themselves in,

and the phase of trench warfare became the routine of the war.

Slowly regaining confidence, the townspeople ventured back, urged by necessity to rescue such goods as the fortune of the bombardment had spared to them.

They found a city of ruins—a terrible and unforgettable sight. For day after day shells had been rained upon Ypres, projectiles of all sizes, from the large twelve-inch naval armour piercing shells, to the little four and a half inch field-howitzer shrapnel. At the height of the bombardment, the fire was so intense that competent artillerists estimated it as ten to fifteen shells a minute.

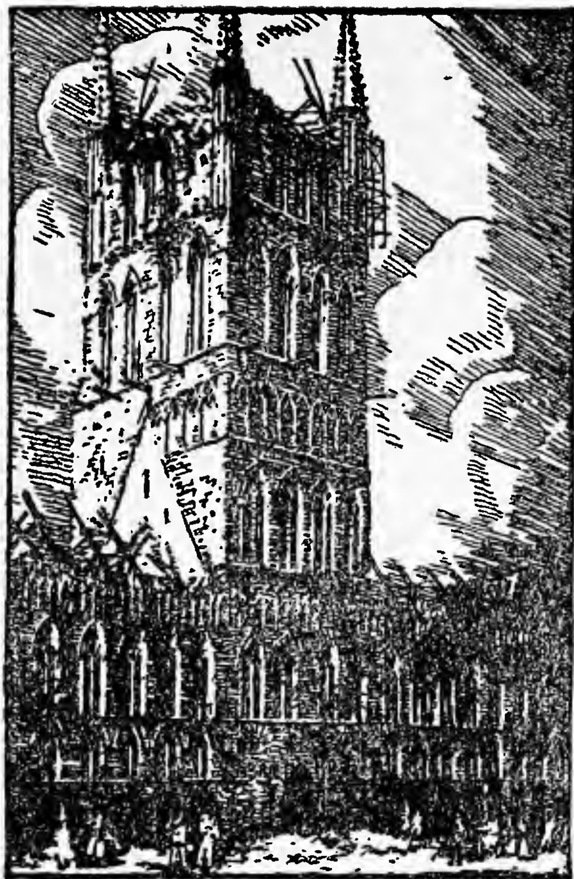
The Grand Place was encumbered with heaps of masonry from the Halles, littered with piles of brick and splintered woodwork from the torn fronts of the houses. Shell holes eight to ten feet deep yawned at intervals, and the interiors of riven houses

seemed to have the monstrous untidiness of a jumbled doll's-house.

A large number of the houses were intact, and had only suffered external scars or minor injuries; but in places whole streets had disappeared into a wilderness of fallen brick, and houses yawned roofless to the skies.

These interiors were pitiful; it seemed as if a giant knife had cut out the fronts, exposing to the passer-by the most intimate of domestic arrangements. The paper flapped wildly from the walls, pictures hung awry, and the opened, untidy disarray of cupboards and chests betrayed the precipitancy of their owners' flight.

Groups of soldiery stood in the streets gazing round-eyed at the devastation. Little two-wheeled carts drawn by sturdy dog-teams and steered by thick-set peasants assisted at the work of salvage. New troops marched in, gazed amazed, and marched



"AFTER THE FIRST BOMBARDMENT."

onward to their lines with faces grim-set in determination. In an Irish regiment every man carried some relic of the wreckage of the Cathedral—more as an "in memoriam" of a sacrilege to be avenged than as a souvenir of war. The very vastness of the desolation seemed to shock the people into silence—that instinctive hush which comes over humanity in the presence of the dead.

All through the bombardment the Archiprêtre of the Cathedral and some of the servitors worked hard trying to extinguish the flames started by shell-fire, but the work was hopeless and the building lay a wreck.

Shell-holes yawned in the pavement, tombs gaped, and slabs of riven marble lay in heaped disorder. A few of the more valuable things had been saved and lay in the vaulted chambers of the clergy house, but the nave was choked with fallen stone-

work and débris, and blue sky shone through ragged holes in the vaulted roof. In the silence of the great wrecked church the wind would moan softly, and little bits of stained glass from the shattered windows fall tinkling at one's feet.

Incongruous in the Cathedral Square stood the modern statue of Van der Peereboom, a grotesque frock-coated modern—hideous and blatant, but the only thing that chance had spared. The Museum was gone, and the old Hotel Merghelynck, which had been entirely furnished as a period museum of the eighteenth century, was damaged. The celebrated Cloth Hall lay a roofless skeleton with only the cellars of the ground floor unharmed. The tower still stood, but in the square lay the brazen bells and cogged drum of the belfry—the mechanism of the famous "Carillon" of Ypres, whose tuneful music had sounded hourly for hundreds of years across the flat

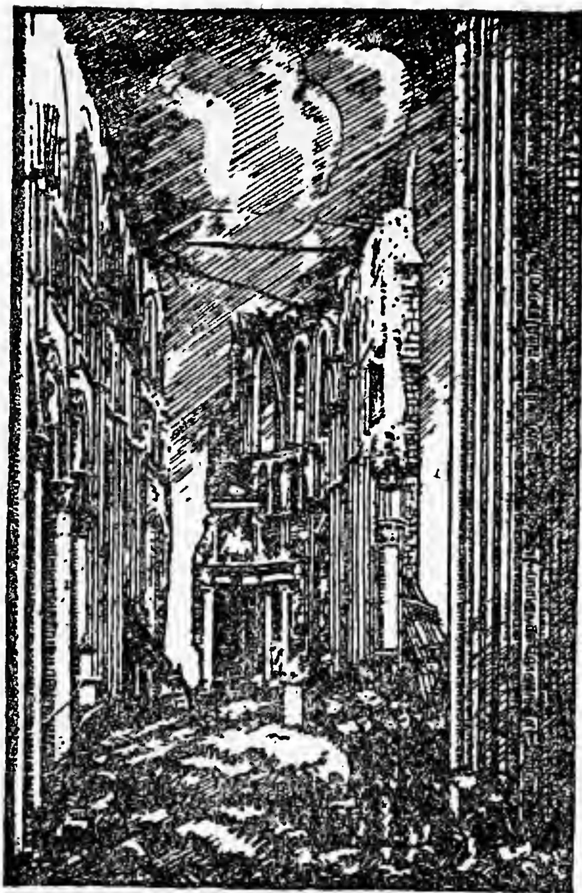
marsh levels of the Flanders lowlands. Nothing had been spared—the Germans had not even left Ypres the music of its bells.

* * * * *

As time went on, conditions settled down to the more or less humdrum existence of a town in the firing zone. Christmas passed—a day of scant rejoicing, for neither peace nor goodwill were dominant emotions with the people of Ypres.

The inhabitants had returned to the town, and in many cases elected to remain rather than face the troubles of trying to remove themselves and their goods to a safer spot. The dogged Belgian spirit manifested itself, and the poorer classes clung obstinately to their imperilled homes. Curious scenes occurred when refugees returned and found another family living in the house that they had abandoned.

There was little looting, but also little security of property, and it was openly said



"THE HOUSE OF GOD."

that some loose characters among the poorer classes had become strangely affluent since the bombardment. Certain it was that they were far better supplied with this world's goods than ever they were before the finger of calamity had touched them. A spirit of enterprise arose, and nearly every small house in the town developed into a little shop driving a thriving trade in small luxuries with the soldiers. Food and comforts of all kinds were in brisk demand, and the country folk from all round thronged into Ypres to sell their produce at high prices—and the prices were notoriously, nay, infamously high. With such utter desolation around them the soldiery suffered these extortions with a dry good-humour, and were content to get these little alleviations of their discomfort at any price.

It is generally during a war that good cooking is most appreciated, and the Paris restaurateurs reaped fortunes after the fall

of Napoleon and after 1871. So on a smaller scale culinary enterprise broke out in Ypres, and the restaurant "In de Hemel" was started. The venture was initiated in a bonnet-shop—one of the few houses in the Rue de Lille that had escaped destruction. No money was spent on decoration, and the napery and utensils were miscellaneous but serviceable. Madame, the presiding genius, was a retired cook, a lady of great reputation as a skilled compiler of Flamand dishes. Before the war she had retired, but was sometimes lured from her worthy husband and induced to superintend the kitchen when some local burgher—some *richard,* to use her own expression—gave a banquet.

Madame fled from the bombardment, and, returning to salve her belongings, was so horrified at the awful cooking of officers' servants, that she protested against it as

likely to disable more officers than the enemies' fire.

Blending enterprise and patriotism, she started her restaurant "In de Hemel," and opened it to all officers.

It achieved instant success, and the little room was crowded with officers of all ranks and nationalities, while others that the space could not accommodate waited hungrily for a vacant chair. The menu was not that of Soyer or Escoffier, but it was excellent of its kind, and hungry subalterns would risk the six-mile walk from the trenches and back for the joy and warmth of a good meal at "In de Hemel."

Madame always cared most for the actual fighters from the trenches, and would cheerfully ignore a major of the Army Service Corps to feed a hungry subaltern of a Scottish regiment. The wounded, too, have cause to bless her, for from the back-door of her kitchen a ceaseless train of

sturdy Belgian wenches carried free gifts of little custard puddings, bowls of soup, and similar diet to the Casualty Clearing-Stations.

It was little enterprises such as these that showed some of the sterling qualities of the Belgian temperament, and one need not fear but that after the war Belgium will rise again to great prosperity, her greatest asset being the industry and resourcefulness of her people.

By degrees Ypres became a show place; every soldier required picture postcards of the famous ruins; souvenirs were eagerly acquired, and a small kerbstone industry in shell fuses, stained-glass fragments, and relics of all kinds sprang up. Small boys acquired wealth, and the Cathedral guide must have accumulated a substantial balance. The shelling which sometimes occurred did not seem to disturb the towns-folk; they had grown accustomed to it. If

a shell or two fell they took refuge in their cellars, coming out again so soon as the bombardment stopped.

On Sundays a regular church parade took place in the Grand Place. The townsfolk and their friends from the surrounding country fore-gathered and walked up and down discussing the happenings of the day. Tall khaki-clad military policemen kept the traffic routes clear of hawkers and stalls, and moved the crowd about as imperturbably as if on point duty in London.

It was a curious life, this period between the battles; a medley of civilian and military interests, a continuous pageant of sharp contrasts—nuns and turbaned Sikhs, mud-plastered Tommies and neat little Belgian lace-makers, red cross motor ambulances and go-carts pulled by dogs, estaminets cheek by jowl with dressing-stations, staff officers in a convent school. The sinister aspect of the campaign seemed

to pass unnoticed; our thin line had held the German legions, and slowly but surely more troops were coming. England was training, preparing for war; Kitchener's armies were in the making; and for the while the remnant of the Regulars, and those fighting gentlemen the Territorials, had stemmed and held the German tide.

We could not but be conscious of the overwhelming pressure on the German side, and our daily intelligence summary chronicled the movement of vast armies of German troops moving slowly but surely towards us.

At that date public consciousness had not assimilated the sheer immensity of German designs, the vast magnitude of their operations, and the enormous and overwhelming masses of troops that they had put in the field. Nowhere was this curious obliquity of vision more pronounced than at the front. We could only see the essential facts of our own individual sectors, and for us the

menace of the German hordes did not exist—*we had held them, and would hold them again;* give us more troops and we would drive them to the Rhine.

With the coming of spring came the new troops, the first Canadian Expeditionary Force; and soon all Canada, from Quebec to Vancouver, was to ring with the sad, imperishable glory of the name of Ypres.

* * * * *

III.

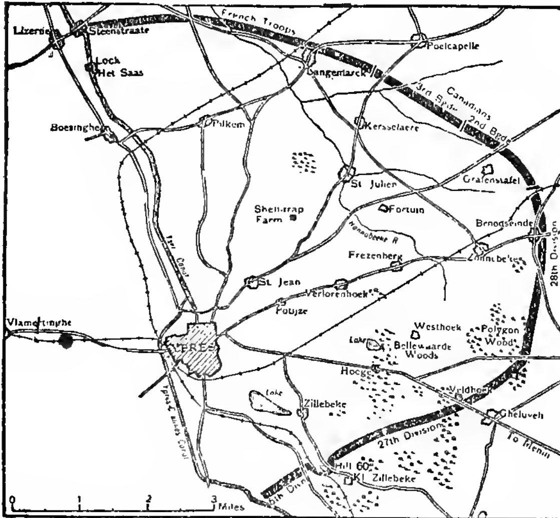
HE Salient of Ypres, as it had stood since the first battle, can be regarded as a semicircular bulge of our lines into the territory held by the Germans. The city itself was the centre or hub of the wheel, and roads ran out from it like spokes toward the various segments of the trench-line some three and a half miles away.

Along these roads were hamlets whose names will live for ever in history. At the middle of April Hooge was a brigade headquarters—a comfortable château but little touched by shell-fire; now it is a heap of brick cut through by a front-line trench. St. Julien, Zonnebeke, and Pilkem were little villages used as brigade headquarters,

and having dressing-stations established for the wounded, store dumps for transport and supplies, and all the various little offices of the smaller units. Potije, a nearer hamlet, was used as a park for engineering stores—barbed-wire, explosives, mine props, and all the miscellany of trench stores.

For many weeks there had been little activity on this part of the front. Neuve Chapelle appeared to have distracted the enemy's attention, and he was heavily engaged with the French operations in Artois. Events succeeded one another with extraordinary rapidity, and the second battle of Ypres seemed to spring out of the minor engagement at Hill 60. On the night of the 17th of April we exploded a series of mines under Hill 60 and rushed the position. It was a point to which the Germans attached the greatest importance, and they counter-attacked fiercely for four days. Successive attacks and counter-attacks

raged round the celebrated hill, and we were eventually driven from what remained of



SECOND BATTLE OF YPRES—POSITION BEFORE THE BATTLE ON THE MORNING OF APRIL 22ND.

the position. To-day there is no hill—it has been mined out of existence.

The weakness of our position in Ypres

had always been the extent of the Salient, and the fact that all our communications ran through the city. The town itself possessed but little military value, but it was the key of the road to Calais, and had a political value in that it was the only remaining town of any size left unconquered in Belgium. For political reasons it was essential that not a scrap more of the soil of Flanders should be surrendered, although the position was an unfavorable one for the Allies and a much better line of defence could have been sited on the slightly higher ground further back.

The northern end of the Salient where it touched the Yser Canal was held by the French Colonial troops; then came the Canadians. The point of the Salient, its extreme westerly projection, was held by the 28th Division, and to the south they linked up with the 27th Division, whose right flank abutted on Hill 60.

The first warning that we had of the impending offensive was the violent spread of the Hill 60 action; then on Tuesday, the 20th of April, a new bombardment started.

In Ypres we were used to large shells, but this was a new and more appalling development of artillery than we had ever met with. The enemy opened fire upon the town with the giant 42-centimetre siege mortars—the guns that had crushed Namur and Liége.

Suddenly and without warning the bombardment began. With a dull drone that filled the air the giant shell could be heard coming for some eight seconds. The noise of its approach increased till it sounded like the roar of the passing of an express train; then fell the shell, and the giant burst of its detonation seemed to shake the solid earth.

The Grand Place was filled with people passing about their ordinary avocations

when the first of these monsters fell. It burst in a group of houses to the north side of the square, of which the Hotel de la Chatellénie was one, and the blast of its explosion drove a hail of fragments and masonry across the open space.

All was confusion; the vast cloud of smoke and dust ascended to twice the height of the Cathedral towers and bellied out like a dark yellow fog across the square. After the hail of fragments had descended there fell a moment of shocked silence, then out of the murk rose cries too terrible to hear.

The Place was a shambles, for bodies lay in all directions, some mercifully dead, others mere heaps of agony. The headless body of the mounted policeman lay thirty yards away from the grotesque that had been his horse; a child lay motionless, pinned down by a giant pile of wreckage.

Ambulances and helpers were on the

scene in a flash. The figures of the men moving through the fog and dust of destruction seemed vague and distorted, fantastic and unreal. The whole square reeked with the acrid smell of the explosion, and the dry lime-dust scent of builder's yard that rose from the crushed houses—a scent that will ever bring back memory.

The soldiers plunged in among the tangled beams that had been the hotel, and commands and shouts for "stretcher-bearers" rose through the high-pitched crying of the hurt. A crowd gathered, and a French soldier came carrying a little girl in his arms. Her long fair hair fell in a gold cascade over his upper arm, and part of the pale tresses were dark and clotted. Her bare arm hung down, and a clear red trickle of blood had formed a crimson tracery upon the pale marble of her skin. There was nothing to be done, or said; the ambulance men accepted the frail burden,

and after a brief examination the doctor threw out his hand with a gesture of sad impotence.

Hardly had the first ambulance left the square when the second shell fell, not far from where the first had landed. After that the giant projectiles fell at intervals of twenty minutes. As record was kept of their fall the gunners' design soon became apparent—they were "registering" their target. An aeroplane wirelessed the result of each shot back to them, and they made their corrections of aim accordingly. It was soon clear that their objective was to destroy the roads and so hamper our communications. As the crater formed by the explosion of a 42-centimetre shell is some thirty or forty feet across, and some seventeen or more deep, it will be readily appreciated what labour is needed to repair a road damaged by one of these vast projectiles.

The first day the enemy refrained from using other shells against the town, but simply used the big 42-centimetre siege-guns. Every twenty minutes the sky would be filled with the roaring of the wings of the angel of death, the shell would fall, and the astonished soldiery in the trenches round the town would mark the vast column of smoke from the explosion.

These smoke columns were extraordinary, a phenomenon entirely different from all previous effects of shelling. With the burst they shot up to some two hundred feet, a solid greasy column of black and yellow smoke. Above them and about their edge the eye could distinguish a fringe of fragments—bricks, stones, fabric of houses, and possibly of men. These solid bodies hung poised for an instant, seemingly motionless at the extremity of their flight, then fell back again into the fog of destruction whence they had ascended. The smoke

clouds hung for a while immobile in the air, then grew larger, bellied out and swollen like vast funeral plumes. The faint rays of the spring sunlight would penetrate the mist of clouds, and a beam would strike the pillar of yellow smoke, which would change in the light, taking on a curiously unreal pinkish tinge and all the incongruous lights of a desert sand-storm.

The danger of one of these vast shells reaching communications was quickly realized, and the whole available force of Belgian labour units at the disposal of the British were turned on to widen the roads at certain critical points. Under the command of a British subaltern speaking many tongues, a scratch force of Royal Engineers, the 44th and 40th Belgian Compagnie de Travailleurs, and sundry transport lorries borrowed from the Army Service Corps, worked like demons at the threatened

points. Their object was to widen the road and hedges; lampposts, buildings, any obstacle that presented itself, was ruthlessly blown down or rooted up, and its débris used to make the new road bed.

A constant stream of lorries loaded stone and rubble from the wrecked houses in the town, and carried it to the road-makers. By nightfall all threatened points had been doubled in width, and the exhausted troops had accomplished their aim.

This road-widening project was a small and almost insignificant matter, but exercised a very vital effect upon the fortune of the battle. The very next day a 42-centimetre shell landed on the most critical road-junction of all—the point where the main road from Vlamertinghe and the railroad crossed the canal at the very entrance to Ypres. The shell fell with mathematical exactitude upon the level crossing and the centre of the old road, creating a thirty-foot

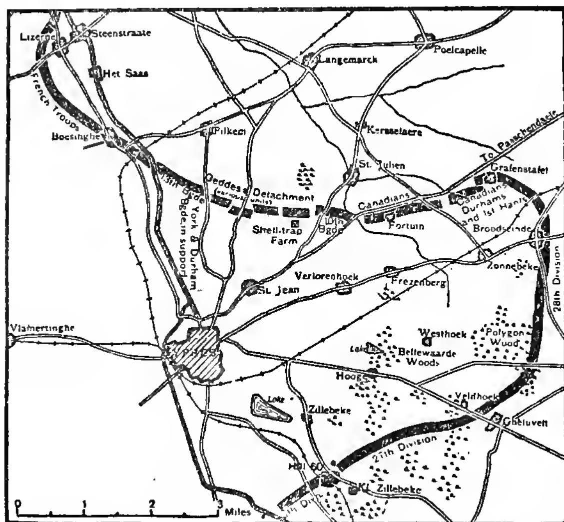
crater and leaving the rails and sleepers of the level crossing projecting in the air like some giant comb. The new section of road held the traffic reinforcements; guns and supplies were able to pass unhindered, just skirting the edge of the vast crater.

So incessant was the bombardment of shells of all calibres that fell upon this entry to the town that weeks elapsed before the damage could be properly repaired, though temporary measures adding much to the width of the route were carried out under fire whenever necessary.

It was on the 22nd of April that the storm broke in all its violence. Shelling had been increasing, though intermittent, all day long, and the evening and night were destined to be memorable for all time as a carnival of horror and of fear.

The trenches on the north of the canal and on the left of the Canadian 3rd Brigade were held by the French Colonial troops of

the 45th Division, Turcos, and Zouaves. Dusk was falling when from the German trenches in front of the French line rose



SECOND BATTLE OF YPRES—POSITION ON THE EVENING OF APRIL 24TH.

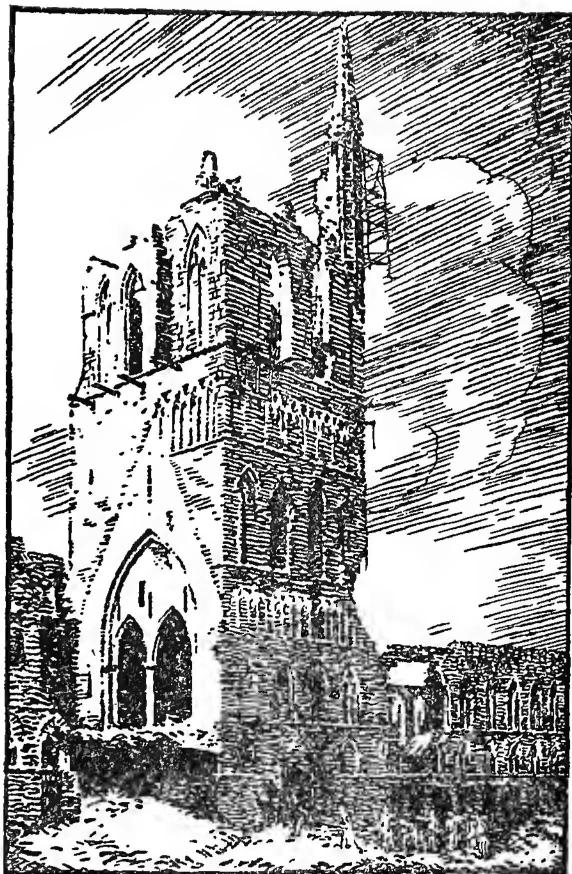
that strange green cloud of death. The light northeasterly breeze wafted it toward

them, and in a moment death had them by the throat.

It was a new and devilish engine of warfare, one for which white troops were wholly unprepared, and which held for these brave Africans a sheer terror of the supernatural—one cannot blame them that they broke and fled.

In the gathering dark of that awful night they fought with the terror, running blindly in the gas-cloud, and dropping with breasts heaving in agony and the slow poison of suffocation mantling their dark faces. Hundreds of them fell and died; others lay helpless, froth upon their agonized lips and their wracked bodies powerfully sick with tearing nausea at short intervals. They too would die later—a slow and lingering death of agony unspeakable.

The whole air was tainted with the acrid smell of chlorine that caught at the back of men's throats and filled their mouths with



"AFTER THE SECOND BOMBARDMENT, MAY, 1915."

its metallic taste. Behind the gas-cloud came the advancing hordes of Germans, under cover of a violent artillery fire.

In Ypres panic reigned among the civilians. Shells fell incessantly, and tongues of flame shot up lighting a scene of Dantesque terror. Shelled out of their billets, the troops held in reserve at Ypres marched out in the dark to the sound of firing, ranging up on the Canadian flank. The sky was lit for miles by the incessant flash of gunfire and bursting shells. Flare lights ascended like meteors to the heavens, and all the air was sickly with the strange metallic taint of gas. The roads were crowded with supply-waggons, ambulances, and transport, and overhead vast flights of shrapnel shells whined and burst.

No one knew what had happened, and Africans far south of the canal were intermingled with the Canadian Reserve battalions. The road to Vlamertinghe was

choked with halted supply-waggons coming up, and a medley of Zouaves, civilian refugees, French soldiers, limberless gun-teams, pouring madly in a wide stream to the south.

Behind them the battle raged, a wild frenzy of artillery fire and a cadenced rise and fall of tapping musketry. Ypres stood flaming in red ruin, and the blood-red sky reflected the surging rage of war. The Canadians held their place, their flank exposed and the Germans creeping steadily round; the Canadian reserves went forward to the support without waiting for orders, and in that infernal holocaust all Canada gained eternal fame. Attack and counter-attack raged the whole night through, and small units of reinforcements crossed the width of the Salient and connected the exposed Canadian left with the bank of the canal. Between us and the French had been a four-mile open gap, yet by some ever-

memorable miracle the German line had not pressed through. Thunderous and incessant the artillery fire raged on.

* * * * *

These night scenes on the Vlamertinghe road were wonderful. The townsfolk streamed down the road with their faculties almost numbed and paralyzed by terror. Each seemed to carry a large round bundle, some pushed laden hand-carts, others drove cursing in some ramshackle two-wheeled gig. The flight was prodigal in its wastefulness; burdens were cast aside, beasts or even children strayed unnoticed, and still the motley torrent poured on—a river of fear in which the individuals moved helplessly, like wreckage in the freshet of a mountain burn.

Children wailed, and men's voices cursed and growled in uncouth Flamand accents.

The sky seemed a vault of flame, and the tall budding poplar-trees that made an avenue of the causeway rustled and whistled eerily in the wind. Here came a stolid group of peasants, laden as it seemed with valueless unnecessary gear that would impede their progress; there an old man staggered on, leaning upon the frail support of some young girl; then came a group of soldiers, breathless and gasping from the gas. The harsh Arabic gutturals wheezed painfully from their lips, and one, the grotesque bloated figure of a Zouave, was too far gone to talk. He hung inertly, supported by his suffering comrades. Behind the flight rose the pyre of Ypres; ahead lay the little village and station of Vlamertinghe, bathed in the green moonglow and constantly red-lit by falling shell. The batteries in the fields to each side of the road fired unceasingly, and shells hurtled away to burst in violet flashes by

Langemarck and Poelcapelle. The German gunners answered, and high-explosives burst thunderously in the fields, or big shrapnels burst overhead with the crash of iron on iron, and a buzz of bullets like some disordered chord upon a giant guitar.

By Vlamertinghe a farm building burnt smokily, lighting the station-yard and making clear the sheer horror of the flight. A team of open waggons and flat trucks stood in the station, and the grey bulk of the armoured locomotive stood, menacing, like some antediluvian monster come to life. Round the train swarmed the frenzied crowd of civilians, and far ahead into the dark the strange procession of refugees marched painfully, stepping from sleeper to sleeper along the line.

Dominant and cool above the panic-stricken crowd stood the figure of a young French officer, the railway-transport officer of Vlamertinghe. He had been a rising

young politician in private life, a secretary of Monsieur Delcassé. The wonder and awe of this night of fear had lifted him, and he dominated the panic by sheer force of genius. Women, children, and badly wounded and gassed soldiers were placed on board the waiting train, the brute rush of the frenzied townsmen beaten back, discipline and some semblance of order preserved. At midnight the last train left the shell-shattered station of Vlamertinghe crowded with women and wounded, and with white-coifed Sisters from the Convent of the Poor Clares crouching upon the footboards. Shells wailed and wept over the village, and the permanent way behind the train was hit again and again by a dozen long-range shells. Moving from the east came the first flush of reinforcements, and as the false dawn lit the sky, the first march of heroes to assist the hard-pressed Canadians had begun.

The shelling of Vlamertinghe did not check the exodus which poured on down the great road and along the railway-track to Poperinghe, a town some three miles away. Outside Poperinghe lay the second line of defence, held at the moment by a piquet of the Town Guard under the Camp Commandment, and reinforced by a half-company of the Army Service Corps drivers and mechanics. A hard-pressed officer of the Intelligence Corps checked and marshalled the stream of fugitives, and they were passed on to sleep in the churches, leaving their carts and barrows in the market square. The gassed and wounded were turned off to the hospitals, and all around the town the fields were full of exhausted fugitives sleeping on the open ground.

It was a sad and terrible picture, this river of fear, with its constant wail of sound and short-cut, muffled cries. Reach-

"THE LAST TRAIN FROM VLAMERTINGHE."

ing safety, the fugitives became incoherent and vociferous, shouting the horror of their fate and describing incidents of dread with horrid gestures. Behind them the red glow in the sky and the lightening flashes of artillery formed a grim background to their fear, and the incessant gunfire reverberated like some Satanic chorus.

The dawn of Friday the 23rd revealed the true state of affairs. The recoil of the French Colonials had exposed the left flank of the 3rd Canadian Brigade, but by midnight the 10th and 16th battalions of the Canadian 1st Brigade, who had been in reserve, had reached the gap and reinforced their countrymen. With prodigious valour they repeatedly counter-attacked the advancing Germans and in the dark of that April night the struggle swayed backward and forward in a soldiers' battle. All was confusion, there were no staff orders, but the men fought on their own initiative and

arrested the onset of the German waves.

During the night small detachments of various units of the 27th and 28th Divisions crossed the Salient, and formed a mixed block of five battalions under the command of Colonel Geddes of the Buffs. This reinforcement was known as Geddes' detachment and it took up a position from the canal to the left wing of the Canadian 3rd Bridage, occupying the line from Boesinghe to a point about a mile north of Shell-Trap Farm and a mile west of St. Julien. This thin line closed the broken salient.

On the north of Boesinghe the German attack had crossed the canal and German troops held the western bank in a small Salient that protruded in a curve from Boesinghe to Steenstraat, but the French had recovered from the surprise and the attack was stemmed by massed artillery fire.

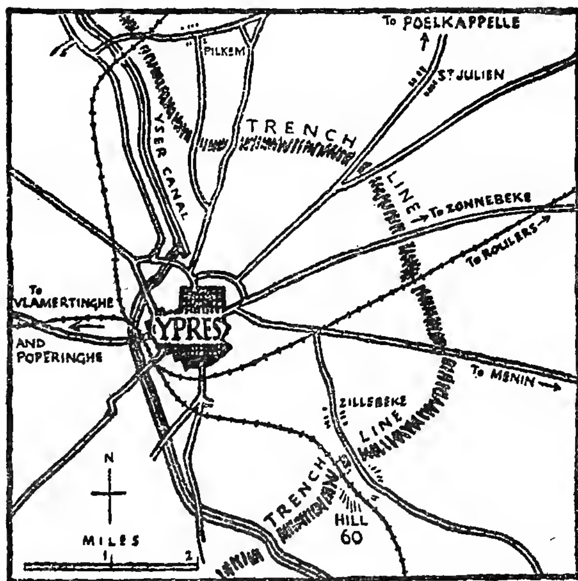
Meanwhile the situation had been dealt with by the staff and Allenby's Cavalry,

and General Rimington's two Indian Divisions were hurrying to support the threatened points.

All day long a terrific fire poured upon the Salient and the city. Incessant attacks were delivered against the Canadian front from Grafenstafel to Fortuin, but the indomitable defenders held fast.

Just before dawn on the following day, Saturday the 24th, came the second great gas attack. A vast volume of gas was released and the deadly waves flowed over the Canadian trenches enveloping the defenceless men. It was death in one of its most terrible forms, an agonising, suffocating death, long drawn out and cruel beyond belief. Even men who reached casualty clearing stations and hospitals were beyond reach of medical aid, for nothing could be done to alleviate their sufferings or remedy their condition. It was a murder, a filthy German murder, contrary to every conven-

tion or rule of war, and abhorrent to any race, civilized or savage. The world received the news with horror and disbelief, but it was a crime which awoke civilization to a realisation of the true meaning of the war



"APPROXIMATE LINE OF TRENCHES AS NOW HELD."

and the true value of German honour and culture. It is a crime that has already cost the German nation dear, and its expiation shall be a lasting memory of blood and tears, for not even the crimes of a nation can escape the inexorable laws of Justice that rule the world.

The 3rd Brigade had now been twice gassed and had been fighting continuously since the 22nd. It could no longer withstand the pressure, and pivoting upon Grafenstafel which was magnificently held by the 2nd Canadian Brigade, it fell back south of St. Julien, upon Fortuin.

In the meantime the 10th Brigade had joined up between the Canadian left flank and Geddes' detachment, and these accommodated their line to the new position taken up by the remnant of the Canadians.

From St. Julien poured down the German waves of assault and all that day assault and counter assault raged over the triangle

between Shell-Trap Farm, St. Julien and Fortuin. The German losses were stupendous and the toll taken by the raging British troops, furious over the murder of their comrades, broke down the masses of the German thrust.

This was the climax of the assault upon the Canadian troops, and that evening the survivors of the 3rd Brigade were withdrawn from the line and their place taken by the Lahore and the first units of the 4th Division.

On Sunday April the 5th, a counter attack was delivered by the York and Durham Brigade and the 10th Brigade against St. Julien, an attack which was held up by artillery and machine gun fire though the outer edge of the village was penetrated. That same night the 2nd Brigade of Canadians was withdrawn, but they were again sent in upon the following day and remained in the trenches till the succeeding Thursday,

the 29th, having endured a complete week of some of the most terrific fighting the world has ever seen.

Meantime the bombardment of the city had never ceased. For three days the flight of fugitives had continued, and by Saturday there was not a living civilian left in the burning city. Day and night the shells burst, and the century-old houses flamed for a red second in the moment of their dissolution. By day a dark pall of smoke and dust overhung the pyre; by night a crimson glow in the sky marked the holocaust. Outside the city the battle raged, and Division after Division poured up to hold the blood-drenched debateable ground of the Salient. Allenby's Cavalry and the Lahore Division of Indian Cavalry, the York and Durham Brigades of the Northumberland Territorial Division—these latter but three days out from England—rushed up from the base. They detrained

at Poperinghe, and marched steadfastly onward into the raging inferno of Ypres. It was a wonderful sight, this arrival of a new Territorial Division unused to fire, and yet marched straight up into one of the bloodiest actions the world has ever known. They came on cheerfully, curiously interested in the strange sights of war about them, and got their first sight of the famous city from the equally celebrated road. The head of the column halted at the curve in the road whence the city can be seen a quarter of a mile away, and the men lay down to rest in the fields on each side.

Before them were the wide plains of Flanders, level as an inland sea, lined here and there with sparse hedges and lines of tall poplar-trees. The city lay in the sunlight smouldering like an enormous bonfire, and the low trail of its smoke hung sombre in the sky, sweeping toward the low hills of Kemmel and Bailleul. High above the

smoke-cloud hung the little white puff-balls from anti-aircraft guns, and high above them frail aeroplanes droned slumberously in the blue vault of the sky. Along the curve of the canal columns of black and yellow smoke showed where the enemy's "heavies" were falling; while on the rising edge of the distant plain similar clouds, barely discernible against the earth haze, showed our reply.

The men's interest was soon abated, and they began to brew tea; the officers were more active, locating the different positions on their maps and trying to preserve an appearance of unconcern. Menaced with battle, they betrayed no unusual emotion; all essential expressions were familiar, except that perhaps they were rather shy. It seems intolerable that at such a time men should feel nervous and awkward, like a provincial at a ball, yet they seemed queerly

self-conscious before the officer who had been sent to chaperone them into battle.

All honour to those northern battalions who marched gaily to a most gallant death.

The fighting was fiercest from Grafenstafel to Fortuin, for the thrust of the Germans was directed at the northern face of the Salient which had now become an oblong projection with dangerous angles at Grafenstafel and Polygon Wood. This position was extremely perilous and on Monday a general counter attack by the Allies took place in an endeavor to straighten out the line.

In the north the French were successful and the enemy were driven from their lodgement upon the western bank of the canal and Het Sas and Boesinghe recaptured. The Germans counter attacked at Fortuin and the 8th Battalion of the Durham Light Infantry were forced back to the Hannabeeke stream. The attack of the

Northumbrian Brigade toward St. Julien suffered heavily for it was barraged and held up by wire, and the Lahore Division, despite the utmost gallantry, was also unfortunate in its assault. The counter attack was thus brought to a halt and other measures determined upon.

The first phase of the battle may be taken as the German assault and gas attack upon the Salient. The second phase began with the reinforcement of our line upon the 24th and closed with the failure of our attempt to regain the old ground on the 26th. Then came a period of rest and re-organisation.

* * * * *

It soon became obvious that the line must be shortened and withdrawn to a new line within the salient. Trenches were hastily improvised, and the lines and reserve trenches dug round and through the ruined outskirts and battered ramparts of

Ypres itself by the Belgian Travailleurs and British Engineer companies. On the 3rd of May the retreat to the new line was safely accomplished, an example of brilliant Staff work. All stores were withdrawn from the old trenches, and a few specially prepared land mines left in their place. For a day the Germans shelled our empty trenches, and did not find that we had gone till the 4th of May. Followed another ten days of constant and bitter fighting.

From the 4th of May to the 8th there was a lull in the fighting. Bombardment continued and trench fighting was incessant, but both sides were anxiously consolidating their new positions and no big offensives were launched.

On the 5th of May Hill 60 was recaptured by the Germans by means of a gas attack, but little of the hill remained after the previous bombardment and min-

ing operations, and its military value had ceased.

On the 8th an attack upon the 20th Division at Verlorenhoek was started. The bombardment was intense and the trenches were obliterated while our casualties from shell-fire were terribly heavy. As a result of this our line was pushed in and had to be reformed behind Verlorenhoek village. On the 12th the 28th Division that had been fighting continuously all through the battle of Ypres—twenty-two days of ceaseless contest—was withdrawn and its place taken by the 1st and 3rd Cavalry Divisions, who were dismounted and sent into the trenches. During the same period the front which had been drawn in round Verlorenhoek was changed locally and reformed upon a stronger line of better trenches.

On May 13th in the middle of a bitter cold rainstorm a terrific bombardment was launched against the cavalry front.

The masseé artillery of the enemy vomited shells of all calibres, churning ground and trenches alike into a mass of mud, burying men alive and completely obliterating the new line.

Here and there units held their line despite hideous casualties, but the 7th Brigade was almost wiped out and compelled to fall back, thus leaving a nasty gap. In the afternoon a counter attack by the whole 8th Brigade, supported by the naval armoured motorcars, charged and retook the position, but so terrible was the bombardment that in the evening we were again forced to relinquish it.

This action was the last essential assault in the battle of Ypres, and the conflict died down to the steady hammer and tongs warfare of the Salient.

Of all the sectors of the British line the Salient of Ypres has the bloodiest record. There is never even comparative quiet there,

and the smouldering embers of trench warfare break out continually into fierce bursts of flaming assaults.

One of these occurred a year later, 3rd of June, 1916, when a terrific bombardment lasting four hours blotted out the trenches of the Canadians, the successors of the heroes of the second battle of Ypres, and the following German attack penetrated toward Zillebeke. For fourteen days there was fierce fighting, and at the end of that period the Canadians had regained their old positions and the German thrust had been washed out in blood.

Once again Ypres had proved invulnerable, once again the German assault had been costly — immeasureably costly — to themselves, but they were no longer attacking the city of Ypres as a living Belgian town, for thirteen months before the city of Ypres had passed into history as a City of the Dead.

After the second battle was over it was hardly possible to find one's way about the ruins, as streets and houses alike had been smashed into one tangle of fallen masonry. Over all hung the scent of burning and decay, of powdered plaster and the sickly scent of dead bodies. Here and there a path had been cleared through the piles of wreckage, and attempts had been made to keep the main roads open. Over all reigned the silence and stillness of Death, and not a living creature moved to wake the sleeping echoes.

It was the same in all quarters of the town—ruin, silence, and desolation. The very immensity of the destruction bowed one down as in sad, silent homage before a loved one's bier.

It was all like some strange city in a dead world, some horror from the Apocalypse. The very earth on which the city had stood was ploughed with shells, destroyed with

ashes, and drenched with salt human blood. Shell-pits gaped in the graveyards, exposing charnel and the mouldered yellow skulls of long-buried dead. Here and there a cloud of bottle-blue carrion flies rose with a metallic buzz from some fragment that had been flesh.

A jagged stump of wall projected from the ruins of what had been the Cavalry riding-school, and some unknown had scrawled a verse from the old French of François Villon:

> "Frères humains qui après nous vivez,
> N'ayez les cœurs contre nous endurciz,
> Car, se pauvres de nous avoir pitie
> Dieu en aura de vous plutôt merci."

The great beauty of Ypres has passed to destruction, the great glory of Ypres has attained immortality.

All down the canal, and in every acre of the Salient, are English graves, graves of

"ALL THAT IS LEFT."

the men of France, graves of the soldiers of Canada—and it is holy ground. Their epitaph and that of Ypres were written by our greatest poet some three hundred years ago:

"When wasteful wars shall statues overturn,
And broils root out the work of masonry,
Nor Mars his sword, nor War's quick fire shall burn
The living record of your memory."

Epilogue

OUT of the ashes and shell powdered brick work, from the broken stones of the dead City of Ypres has come a cry of gladness and relief. For two years the low hills round the city have been a girdle of flame, day and night the great shells have curved high across the Salient, beating against the fallen masses of the tall churches, churning the red heaps of Flemish bricks. By day, the funeral plumes of shell hovered over the ruins, by night, the red light of shell bursts displayed them as silhouettes of the terror of the war. Yet all the while the armed men of the Allies moved unperturbed among the ruins, brought up their supplies along the fire swept roads, and steadfastly held the

murderous line of trenches that maintain the Salient.

From the low spur of hills that runs from Hill 60 toward Mount Kemmel, through the villages of Wytschaete and Messines, the eager eyes of the enemy could look down upon the flat enclosure of the Salient, marking the fall of all their shells.

Life in the Salient was underground life; no movement could be made by day that the enemy could not discern; and even at night all traffic routes and every artery of communication were under fire.

The Messines-Wytschaete ridge was entirely in German hands and its holders considered it impregnable and all important. It passed to them during the terrific conflict of the first battle of Ypres, and indeed was the only measure of success they were able to snatch from out that stupendous disaster to German arms. Even had the British at that time appreciated the im-

portance of the position, it is doubtful in any case, with the troops then at our disposal, that the ridge could have been held. In German hands throughout the long period of siege warfare the natural position of the Ridge became a gigantic fortress, strengthened and defended by every modern measure known to field engineers.

Behind the ridge the German batteries fired upon the Salient and upon the City of Ypres. Their observers upon the hills could see the fall of every shell upon the chosen target and so alter or correct their gunners' aims. The Allies, on the other hand, had no means of observation to direct their fire and the enemy, on the ridge, for two long years thus enjoyed an advantage of the utmost military importance.

Slowly and surely the Allied scheme of offensive against the German armies has

developed. Its initial stages are marked by battles which transfer positions of great tactical importance from German to Allied hands. There have been three battles for ridges, Albert, Vimy, and now Wytschaete; each has been successful, in every case the German has been driven from a defensive position deemed by him impregnable, but the battle of Wytschaete Ridge is beyond question the most remarkable of the three, for there the Allies' methods were so perfect that the Ridge was stormed, taken and consolidated. Within those few hours the enemy lost in prisoners alone, a number of men equivalent to our total casualties.

The capture of Wytschaete Ridge releases the Salient of Ypres from the bitter pressure of the last two years, and may be the prelude to a disengagement of a large and important sector of the territories in enemy occupation, for it opens a road to advance

up the valley of the Lys—the road which Marlborough took.

A modern battle depends for its results upon preparation. There is little element of surprise, and in this engagement there was no attempt to effect one. The Germans were forewarned, their communiques and their expert commentators chronicled the activity in the Wytschaete bend and General von Laffert issued orders to his troops that the position was to be held at all costs. It was to be a purely stand-up fight between fairly matched opponents. Its results show the mastery of the Allied offensive over the German defensive and is an earnest of the other great victories to come—that certain, slow-moving but inexorable punishment which outraged civilization is imposing upon the guilty people and the Government of Germany.

Day by day the British divisions and the massed artillery concentrated in the

Ypres-Armentières sector. Horse, foot and guns—an overmastering wealth of guns—streamed along the roads. Squadrons of tanks lay in the fields of the advanced area, kite balloons dotted the sky, and flight after flight of aëroplanes busied themselves in reconnaissance beyond and over the German lines.

Behind the shelter of the ridge the Germans massed their divisions and thickened their batteries. From Courtrai, Bonbraix, and Lille the reinforcements poured up. Even as they marched the Kaiser made speeches to his people, proclaiming the breakdown of the Anglo-French offensive and endeavouring to hearten them against the long-drawn misery of war.

In the sector gun challenged gun, the artilleries registered their targets and waited—waited for the day. The infantry learned of their allotted tasks; English, Irish and Colonial troops all were repre-

sented. The gallant Belgian gunners brought their batteries of seventy-fives, and all who passed by the desolation of the dead City—were they British or Belgiums of the soil—knew that the soul of the City still lived and that upon the morrow would sound the guns that heralded her deliverance.

For several days the guns poured their floods of flame and destruction upon the whole length of the Messines-Wytschaete ridge. Little woods that had survived two years of war and had again blossomed out in all their summer greenery were swept away, blasted, riven and overturned.

The last vestiges of buildings that marked the chateaux and the villages of Wytschaete and Messines themselves were churned to fragments. A pall of smoke hid the ridge from end to end and hung stifling in the boiling heat of the summer's day. The gunners worked half-naked at the guns.

The trench mortar crews who served the giant trench engines seemed more like earth devils than like human beings as they poured their vials of death upon the enemy position.

From every facet of the sky shells and projectiles of all calibres descended upon the deep German defences. Barbed wire was swept away, concreted casement wrecked and overturned, deep dugouts buried.

At dawn upon the seventh of June the infantry attack was delivered, but ere the bayonets were to sweep over them from behind the creeping cloud of shell barrage, the very Belgian earth was to rise spewing forth the assailants of her liberty.

Nineteen mines were fired. Nineteen deep and cavenous chambers quarried secretly beneath the German stronghold had been packed with explosive against this one day of deliverance. Hundreds of the most skilled miners from Australia, Wales and

the north of England had laboured in their construction, and in that hour before the dawn stood drawn up in the trenches waiting the fateful moment.

An officer of the Royal Engineers pressed a lever and the whole earth shook as Wytschaete Ridge reeled and staggered under the blow. It was as if the Dead City had shuddered beneath her shroud before waking.

General Plumer's men were swift to the assault, the cheering battalions poured out of the trenches behind the creeping barrage and vanished into the smoke of the battle. In six hours the whole of the celebrated ridge was in the Allies' hands. Hastily the new won ground was put in a state of defense in order that the victors could repel the usual counter attack, but no counter attack was launched—the attack had been decisive and the enemy was broken. Not until the next day did the re-organized

German reserves attempt the assault, marching obedient as ever to inevitable slaughter.

In the Wytschaete Ridge battle some eight thousand prisoners, fifty guns and two-hundred-and-fifty machine guns were taken. Day by day the local advance goes on, but the conditions of the previous two years are now reversed. We now see the enemy; our observers look out on to the flat plain north of Lille and there in plain view his new formations, defenses, and troop concentrations must endure the merciless battering of our guns. The whole complexion of the war has changed since those early days of the first two years when the Allies could but hang grimly on, enduring the assault of a well organized, well munitioned foe. To-day the balance of organisation, of men and of munitionment is upon our side. The last hope of victory has left the heart of the German soldier, and every month brings

fiercer pressure to bear upon their stricken morale. Unlike the Allies they have no bed-rock of Faith—no belief in the Justice of their cause. The evidences of their crime surround them so long as they stand upon the soil that they have ravished and laid waste.

Maniacal impulses of frightfulness seize them, they nerve themselves to sporadic outbreaks, they wreck an infant school in London with air bombs—and yet they know—they know at heart what terrific fate menaces them. At Wytschaete Ridge alone they lost some thirty thousand men in casualties, and six of their divisions failed to prevent the inevitable Allied triumph. Co-operation and co-ordination have destroyed the myth of German military supremacy; and be it remembered, as yet the vast reserve forces of the American democracies have not been transported to the European battle-field.

The fate which overtook the little City of Ypres very nearly fell upon the City of Paris, and might then have been the common lot of all our western civilization. The fortunes of the citizens of Ypres might well have been the fortunes of any citizen of any nation against whom the Germans were launched in murderous assault. The Salient is but a small portion of the vast battle front, but it is the point where the struggle has ever been fiercest, the conditions worse and the balance heavily loaded against us. This victory of Wytschaete Ridge relieves the Salient, it is more, much more than a message of hope, it is the sure forerunner of absolute victory, and presages that real world-peace that we shall make, when, and when only, we have made sure our deliverence of Civilization from the Germans.