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The journalist who won the war

THE PRESS AND THE GENERAL STAFF

NEVILLE LYTTON

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THEY TOLD ME BEFORE GOING TO FRANCE THAT WHENEVER A SOLDIER WAS IN TROUBLE OR IN DANGER HE THOUGHT OF HIS MOTHER. I WISH, DEAREST MOTHER, THAT YOU ONLY KNEW HOW I THOUGHT OF YOU.

Note

All the letters quoted in this book are written to Lady Wentworth and published with her consent

PREFACE

In this book I do not intend to deal with the whole question of the Press in relation to the war, but simply to that portion of the Press of the world that was attached to the British Expeditionary Force in France. The importance of the relation between the Press and the General Staff, and the relation between the Press and the fighting man cannot be exaggerated, and the experiences of the war must be clearly set forth so that the mistakes we have made may be avoided in the future. This war has differed from all others simply in the matter of scale; no one foresaw accurately the scale of the effort likely to be made by all belligerents and so no preparations were quite suitable. The simple fact that the huge battle-line stretched across the continent, with its flanks reposing on insuperable geographical boundaries, made the task of the war-correspondent entirely different from what it was in South Africa. In those days he trotted about on a pony with a pocketful of gold, purchasing his food or rations and making his own cabling arrangements; but what use would a pony be to a correspondent trying to report on two engagements, one taking place at Ypres and the other at St Quentin, or how could he depend on his own energies alone for describing the activities of twenty-two army corps. A complicated organisation is required and the Press has to be treated as an arm, like tanks or aeroplanes, suitable for defence and attack.

No one had foreseen what a great power for good and evil the Press might become; there were a certain number of correspondents ear-marked for active service, but the idea of accredited correspondents did not appeal to Lord Kitchener. When the clouds of war began to gather, editors of newspapers proceeded to scatter their correspondents on the continent, and it was not till Mr Hamilton Fyfe sent his sensational despatch that the War Office woke up and saw the importance of doing something. General Swinton was appointed as chief eyewitness and proceeded to France. Now in my opinion the 'eyewitness' system is absolutely wrong. The public is very loath to swallow 'peptonised dope,' and, moreover, reporting for newspapers is an art like any other, with a technique which has to be acquired by years of practice. The system was short-lived and failed through no fault of the excellent officers who did the work; they had no cabling facilitites, and General Swinton himself has informed me that his despatches were censored by several Generals.

The Newspapers Proprietors Association then selected a group of war-correspondents, who were accredited to G.H.Q., the free-lances were recalled and the first step at proper organisation was taken; but though the system was now all right the attitude of the General Staff remained all wrong for many months to come. The soldiers' ideal of the newspaper man was that he was a badly bred, ill-mannered, uneducated fellow who revelled in indiscretions, and it is entirely to the credit of the correspondents that before the end of the war the soldier came to look upon them with affection, confidence, and admiration. No trouble can be too great in choosing a first-rate man for the job of war-correspondent, but, once he is attached to the army, the General Staff must treat him as an

officer, *i.e.*, with complete confidence and trust. It must not be forgotten that the correspondent deals not only with facts but with moods; the General Staff can put him on the right lines and can check his figures, but he must get the psychology of the fight from the fighting men themselves. There is nothing more irritating to those who have come out of a 'show,' probably with immense losses, than to read an account of their battle which is out of tune with facts because information has been gathered from officers too comfortably far behind the lines. The correspondents realised this very thoroughly, and spared no pains to get their information first-hand, and, whenever necessary, they showed a contempt of danger that does them infinite credit. During the course of the war there were not a few casualties, and the idea that a war-correspondent is a worthless 'embusqué' is absurd. If they were not up in the front lines for long periods at a time it was simply because they had to keep touch with their cabling centres.

In the early stages of the war the facilities were not nearly great enough, and the censorship imposed upon them was much too severe, especially in the matter of mentioning the names of units. Owing to this lack of freedom it cannot be said that the accounts of the early battles—Neuve Chapelle, Festubert, Loos, and the early phases of the Somme—gave any idea of the true psychology of the fighting man. At that time I was with my battalion and never had the smallest suspicion that I should have anything to do with the Press. The feeling we had in the line was that the correspondents saw the war too much through rose-coloured spectacles. To the infantry soldier the whole thing was a nightmare; and though this is a difficult mood to deal with in the Press, yet I am convinced that it is possible to report on tragic

events in a truthful and simple manner that will give no offence to the fighters themselves and that will help people at home to get the right perspective of the heroism of their relations at the war. It seems to me that there are two ways of reporting a battle—one is to detail the facts in a cold analytical manner—like Mr Percival Phillips of the *Daily Express*, or M. Henri Bidou of the *Journal*—the other is to bring out the relation of facts to humanity in the manner of Mr Bean, Mr Nevinson, Mr Philip Gibbs, or Mr Masefield. In either case, precise facts should be the basis of these compositions, and it is the duty of the General Staff to provide an organisation that will enable correspondents to get the truth, the whole truth, with the least possible difficulty. This is where the General Staff failed till the latter phases of the Battle of the Somme, when Lord Northcliffe and others brought such pressure to bear on G. H. Q. that gradually the correspondents were treated with the confidence they deserved. In 1917 the facilities went on increasing and many of them became such friends with commanding officers that they were welcomed wherever they went.

With the Battle of Messines they came into close touch with General Plumer's army, and his Chief of Staff, General Harrington, started an arrangement which afterwards became general throughout the armies. Before each offensive he would receive them and give a detailed staff lecture—laying before them with absolute trust the enemy order of battle, our own order of battle, the objective maps, the barrage maps, the arrangements for supply and transport, the engineering preparations, and every detail of staff work necessary for a modern battle. General Harrington used to prepare these lectures under numbered headings and take infinite trouble to make an accurate statement of the situation. Considering

the amount of work he carried on his shoulders at that time, his forethought and kindness to the Press were amazing, and we shall ever owe this wise and broad-minded soldier an eternal debt of gratitude. He was such a good craftsman that I truly believe that he enjoyed showing us the perfection of his work. Many is the time that I had wished that I was a young officer about to take up the profession of arms instead of a man grown gray in the pursuit of another calling. After these lectures the correspondents would go to their rooms, take an early dinner and a few hours of sleep, and then proceed by motor to some hill-top just behind the battle-line. After zero hour some would go on to the battle-fields, others would go 'corps-crawling,' *i.e.*, collecting information from corps headquarters, and they would all return to their mess by two o'clock. A conference would then take place among themselves, and all information gathered, from whatever source, was pooled, and they retired to their rooms to write their despatches. This pooling was initiated by the British correspondents, as they thought, quite rightly, that the war was too big a thing to admit of 'scoops.' From 1917 onwards, besides the British, there was an Allied Press unit, an American Press and a Neutral Press—in all some fifty men. During offensive operations these all were scattered along the front, and, as they returned to their headquarters, the Press officers who accompanied them had orders to pass on to me any crumbs of news which they had gathered.

The despatches had always to be written against time, and they were generally dog-tired before they sat down to write, as they got little or no sleep. Similarly, censorship had to be done against time by tired officers with the knowledge that one slip meant dismissal and disgrace. Nothing could be mentioned that was at variance with

the official communiqué, and the communiqué always came out after the despatches had been sent. This 'censorship while you wait' is not easy, and I should never have succeeded without the assistance of such capable officers as Captain Cadge, Captain R. de Trafford and Captain Montague.

In the latter stages of the war many great difficulties had been overcome and our system was more elastic and supple. The friendship that had sprung up between all units and the Press contributed greatly to the collecting of accurate information quickly. The chiefs of staff of all armies gave us conferences, and always drew our attention to units that had fought particularly well. One of our great difficulties in the big advance was to get suitable headquarters. We had to be behind the armies so as not to interfere with billeting arrangements of fighting troops; we had to be near cabling centres such as St Omer, Montreuil, or Abbeville, and yet our area of information was as a rule in front of Infantry Brigade H.Q's. The situation was still further complicated by the fact that in the Somme area (from Amiens to Cambrai) there were eighty kilometres of destroyed country; the distances that our Vauxhall cars accomplished in those days were incredible, and the energy of the correspondents is beyond all praise. Any effort, however, to record the fighting of our armies in the autumn of 1918 was worth while, for such an achievement is never likely to occur again in the history of Great Britain. Our foreign correspondents also worked with similar zeal; their loyalty to us in the bad days of March, 1918, was only equalled by their enthusiasm on and after August 8th, 1918. At the moment of the armistice they were enthusiastic and said of the British, 'Vous etes les grandes vainqueurs de la guerre.'

I do not think it is too much to say that we had at the end of the war the best organisation of news service that existed in any army in the world. I wish I could say the same of the photographic and cinematographic sections and of the historical record side. In both these matters the French were streets ahead of us; this was partly due to patriotism, partly to organisation. Their patriotism made them willing to spend the necessary money, and the French War Office instituted a 'section photographique et cinematographique de l'armée' whose chiefs were soldiers under military discipline. The work of Lieut. Croze on the front was magnificent; some forty of his operators were divided up and worked with each army; thus from the early days of the war they began to collect methodically material for an illustrated record of the war. Lieut. Croze was a man of education and imagination, and was able to guide his operators in choosing the subjects that would be most interesting to posterity. Our War Office, on the other hand, only provided two photographers and two cinema operators for something like twenty army corps.

In the winter of 1917-18 the Ministry of Information was created, thus making confusion worse confounded, causing a dual control, part civil and part military. In war time the soldier is top dog; why in heaven's name doesn't he use his power to full advantage? In France, Lord Beaverbrook would have been mobilised and the services of his brain would have been placed at the disposal of his country in return for a colonel's pay. The new Ministry did not provide the army with any more photographers, but it held exhibitions of war photographs which were enlarged to the size of life and smeared with incredible colours. The man who enlarged and coloured the photographs got a knighthood; the

photographers who daily risked their lives for three years got the O.B.E. The energy and contempt of danger of the photographers on the front were altogether admirable.

In the matter of compiling material for historical and artistic records the French were also a long way ahead of us. With each of their armies they had an 'officier informateur,' whose duty it was, after a battle, to collect all the dramatic episodes on each divisional front and to put them into literary shape. These officers were men of intellectual endowment who had had plenty of experience of front-line work. The result of their labours was sent all over the world; they did not interfere with war-correspondents' work, but rather helped it, inasmuch as they passed on any good stories to those writing for daily papers, taking time to compose their own work which took the form of small historical pamphlets. At my instigation this system was also adopted in our army, but it had not begun to take effect by the time the armistice arrived. The work of these French 'officiers informateurs' was most successful during the Battle of Verdun, which was admittedly the best advertised show of the whole war.

Up till the last year we had but an incomplete organisation to deal with the emotional and historical side; consequently there are many episodes of human tragedy and human valour that will never be recorded. Our histories will be compiled from the official war diaries, which are usually as dull as ditch water; you might as well expect a historian to make a great work from such documents as a painter to produce a masterpiece from photographs. This neglect on the part of our general staff is the more regrettable as a great writer (Mr John Masefield) had proved his genius for recording battles in the Gallipoli campaign.

The French again were wiser than us in their use of artists; their painters were all mobilised according to their class without distinction or favour. When they had served about a year in the trenches, they were pulled out of the line and given a job in the Camouflage branch which left them enough leisure to do sketches of battle-fields. We, on the other hand, adopted the ridiculous procedure of making our most popular artists Majors, even though they were of military age and should have been serving as combatant soldiers. These comparatively young men were called upon to put on canvas the majesty and horror of war without having had any war experience. No wonder that the only good works that have been produced have been done by such painters as Mr Eric Kennington, who have seen some real service before becoming official artists. Organised artistic effort in this country has ever been, to put it mildly, a scream; so long as our Royal Academy was an artistic club composed of Reynolds and his friends, it was good: ever since Reynolds's death it has become more and more the Church and State concern that we now know it to be, unillumined by the divine flame of art.

The harmony that existed finally between the war-correspondents and all units was due to the first-rate men that were sent out by the Newspapers Proprietors Association. They had a battle to win like everybody else, and they won it. All honour to them.

CONTENTS

CHAP.		PAGE
I.	'MALBROUCK S'EN VA-T-EN GUERRE'	1
II.	THE LUMINOUS WATCH	7
III.	THE FRONT	20
IV.	'THE ALLIED PRESS'	57
V.	THE CAMPAIGN OF 1917	85
VI.	REORGANISATION	135
VII.	LUDENDORFF'S OFFENSIVE	146
VIII.	'THE BLACK DAY FOR THE GERMAN ARMY'	178
	INDEX	223

CHAPTER I

'MALBROUCK S'EN VA-T-EN GUERRE.'

My publisher assures me that war books are a drug in the market, and that the whole world is fed up with the subject; the truth is that people will get bored with anything if it goes on long enough—even with battle, murder, and sudden death. At the beginning of the war were we not all thrilled to the marrow when we heard of some of the heroic deaths of our dearest friends? Long before we had reached the armistice, we used to say, 'Poor old Tom ——— was done in yesterday. What a good fellow he was. I wonder if his wife will marry again. He was her third husband since the war,' and so one passed on wearily to the business of the day, while bald heads sitting before the plate-glass windows of the clubs yawned as they ran their eyes down the enormous casualty lists. Yet, notwithstanding the universal boredom, this must inevitably be one of the great events of all history. Before the war, and after the war, will represent two different periods as distinctly as before Christ and after Christ: so I mean to have my say even though it may attract little attention.

Before I get to my dealings with the Press, I intend to give some account of my early experiences, otherwise what I say later on would carry little or no consideration. Few will have forgotten the horror of the first news in August 1914; the sense of tragedy was made more tragic by the unusually brilliant weather, day after day

of clear skies with baking sun. My home never looked more beautiful, yet there was no pleasure in anything once I knew that France was overrun by the hated German; for I had been brought up in France, and I have always loved it as dearly as my own country. Then I got news that a great friend of mine, a cavalry officer, had been killed; he had been shot in the leg and a brother officer had picked him up and put him across the saddle and galloped off with him, but in this position he was again hit in the head. He took four days to die, and he was in a house where there were no anæsthetics; the news sickened me and life became an absolute burden, and yet I had never had any military service, so it was frightfully difficult to know what to do; I knew France so well that I thought I might be used as interpreter, and I offered my services to the War Office, but naturally enough nothing ever came of it. What finally determined me to become a soldier of some sort was the arrival of the Somersetshire Yeomanry, who camped in our park; they arrived about midday and at tea-time the Colonel came over with one of his officers. This officer was an acquaintance of mine, and I had always despised him because he was very dressy and was in the habit of scenting himself, and he used to cut me out in the affections of young ladies to whom I was attached; and yet there he was bronzed and virile, after a three days' march from Somersetshire, thirsting for German blood. This officer afterwards had a most gallant career in the war; he had a bad wound, and, when he was recovered, he returned again and was killed. How often did this war prove that men whom I had despised were possessed of qualities that I would have given my soul to possess. One of the things that astonished me most was to find out the types of men who were most brave; the drunkards,

the rakes, the dandies were a long way first—the high-minded religious people of strong principles were often good diers but not often good fighters—the orderly, well-disciplined, obedient types were more often than not quite useless in the face of the enemy. I was once discussing the psychology of bravery with 'Sem,' the French caricaturist, and I was telling him how extremely gallant were the dandies and the fops, and he made this wise answer. 'Après tout—le courage—c'est une élégance.' I could not stand it a moment longer, and I determined to go. Determination breeds opportunity, and the next day I noticed that Colonel Claude Lowther had obtained leave from Lord Kitchener to raise a battalion of Sussex men, and I determined to go to him and put myself at his disposition. He received me most amiably, and I told him that I was willing to be a private in his battalion; he asked me if I had any influence in the county and whether I thought I could raise him some men. I said that I had a certain amount, and that I would do my best, so he gave me a big parcel of attestation papers and sent me off. The next day I hired a car and started on a tour of my part of the county; some days I got a doctor to come with me and, being a J.P. myself, we examined and swore in the men then and there as we went from house to house. I can't say that I was a very welcome visitor at most of these cottages, but the fact that I was going myself carried a certain amount of conviction. The most irritating people were those who said, 'I be'nt going till they Germans come here; then I dare say I shall be as good as some of they.' After about a fortnight's work I had got together the best part of a company, which was not so bad. In my spare time I fetched a drill sergeant over from Horsham to drill me, and I practised my word of command on my family; I

found it difficult at that stage of my military career to get a squad composed of my two daughters and a governess to form fours satisfactorily, also, whenever I said 'right,' my daughters turned to the left, and this confused my brain to such an extent that, when I eventually drilled a company and they carried out my orders correctly, I was utterly nonplussed and had brain stoppage so that no further words of command would come into my head.

Having succeeded so far I wrote to Colonel Lowther and asked him what my next step should be. He replied that our training camp was to be at Cooden Beach just above the golf club, and that I was to report to Colonel Howard, who was camp commandant, on a certain day, and that I was to warn my men that they should report at the same place a week later. Accordingly I got together a certain amount of camp kit and started off on the day named. I thought it wise to take an early train so as to have many hours of daylight in my new quarters; my family accompanied me to the station, and there was a most tearful parting. It seemed to me that I was really off on active service; I confidently believed that I should be in France within six weeks. After the first few days of the war, which brought nothing but misery at the loss of friends and a guilty conscience at my own inaction, I now felt that I was doing something, no matter how badly, and this brought a great sense of calm and rest, also the spirit of adventure was in the air, and I felt myself an adventurer and delighted in it. When I got to camp I found Colonel Howard in a very troubled state of mind, and he seemed more troubled at my arrival. 'Here I am,' I said. 'Well, go back,' he said. 'You are not wanted for another week.' The camp was not ready, the tents had not arrived, and I saw clearly that I could

be of no use whatever. I looked at my watch; there was a train back in ten minutes; I dashed off and just managed to get into the last carriage as the train was moving out. When I reached home again I found the whole family out; the strain of saying farewell had been too much, and they had all gone to spend the day in the forest. I was dead tired, and so I threw myself on the sofa and fell fast asleep. I must have slept many hours, for, when I woke, the lamps were lit and my family were standing over me with faces livid with horror. I think they thought that I had already got killed and that this was my ghost, or that it was a vision prophetic of disaster to come. I explained the situation, and I must confess it was a terrible anti-climax. When I went off by the same train a week later no one accompanied me to the station, and there was not a tear shed by a single member of the household.

Malbrouck s'en va-t-en guerre
Mironton ton tin mirontaine
Malbrouck s'en va-t-en guerre
Qui sait quand reviendra.

Why is it that there is always something comic about actions that purport to be heroic? On this journey parties of my recruits joined the train at various stations between Three-Bridges and Eastbourne, and, when we formed up outside Cooden Beach and numbered off, there were some hundred and fifty of the finest specimens in Sussex, including eighty of the West Sussex Police. I was thirty-six years of age at the outbreak of this war, and since the age of twenty I had lived a life of almost complete seclusion. I had been a student in Paris from seventeen to twenty, and that tired me of towns, so I

went to live in the country in England. I was not obliged to make money for my living, and I determined to study alone and remain aloof from all the myriad art movements that have troubled this period. A war did not enter into my calculations; certainly I never expected to find myself at the head of one hundred and fifty men marching into camp. How lucky it is that one cannot foretell the future, and how much easier it is to face unforeseen situations if one has made no special preparations for them. It is easier to bear cold water if you have first had a warm bath, and from this fact one may conclude that violent contrasts are wholesome and stimulating, and prevent boredom and apathy. To get the most out of life it would be a good thing to be alternately very rich and very poor, very powerful and very humble; first a Prime Minister then a dock-hand, next an Archbishop then again a beggar. Thus one really would have some knowledge of human nature.

CHAPTER II

THE LUMINOUS WATCH

DURING the first few days of camp life my 'robber band' was made up to full strength of a modern company, and an officer who had seen service in South Africa was put in command. After several weeks of intensive training, I was given a captain's commission. We still thought we should be out by the New Year, and we all worked with feverish energy. Colonel Lowther was convinced that a greater number of men could be raised from the county of Sussex outside the ordinary recruiting methods, and he again obtained leave from Lord Kitchener to raise three more battalions and form a brigade. Thus our training was interrupted by another recruiting campaign. The battalion, already well-drilled, was marched 'musique en tête' to the neighbouring towns of Eastbourne, St Leonards, and Hastings and formed up in the market-place, while the officers mounted on tubs and addressed the multitude. Furthermore, the officers and N.C.O.'s went back to their native towns and villages, and described their life in camp in all its details. This certainly was the most successful method of all, for what deters the average man from becoming a soldier is the sense of the unknown. Colonel Lowther also made a wise arrangement whereby all the men from the same district were kept together in platoons. By these means two more battalions were raised without much difficulty, and Lowther began to hope that he would be given the

command of the brigade which had been raised at his initiative. He certainly had ideas of organisation that ran on big lines, but all small details worried and irritated him; after all, what else is a soldier's life but one endless round of small details where great accuracy is required? Possibly if Lowther, at this stage, had gone out to France and had been attached to a brigade staff in the trenches for some weeks, he would have gained the confidence of the higher command sufficiently to get this appointment. However, his health was not good, and possibly this was the reason which kept him at home. His second in command at that time was Major Grisewood; he had been for some years a regular officer in a cavalry regiment, but had retired before the war. In my opinion he was one of the few English officers that I had ever met who had a positive genius for soldiering. He had considerable mathematical ability and some experience of business (which was lacking in most of us), and, above all things, imagination. Had he been in the French army he might have risen to the very highest rank; he might even have been a second Foch. Unfortunately, he had two defects—he was a devout Catholic, and he had a tendency to favour people of his own persuasion, also he had a complete intolerance of fools in high places. This led him to quarrel as often as not with his immediate seniors, and this was eventually his undoing; moreover, he was half Italian, and his delightful Latin temperament was not understood by most English regular officers. During the continued absence of the Colonel, who was, at this time, ill for long periods together, Grisewood undertook the training of the battalion and he did it exceedingly well. He paid the most scrupulous attention to those little buff pamphlets which were issued from time to time by the General Staff in France and which formed

an admirable basis for sound training. He also got some sort of order into our interior economy which was badly in need of attention. Most amateur soldiers think that soldiering in war time means fighting or field operations preparatory to fighting; they fail to see that modern armies are huge business concerns, and that the 'Q' side is of vast importance. From time to time the district commander and other officers, Inspector-Generals of infantry came down to review the battalion, and I think I am right in saying that their reports were invariably favourable. After one of these inspections, the Inspecting-General asked Colonel Lowther whether he was satisfied with the morals of his men; Lowther at that time was thoroughly annoyed at the slowness of our equipment and the continued absence of rifles, etc., and so he replied somewhat angrily, 'They have more morals than maxims, sir.'

Many wounded officers were now returning from France, and among them I had several friends whom I persuaded to come down to lecture to the men. It became obvious to us that there was no fun at all in this particular war, and without exception all these soldiers fresh from the fight had the expression of tragedy on their faces. What I wanted to acquire above all things was some sense of scale—that is, how much space a division occupied, both in width and depth; what was the relation of the field artillery to the infantry, and of the howitzers to the field-guns; and where the headquarters of companies, battalions, and brigades were situated. I never succeeded at getting at this, nor did I ever have the smallest idea of scale till I got over myself.

This first winter was not all beer and skittles; the weather broke with a vengeance and it rained continuously for months on end. The men got depressed as there were

no signs of our being sent to France; they had been served out with very shabby blue uniforms and a few obsolete rifles; we still continued field practices, even in the bad weather, and the blue uniforms became filthy in spite of every care and incessant cleaning; then the camp became a mud pie, and worst of all we had an epidemic of meningitis. A few men died and the company, of which I was by then in command, had to be split up and all proper training became impossible; however, the epidemic was very skilfully dealt with by the battalion doctor, and the danger passed with the first days of the New Year.

About this time Colonel Lowther was warned that an Inspector-General would shortly come down, and that he would wish to see the battalion make an attack as part of a tactical scheme. In that neighbourhood was a farm called Court Lodge Farm; Lowther was attracted to this farm by the vast beauty of its architecture, and he evidently thought it would be a pleasant spot to stand with the Inspecting-General while his lambs (the battalion had been nick-named 'Lowther's Lambs') gambolled around him. For this great day we rehearsed and rehearsed and rehearsed. The rôle allotted to my company was a flanking movement; I was to approach the farm from the west, moving up from behind some hills, remaining on dead ground till the final moment, when my front platoons were to appear, in open order, giving covering fire for another company which was to make the assault from the north. We eventually got the synchronisation of movements to perfection, and each company made an enlargement of a small scale map. Then the great day came and the battalion was at its assembly point by 10 o'clock; the officer's call was sounded and the Colonel explained the scheme to us as if for the first time. I

must say he acted with great skill and so did all the other officers, who knitted their brows with Napoleonic concentration as they poured over the map; one captain went almost too far in his naïf questions, and almost took in the Colonel, who had a moment of great nervousness lest the whole thing should go wrong. However, there was no hitch; the first skirmishers of my company appeared on the sky-line at exactly the right moment—an unforeseen menace which was duly and appropriately pointed out to the General. I gradually reinforced my firing line (how simple it is to manœuvre when there are no bullets and no shells) and then the great moment for the assaulting company to charge arrived; at this point I seized a bicycle from my orderly in a desperate effort to be in at the death; the bicycle had no brake and the hill was steep, so I steered for a dung heap near an outlying shed and arrived just in time for the final charge. In the pow-wow that followed the fight the General singled me out for special praise, the truth being that when my men first appeared the General inquired whose company it was and the Colonel told him that it was mine; when the final assault was being made the General again asked which company it was, and the Colonel, having forgotten whether it was 'A' or 'B' company looked for an officer and saw me, somewhat hectic from the bicycle episode, so he again answered that the company was mine. Had this been the case my men would have had to travel as fast as I did on a bicycle going down a steep hill without a brake, and naturally this impressed the General considerably. We all hoped that this successful manœuvre would have secured for Lowther the command of the Brigade, but General Woollcombe, the commander of the district, decided otherwise, and so Lowther losing interest in this venture which had been begun with so

much enthusiasm, gradually faded out of sight and severed his connection with the battalion.

The next event of importance, naturally enough, was the arrival of a real Brigadier; I say a real Brigadier for he was a regular soldier. Even in those days the battle between the professional and the amateur soldier had begun; each had the heartiest contempt for the other, and to this day I cannot make out which side is most justified in their opinion. My company was warned to stand by for inspection on a certain day, and I made a large outlay in cleaning materials, but nothing really had much effect on those blue uniforms stained with Sussex clay; still we did our best to turn out smart. The Brigadier came round with Grisewood and made a most thorough inspection of the company; then he made me stand the men easy and called me apart. I had hoped he was going to address them somewhat on these lines—'You have come forward in the first hours of your country's distress, and this is an action for which you will be proud to the day of your death. The real test of your sacrifice has not yet come, but it is the first step that counts, and from this I know that you will perform all that is asked of you.' Nothing of the sort! 'I think that your pack straps should be right over left, not left over right. See to it another time, will you.' Surely the moral side of soldiering does count even with a phlegmatic race; it is not human so to treat people who have volunteered in the first days of the war—many of them men of money and position. The only regular British officer that I ever met who succeeded in inspiring us was Colonel Campbell, the bayonet-fighting man; after his first lecture we were all of us ready to assault anything from Hindenburg to our own Brigadier; such was our spirit of the offensive.

As the winter yielded and the spring came on, and yet

there was no news of our going abroad, I obtained leave to take my company for a four-day march; officers and men alike, we all carried full kit with ammunition and rifle, and we slept in barns and farm sheds at night. At this time my junior captain was a man of fifty-eight years of age, Capt. Otho Paget; previous to the war he had a great reputation in Leicestershire as a fearless rider, and he stuck this march, and indeed all the other hardships he was called upon to bear throughout the campaign, with the utmost courage and endurance. We averaged twenty miles a day, starting out along the coast through Hastings and St Leonards to Rye and Winchelsea, and then turned northwards into Kent and came home by Hurstmonceux. At one of the villages on the borders of Kent and Sussex a romantic episode occurred. In the early days of the previous autumn I had been recruiting in this same village with a brother officer, and we had just been to call upon the vicar, who had directed us to the house of a well-known Justice of the Peace in the neighbourhood; our car was climbing a steep hill outside the village when we passed a most graceful young lady with two little boys. She was like the very best Caldecott damsel, the embodiment of English freshness and charm. The hill was so steep that it would have been inhuman not to give her a lift; while my friend interviewed the J.P., she told me that she was the governess to the vicar's children and that she had a sister who was a teacher at a school in Bexhill. We set her down again at the vicar's door and I thought no more about her, till we passed through the same village during this march some six months later. Our billet was just outside the village, and, after I had seen that the men had got their rations, I could not resist having a wash and a shave, and calling upon the dear

vicar. He received me somewhat coldly, somewhat suspiciously I thought. 'Sir,' I said, 'do you remember me coming to see you in the early days of the war? The kind help you then gave me enabled me to obtain recruits, who are now trained and fit to fight; at this very moment they are encamped on the outskirts of this village, but that is not the matter of my visit. Is Miss M—— still with you as governess? for I have a letter from her sister, who lives at Bexhill, and this letter she asked me to deliver in person.' (God forgive me for a liar!) The vicar assured me that Miss M—— was still in his service, but that she was out for the moment—would I wait—did I care for rock gardens. I said 'Yes, passionately,' (more forgiveness.) I admired everything, even his coloured leaves, and then he had to leave me as there was a mothers' meeting at the other end of the garden. I took a chair among the perambulators and studied a blackboard with a table of diet, containing food values of articles suitable and cheap for war time. Two oranges = one banana, two bananas = one ounce of walnuts, etc. Really I did feel a bit ashamed. The time passed very slowly. At last I spotted my friend coming down the carriage ride, and I tore towards her with a letter in my hand. 'From your sister,' I cried, 'it is urgent; I have to deliver it in person and will take back an answer.' Bless her! She tumbled to it. A few minutes later we were in the rock garden and I was telling her the correct Latin names for at least fifty per cent of the plants. She told me that she found more favour with Mr Vicar than with Mrs Vicar (I was not surprised)—that she had recently had a birthday and that her brother (sic) had given her a lovely little wrist watch, and she held out her pretty hand for me to admire. This I did enthusiastically, but she said, 'You can't really appreciate it by daylight.' 'All right,' I

said, 'the sun sets at 7.30. Meet me at the stile in the field next to the Goat and Compasses' at 8.30. I leave you to square the vicar.' I returned to the company to hold a foot inspection, and at 8.30 I was at the trysting place and so was the lady. Marvellous to relate I discovered that the watch was luminous. Quite recently I received an invitation to the wedding of Miss M—— to a gallant sailor. She is now busily engaged in living happily ever after.

On return to camp I found rumours of a move, but this did not take place at once. We had another field day; we had to make a very early start, march to Ashburnham Park and consolidate a position in anticipation of an attack; our approach to the Park was to be hindered by the enemy (force unknown), and my company was to be the advance guard company. Of course, we all knew that the unknown force was a company of Kent Cyclists employed on Coast Defence. I knew the country like the palm of my hand; also I knew that Ashburnham Park had but one entrance. Profiting by this knowledge I managed to manœuvre so that the entire force of the enemy was captured. This annoyed the Brigadier not a little, for the day was over before it had begun, and I got properly told off. As the nights were now warm our training was all done at night, and I am sure we all got great benefit from it, as darkness is an enemy in itself, which increases very greatly the alertness of the troops. Previous to these practices we had a lecture from our gallant Brigadier, and the opening phrase has stuck in my head. 'The subject for this lecture is "night operations." Night operations are movements by troops carried out in the dark.' *Some Bromide.* The khaki uniforms now arrived, and this was a source of infinite pleasure to the men. Their old blue uniforms had been

worn out ten times over and were in rags; for months past on the march the men used to sing to the tune of 'For he's a jolly good fellow,' 'We want that suit of khaki (three times) and so say all of us,' and the officers used to answer (strophe and antistrophe) 'You'll all of you have to go naked (three times) and so say all of us.' Then came orders to move. Grisewood addressed the battalion and told us that the last lap of our training had begun, and that we must pull our socks up. Poor man! he little knew how often he was obliged to say that before we actually left England. We went by train to Detling, near Maidstone, in Kent, and encamped on some low-lying ground where the climate was most depressing, especially after the glorious air of Cooden Beach. Every day we went up to the Downs and dug trenches in that mercilessly flinty soil. I used to strip to the waist and dig with the men; it rained nearly every day, but rain on one's bare back while taking strong exercise is a luxury that is more exquisite than all the luxuries of all the hotel Ritz's in the world. It was mortal dull, but it gave us the most magnificent muscles. From time to time our Brigadier did Grisewood and me the honour to invite us to dinner: on these occasions we found it a great drawback not to be able to have a fund of anecdotes of previous campaigns, for the conversation of *real* soldiers seemed to consist entirely of reminiscences. Our host, whose strong point was certainly not tact, seemed to wish to impress upon us that his past life had been chock-full of vital experiences, each one of which went to make up that subtle quality, the power to command. Grisewood and I were at first rather bowled out by this stream of reminiscences, but it soon occurred to us that, if our uneventful but blameless past was free from incident of military importance, we had at least

rich powers of invention and could easily pretend that we had taken part in many small frontier campaigns. He would say to me, 'Do you remember, Lytton, that little affair down in Rangoon, when we climbed on to the roof?' and I could answer, 'Yes, colonel, and do you remember when I turned the hose-pipe on to the mutineers that night that the battalion Sergeant-Major's wife had her first baby?' This left the Brigadier and his Brigade-Major pink with annoyance, and on our way back to our tents we would say, 'We got old Ponto's (that was our nickname for him) goat to-night all right.'

Our next move was to Aldershot; the start from Detling was made at 3 a.m. (Everything in war always starts at 3 a.m.) Grisewood, who was by then Colonel, exhorted us to be extra smart so as to impress the thoroughly military neighbourhood with our soldier-like appearance, but unfortunately it was raining bucketfuls. When we got into the train we were all wet to the bone; dear old Paget pulled off his top-boots, and, his feet swelling, he could never get them properly on again; also wishing to protect his chest he stuffed a copy of *The Times* inside his waistcoat; this printed paper rapidly became a most horrible pulp and he forgot to remove it, and thus strangely camouflé'ed he marched past the governor's house in rear of the company.

We found ourselves made up into a division with two other brigades who had very little training, and so we had to begin platoon drill all over again. Luckily there were the ranges, and we fired our musketry course, which was great fun; our battalion came out top of the whole division. Grisewood was very anxious that I should be his second in command and, indeed, I worshipped him and should have liked it, but the divisional commander decided against it. I was chosen to form a sniping school,

possibly as a result of the excellent shooting of my company on the ranges, and I was given twenty-five men from each battalion in the brigade. We had a little camp all to ourselves, and a range. The Aldershot command asked me to devise a scheme of training, finishing up with a competition for which they would offer a cup to the winning team. I had heard from my friends in France that all the sniping was done at daybreak or at sunset, so I made my snipers dig lairs by night as silently as possible, with covering parties ahead (these lairs were made on the range between the firing points). Another party of snipers were posted in the butt pit, as though in a trench; these sent out patrols in order to locate the position of the enemy working parties, and took bearings from definite points in the butt pit. In the morning, before daybreak, the lairs were manned and the butt party would light fires as though for cooking breakfast, and exhibit figure targets for short exposures in the half-light; the snipers had orders not to fire unless they were pretty well sure to hit. By daylight there was a crawling competition; the men had to crawl from the camp to the 300 yards firing point, a distance of almost 300 yards; they were to make use, as much as possible, of dead ground, and for the bulk of the distance they were protected by a little hillock when they could stand upright and walk in a normal way, nevertheless the average time for this distance was three hours. While this crawling went on there was also a party in the butt pit observing by means of periscopes, and as soon as they spotted a crawler they would ring one up on the telephone at the firing point and give a description of the spot where they had seen the crawler. It was astonishing what enthusiasm the men put into this training even though it was in the middle of the winter and the weather was extremely

severe; some of them became remarkably good marksmen, and it is interesting to record that the moment they got to France they began killing Germans. At the end of the competition we marched back to Witley, where the rest of the division was encamped. The final kit inspections were already taking place, and it was obvious that we would soon be on the move. A great controversy was raging over a defence scheme of a little hill on Witley Common; the Brigadier, who was just beginning to assimilate the tactics of 1914, was positive that all trenches should be sited on the reverse slope. It was assumed that a state of trench warfare already existed, and all the senior officers were called upon to produce a detailed defence scheme with map enlargements. I remember suggesting that the hill should be tunnelled and that the front line should be on the forward slope, and the support and reserve lines on the reverse slope. This was considered rather impudently precocious, and yet ninety per cent of the hills on the western front were defended in this manner.

CHAPTER III

THE FRONT

FOR the last few weeks all the officers had been sending home packages of their superfluous kit; the last thing I sent home was my sword. This immediately brought forth a batch of letters from the family; 'Now we know it means business. Up to this we have never been taken in by the rumours of your being sent abroad, but since your sword has been sent home to be stored in lavender, we know that you are indeed going to fight.'

There was the usual 3 a.m. start in pouring rain and this time Captain Paget surpassed himself; not only did he carry the full equipment, which in all conscience is heavy enough, but in addition he had a frying-pan, several bird-cages, sponge racks, and other impedimenta, so that by the time he arrived at the station he was in a fainting condition. However, he was completely consoled as soon as he got a fire going in the carriage and fried some bacon, very much to the annoyance of his brother officers.

We reached Southampton by daybreak and hung about there all day; at nightfall we embarked on a horrible little transport called the *Viper*. The weather was stormy, the men were packed like sardines and were frightfully sick all over each other. We reached Havre at sunrise and formed up on the quay; a very much creased and shop-soiled looking lot we were, and the

march discipline from the harbour to the concentration camp was not all that was perfect. The weather was bitter cold and the camp was covered with snow; tents were our only shelter and we were already chilled to the marrow by the night journey. We remained there that day and part of the night; never did I welcome the 3 a.m. start more readily, for I was literally frozen. Unfortunately, the windows of our carriage were all broken, and though we sat huddled together with our arms round each other's waist we could not raise a spark of animal heat. We travelled via Abbeville and St Pol and eventually reached a little village called Morbecque, some few kilometres from Hazebrouck. My company was billeted in a delightful little farm; the men had clean straw to sleep on and, for the few days we stayed there, I think they were perfectly happy; they were amazed at the industry of the Flemish peasants; I think they imagined that every Frenchman they met would have a flat-brimmed hat, a pointed beard and an incessant shrug of the shoulders, instead of which they found a huge rugged race with the women as fierce and as strong as the men. The tenant farmer of our farm was a glorious specimen of his race, tall, handsome and sad; every night he would come in after dinner and have long conversations about Time, Death, and Judgment. He liked my men, who were nearly all from the country, and they helped him with his work, and this made him very hospitable and good tempered to us. He had been a soldier in his young days, and he told me that he considered that it took five years to make a soldier. I said, 'Why so long?' and he replied, 'It takes all that time to eradicate the fear of death.' 'Yes,' I thought, 'and possibly a little longer.' Certainly one of the most difficult things to acquire, during the transition from civil to military, is what the Japanese

call the doctrine of impermanency, and once acquired it is equally difficult to shed.

Rumours reached us that men, after being in the line a certain time, acquired an incredible fierceness, and I heard this story of an incident that occurred during a minor offensive when our guns were bombarding the German lines. A German soldier went mad with shell shock and stood up on the parapet with his arms raised shouting, 'Gott mit uns.' 'Got mittens 'ave yer,' cried one of our Tommies, 'well, 'ere's socks,' and he shot him.

We rested here for a few days and then marched to Estaires; once again Captain Paget relieved the monotony of the route. We were informed that Divisional corps and Army Commanders would be standing at a certain corner to sample the new division. We were warned to look to our march discipline, but not to pay compliments. Paget, among his many antipathies to conventional attire, could not bear to wear boots; his favourite foot-gear was sand-shoes, and, thinking himself at last in the battle zone, he cast all effort to appear like a soldier, and wore his favourite shoes. The route from Morbecque to Estaires is entirely paved with cobble stones and, long before we reached the corner where the distinguished Generals were standing, Paget's shoes were a memory, and his heels were showing bright pink on the frosty stones.

We stayed at Estaires but a few hours, 'A' and 'B' companies moving forward after a short rest. Estaires was then (March 1916) fairly well knocked about by shell fire, and at night the flashes of the guns were all round and about. As we listened to the dull roar that first night we murmured to each other 'Good old "A" Coy., they are catching it.' On the following evening 'C' (which was mine) and 'D' companies moved on to Fleurbaix, a little village just south of Armentières.

Here at last was true Bairnsfather scenery with all the buildings shot to blazes; as we reached the village our machine-guns were keeping up a frightful rattle with indirect fire on the entrances to German communication trenches, and the 'Verey' lights shed a ghastly flickering glare on the ruined buildings. My company was attached to a company of Yorks and Lancs, and at mess that night the officers told us all about the peculiarities of the sector. Apparently for the last week or so brother Fritz had been perfectly quiet; they were expecting us to relieve them shortly, as they were likely to be moving down south for the coming concentration on the Somme.

That night one of our men got hit by a stray bullet as he was entering a communication trench, and was killed dead; I had a look at the poor chap as he lay all waxy and white in a destroyed cottage which was used as a mortuary. This was our first man 'Killed in Action'; every time we were in the trenches from now onwards there were always a certain number of these war accidents that caused a steady diminution of our strength without achieving anything. One of our company Sergeant-majors was also nearly killed by a sentry of the Yorks and Lancs battalion to which we were attached; the saturated atmosphere of that part of Flanders had given him such a cold that he had completely lost his voice, so that when he was challenged and asked to give the countersign he could not make himself heard, and nearly had a bayonet through his stomach.

The following day I was attached for instruction to a commander of a battery of R.F.A.; by eight o'clock I was at his headquarters. After breakfast he showed me his guns, which were in magnificent condition, and then I went with him on a tour of inspection round his observation posts and the front line trenches. The first view of

the trenches is thrilling, and I was greatly impressed with the complete absence of a single living thing. In order to reach the front you pass through villages crammed with troops, and then through horse lines and lorry parks and R.E. dumps, and finally you reach the entrenched area, and from that moment you can't see a soul, and it is difficult to believe at first that you are in any danger of being seen by the enemy. After the O.P's we went on down the front line to see if the company commanders had any new targets which wanted dealing with; there were the boys of the 'A' and 'B' company filling sandbags and looking as much at home as though they had been out since '14. The officers of 'A' Coy informed me that during the night Paget had appeared shortly after dinner in a striped (hoop-wise) bathing suit and had proceeded to pick his way through our wire, and was half-way across no-man's-land before he ran into one of our patrols, and was fetched back. It appears that he had heard that a German prisoner was badly wanted in order to establish the German order of battle, and, showing a contempt of danger every bit as magnificent as his contempt of convention, he had removed more than all traces of identification, and, thus strangely disguised, was going to pay a call on Fritz in his own trenches. I am sorry that circumstances prevented my following this officer's career throughout the campaign, but I am glad to know that he has survived and that his splendid courage has been awarded with a M.C.

The country round Fleurbaix was completely water-logged and I doubt if any system of drainage could have kept the trenches dry, though the German trenches were reported to be much better drained than our own. Our communication trenches were more than half full of water and the duckboards were raised accordingly; this meant a steady occurrence of casualties during reliefs.

All German trenches that I have ever seen have been immensely deep and the water has been drained off with pipes; the walls of the trenches have been revetted with wood and there has been a plentiful supply of bomb-proof dug-outs. Thus by skilful engineering the German soldiers had the maximum of safety and comfort, and their apparently economic casualty lists have shown the wisdom of this plan of taking the utmost care of the men. If we could produce a comparative list of avoidable and unavoidable casualties the public would be appalled. Our trenches in this sector were of the breastwork order; they were revetted with sandbags, and whenever there was an extra heavy fall of rain the walls of the trenches fell in; wooden revetments would in the end have been cheaper and better.

We spent the whole day going round the entire sector occupied by the division, and I did not get back to my company headquarters till tea-time. After tea I had fallen asleep when I was awakened by a loud explosion. During my absence the Colonel of the Yorks and Lancs battalion to whom we were attached had ordered squad drill in a small orchard on the outskirts of the village, and the men had practised fixing and unfixing bayonets. This drill in an open field, in full view of the enemy sausage balloons, seems to me to this day an incredibly stupid proceeding. 'Ah! discipline! what sins are committed in thy name!' In mid-winter, when visibility is low, naturally the Germans don't waste their shells on imaginary targets; therefore this village had been perfectly quiet, but it was already March and on this particular day (Friday 13th) there was at intervals a harsh garish light peculiarly suitable for air photography. The Germans knew that our army was growing in strength and they were on the lookout for fresh concentrations; as we were attached to a division holding the line, the

normal number of men was doubled and therefore, surely, extra care should have been taken to lie low. Well, this first shell came along and fell in the orchard where the men had been drilling; we all jumped up and I must say that I was intensely exhilarated at the thought of being shelled. A few seconds later there arrived a second shell; this one struck a building which was used as a Quartermaster-Sergt.'s store where rations were being dealt out; the store was on the upper floor and the men in the room were flung through the floor, and the shell exploded amongst them and brought the building down on the top of them. The company commander to whom I was attached (Captain Cobbold) dashed into this building with his company Sergt.-Major and I went after them; we heard groans coming from a mass of debris and we raked among the fallen beams to get some of these poor fellows out. A German plane was now overhead and every few seconds a huge crump landed in this little group of buildings; I followed Captain Cobbold, who would listen as he heard one coming and then would dash in one direction and another and fling himself on his face. After each burst he would return to the building that had been first struck and proceed with the disentangling of the mangled forms that lay there in a heap. I was equally amazed at his courage and at the skill with which he judged where the shells would land. I did my best to imitate him in both respects, and we got a lot of fellows on to stretchers, but they were all dead. As time went on, the shriek of the shells became almost unbearable, and I well understood how little of this sort of thing it requires to turn a sane man into a raving lunatic. Many of the survivors of the platoon billeted in these buildings did go mad. After the burst of one of these shells that had fallen well behind me, I felt something brush my

breeches, but in the terror of the moment I paid no attention to it. It is difficult to judge of time on such occasions, but I should guess that we had been about three-quarters of an hour in these buildings, and it was obvious by then that there were no living survivors among the debris, so we crossed the road and entered a little sandbag shelter where the wounded had been collected and began to help dress some of the wounds. There was one wretched man who had all the muscles of his back torn off and was in great agony; we consoled him with the fact that it meant Blighty till the end of the war. As we dressed these chaps, shells continued to fall in the neighbourhood, and the terror on the faces of badly wounded men when the bursts got closer was a ghastly sight. When we had got the bandages on to the worst ones, I noticed that my breeks were saturated with blood; I thought at first that it was from the other fellows wounds, but as the blood appeared to increase, I stripped and saw that I had two wounds in the right leg. I had felt not an atom of pain, and it was only when I knew that I was wounded that I began to feel a little stiffness. I think it is often the case that quite serious wounds do not hurt much at the time, and this is a consoling thought.

As the darkness came on, the shelling stopped, ambulance lorries came up and took away the stretcher cases. I was in no hurry and waited till the lorries came back, and as I was waiting I went to have a look at the 'bag' laid out in a back-yard. There were about nineteen killed; many of them I could only identify by their discs. Some of them were men from our own farms in Sussex whom I had known for years. Poor fellows! all this weary preparation and training and then to be killed without so much as a glimpse at the enemy or even a suspicion of the lustre of their own glory.

At the dressing station five legs had to be amputated; four of these chaps died on the following day. The survivor was an old campaigner who had been wounded before, and I am sure that the reason that he survived was that he was more or less proof against nervous shock and he was thoroughly imbued with the doctrine of impermanency. I was injected with an anti-tetanus serum and was then sent on to the C.C.S. at Merville; I got off to bed about 11.30; I was covered with brick dust from head to foot, and I must have been a horrible object on clean sheets. I was beginning to wonder if I should ever go to sleep again, when I became aware that the man in the bed next to me was in great agony; I asked the Sister about him and she told me that he had his stomach pretty nearly shot away with machine-gun bullets. At first he stifled his groans, but as they gave him more and more morphia he lost his self-control, and he called out upon his mother and his sweetheart and implored them to come to his help. He was quite young and his frail body seemed to be shattered with pain. His anguish increased as the night wore on; I began to think that I had almost had enough war already; at about 4 o'clock I must have dozed off, for I am conscious of having been awakened at five by people moving about; it was the stretcher-bearers carrying this poor young fellow out with the Union Jack over him. After breakfast I was washed, and my wounds were dressed by the most marvellously competent woman I ever came across. She was the embodiment of all that was perfect in the art of nursing, that art for which the British race has undoubtedly a supreme genius. She was in many ways absolutely beautiful—not altogether unlike the smiling Virgin of Rheims. She was the true mixture of the classical and the Christian; she had the dignity, the grace, and the

symmetry of the Greeks; with the solemnity, the aloofness, and the pity of the Christians. She certainly was not human, she was nearly divine. I, of course, was simply No. 7; she took no personal interest in any of her cases, but she was full of a strange dignity that came to her from living continually in the 'no man's land' between life and death. All that day I dozed and thought alternately; I thought especially of Captain Cobbold and his splendid example. I have not seen him from that day to this; I heard that he had been badly wounded on the Somme. If ever his eye should light on these pages I should like him to know that in the hour of death and on the day of Judgment I shall think of him and hope to have a small particle of his glorious courage.

After two days in Merville I was sent down by train to the Duchess of Westminster's Hospital at Le Touquet; I arrived at about midnight; went straight to bed, and fell into the soundest sleep that I had ever had. On waking, the next morning, I did not know whether I was in heaven or hell. (I should not have been the least surprised to find myself in either place). My sleepy eyes rested on the words 'Salle des Cartes,' which made me think it must be hell, but when a gramophone started playing a hymn, I thought that might be the latest fashion in heaven; the hymn, however, was immediately followed by a ragtime and so I knew then that I was still in this world. I like that touch though—the hymn while the night nurses go off, and the ragtime while the day nurses come on.

In the bed on my right was a territorial Colonel who had been wounded at the battle of Loos, and on my left was a Canadian who slept for four consecutive days; I thought he must be frightfully ill, but on the fifth day he woke up as cheerful as possible. A bullet had grazed his head and slightly cracked his skull, so he was ordered

to keep very still and, being short of sleep, he slept for ninety-six hours on end. On the other side of him was a Northumberland Fusilier, who was about 6 ft. 7 in. in height, with a black stubbly beard of a few days' growth. He looked as if he had absorbed all the coal in Newcastle, and his head made an absolute black patch on the pillow; he was not wounded and there was at first very little the matter with him, but the Canadian and I christened him the bantam, and told him that he was in the unlucky bed (the name of the donor being something like Moses Goldstein); this depressed him and his temperature chart gradually began to look like forked lightning, and as I left the Hospital he was in a critical condition.

The first visit I received was from Colonel Spurrell. Colonel Spurrell was formerly in command of one of the Sussex battalions of our brigade, but the higher command had judged him to be too old for active service and he was placed in command of the divisional infantry base depot, situated at Etaples. This was a bitter blow to him, for he was a frightfully keen soldier; brave as a lion and gorgeously handsome. I don't think I ever saw a man so like my idea of Thackeray's Colonel Newcome. The sympathy which he showed me on this occasion was perfectly delightful; he insisted upon taking me as soon as I was able to walk to Holy Communion. It is many years since I have practised any form of religion, and it seems to me irreverend to partake of holy mysteries if you don't believe in them; but he, so to speak, ordered me to go and I saw that it would hurt him seriously if I refused. Throughout the service I watched his splendid face touched with the deepest emotion, and it was one of the most beautiful sights I have ever seen; besides, I felt so proud that he should show the affection of a father to me. Later on he visited us in the line, and his visit

happened to coincide with a small German attack on my company front. When the whole thing was over I found him standing by my side on the fire step. The trenches were then in a frightful state of slough, and I think he realised it would have been impossible for him at the age of sixty to be an infantry Colonel.

During my stay in hospital I fell in love with two sisters and a V.A.D. who represented three elements of perfection; there was Betty—my own particular sister—who was Irish and had wit and conversation, and there was Martha who had a splendid voice, and lastly, a night V.A.D. whom I christened Lily Elsie. She was the loveliest thing I have ever seen; I made up to her with every means in my power but without success. My compliments she spurned, then I tried to chaff; she took me 'au pied de la lettre' and was offended; finally I reported her to the orderly officer for wrapping up my shaving brush unrinsed in a woollen sock. This did have a little effect for she tucked me up in bed after that. I explained to the Duchess that polygamy must inevitably come after the war, so I wanted these three ladies for my wives, and she, seeing that my intentions were honourable, encouraged my suits.

I was now receiving very depressed letters from Grisewood; the day after I was hit, his second in command had been struck down with measles and one of his company commanders had also gone sick. With very few officers he had been obliged to take over the trenches from the Yorks and Lancs, and after a week in the line he had been relieved by another battalion; the relief was a very long affair, accompanied by an icy wind and snow and sleet; the men were obliged to march about a dozen kilometres, wet through to the skin, with feet swollen and tender from standing for days in the water up to the knees. The strain

had been too much for some of them and, among others, Grisewood's brother caught meningitis and died within twenty-four hours. Things being so, I resisted with all my might and main every attempt to send me to England, and appealed to the C.O. of the hospital to return me to my unit with the least possible delay. This he did, like a real scout, and in about three weeks from the time I arrived at Le Touquet, I was back with the battalion at Merville; scabs had barely formed on my wounds, and I was unable to get on a horse for six weeks. From the moment that I knew that no metal had been left in my leg, and as soon as I was assured that there was no danger of arterial bleeding, I gave myself at least one hour's massage every day, accompanied by resistance exercises in the manner taught me by my excellent friend, Dr Ryman, a Swedish doctor of great skill. I noticed that many wound cases came into hospital in a fairly satisfactory condition and got steadily worse from lying in bed; I attributed this to local stagnation of the circulation, and I was determined that this should not happen to me. For eighteen years previous to the war I had lived without any meat, and I think this also helped my recovery. When I saw the doctor who had first treated me at Merville, he could hardly believe that I was so soon recovered, and he told me that he thought it quite probable that I should lose my leg.

For some ten days the battalion rested in Merville, and then we were off again. A new Brigadier was appointed and I saw from the first minute that he and Grisewood would never get on; Grisewood had been handed over as 'troublesome goods,' and therefore the new man was on th[illegible]ookout for squalls. Our division was to take over [illegible]enchy-Fest[illegible] from the Welsh divisio[illegible]isional

I was sent on ahead to take over Gore château, which was the H.Q. of the support battalion; at that time the château looked magnificent in its half-ruined state: it was a red brick building, seventeenth century, with superb outhouses enclosing a vast courtyard. I occupied a room which was supposed to have been slept in by the Crown Prince during the German advance of 1914; the room contained the remains of a four-post bed the upper part of which had been removed by a shell. It was like a French engraving of the eighteenth century, and one could imagine an elegant lady stretching out of bed a languid hand to be kissed by some furtive lover, the husband fast asleep—the whole scene lit by candle-light. The walls were actually decorated with highly undignified cuttings from the *Sketch*, *Tatler*, and *Vie Parisienne*; such decorations represented indeed throughout the war, as it were, the margarine of femininity. I was awakened on the following morning by a Howitzer battery loosing off in the orchard, this was followed by an aeroplane fight overhead, and then came the familiar cry of 'Morning paper' in a perfect Strand accent. Before the Welshmen cleared out, their band played superbly in the courtyard; I don't think I have seen many things more beautiful in the war than this glorious building punctuated with khaki soldiers listening to the band; and how those Welshmen do play, their rhythm is not a whit less fine than that of the Germans themselves. The Givenchy sector previous to the Somme offensive was almost as lively as the Ypres salient; the indirect machine-gun fire all along the village line was terrible, and there was not the slightest protection from shell fire except in the keeps or redoubts which were actually on the top of the hill. During the winter whole portions of the front line trench had fallen in, and our division was

expected to reclaim these trenches now that the weather was improving. On these gaps the Germans naturally had fixed rifles, and our casualties were steady and continuous; what a pity that we had not then found out what the Germans learnt later on, that a continuous uninterrupted line is the worst possible form of defence. Also in these days we employed hundreds and hundreds of men in carrying up rations and ammunition; many of these were expert bombers and first-rate marksmen, and their energies and lives were certainly wasted to some extent. Grisewood saw in the twinkling of an eye what the situation was and immediately produced a light railway scheme which would have solved the problem completely, but his ideas were treated as an impertinent bit of cheek (there is the difference between the colonials and ourselves). With this system of employing men, who should have been resting, as ration carriers, there comes a sort of universal weariness that is the very antithesis of the offensive spirit. Then the discipline business in the trenches was greatly overdone; our men were actually compelled to keep their full equipment on every moment of the day and night; just fancy trying to sleep on a fire step one foot wide with a pack on your back—the idea is fantastic. I used constantly to see Germans in their trenches from artillery O.P's and, of course, they were untrammelled by unnecessary equipment and, altogether, in battle areas, their discipline was far more elastic and reasonable. My company on one occasion was relieved by a company of the 2nd Argyll and Sutherlands, and I told my men to find out something on the quiet from them. Later on I asked one of my platoon sergeants what he had discovered. 'Oh,' he said, 'one of the chaps said that we were a fine body of men, but that we should never stand a big attack because we took too much out

of ourselves and had not near enough rest.' There was indeed no sort of sleep discipline, as could be seen by the expressions on any of our officers or men. One would have taken our sector to be an asylum for the melancholy mad. The regulars or semi-regulars, such as were our Brigadiers, always imagined that we should be slack; now raw volunteer troops are never slack; they are over-keen, very often over-brave (the Americans were), but slack, never. The chief German activity in front-line areas was rum-jars; one can see these coming both by day and night, and, if one is nippy on the feet, one can get out of harm's way in time, but the sport is wearing and at best they make a horrible mess of the trench. Our chief stock-in-trade was rifle grenades; there was a Scotch division across the canal, and the Jocks used to spot for us, cheering loudly when we lobbed one plumb into the German trench.

One night all the gas gongs sounded, and S.O.S.'s were sent up from the front line; the first effect of every one wearing gas masks is that no one is recognisable. We were having dinner at the time and in my extreme haste I put my helmet on before I had swallowed a very pleasing pancake; that bit had to remain in my mouth throughout the attack. I was left to keep touch with Brigade H.Q. while the Colonel went to advanced battalion H.Q. How shall I ever forget those efforts of mine to keep a jumpy General up to the latest developments —Lewis Sydney reciting 'Kissing cup race' as though with a split palate was not half as comic as I was. Just have a try once on the London telephone to talk to a friend with a gas-mask on, and you will get an idea of the effort with a field telephone. I soon saw that the task was hopeless, so I proceeded to advance H.Q. and to my dismay found no Colonel; I also found that a company of

the support battalion had manned the main communication trench instead of the support line; I think my language got through the mask. I had with me the artillery liaison officer and, while he was trying to get on to the group commander, we tapped a conversation between the Colonel, who had lost his way, and the company commanders, so that I knew exactly the situation. The Germans had replied to our S.O.S. barrage and shells were falling pretty fast, but the thing soon died down as we had only had a whiff which had drifted down wind from another sector. As I was returning I passed a sentry, who had stood rigidly at his post at the junction of the two trenches in spite of many shells, and I commended him for his courage, and he replied, 'I was too frightened to move, sir!'

One morning the Colonel was rung up by the officer who was commanding my old company (I being then acting second in command) and was informed that the company Sergt.-Major had been drunk in the trenches during the night and was under close arrest; he was an old regular soldier of much military experience and a man of prodigious strength; he had apparently got hold of the rum and I knew him to be a terror when in drink. I took an escort with me and as soon as I reached the company H.Q. I ordered him to be brought out of the dug-out; he was no longer drunk but he was furious at seeing an escort and said that he, an old soldier of the old iron Sussex, was b——y well not going with any escort of new army men. It was not a pleasant situation; I ordered the escort to fall out and then said to him, 'Now Sergt.-Major, come along with me.' At the same time I put my hand on the stock of my revolver, and had he hesitated a second I should have shot him dead. He saw the situation and came like a lamb, sobbing all the

way. At his Court-Martial he was reduced to a private, and was then transferred to another battalion; in a few months he was again company Sergt.-Major, for what he didn't know about soldiering would go in a tabloid and then it would rattle. Later on in the offensive of the third of September he was in command of an ammunition-carrying party, and seeing our chaps go over the top he could not resist the temptation and went with them. He was never heard of again.

On one occasion when we were going back for a rest I was ordered to police the exits of the communication trenches, and to report when the relief was complete. The wily Fritz must have suspected something of the sort, for he kept up a steady machine-gun fire, and the tired bullets pattered on the road through the village like rain; luckily the men had simply to cross the road and not to go along it, and there were no casualties. When the last man was out, I collected my police and we marched with all speed out of range; it was a fine moonlight night, and those horrid ruins of the destroyed area looked more ghastly than ever. Our first halting-place was in a little wood; the weather was warm and mild and delicious smells of fresh spring growth replaced the stink of decaying sandbags; also the nightingales were singing with all their might. This sudden change to divine life from awful death was quite overpowering; you see, this Givenchy sector was a place peopled with many dead and few living, and it seemed impossible that one should ever hear a sweet sound or smell a sweet smell again.

Shortly after this I went off with Grisewood on my first leave; at Boulogne I noticed a certain English 'grande dame de par le monde' and her daughter. They were in the fullest sense of the word social celebrities; as a rule I hate social celebrities, but I was starved of female

companionship and I placed my deck chair next to theirs. Shortly after the boat had started, I noticed a man with a cinema camera climb into the rigging, focus my fair friends and begin to turn. Of what a strange mixture of the sublime and the trivial is our race composed.

He who has never had a first leave from France during this war does not begin to know what life is, nor ever will know. I had had luck to be still alive; I had had sufficient experience to know that nothing was to be expected except a dead level of horror, and I had ten days in which to cram the whole of the prime of life. In the words of Mr George Robey 'There was not much, but what there was, was *good*.' At such times it is not difficult to distinguish those human beings who have a spark of glowing affection from those who are indifferent; it is as though one were privileged to assist at one's own funeral, and I must say the experience was a bit of an eye-opener.

I travelled back with Grisewood and we got a lift in a car from Boulogne to divisional headquarters; we discovered that the Brigade was in the Cuinchy brickstack sector, and that the night previous the battalion had had seventy-five casualties owing to the blowing of a German mine. We proceeded to Brigade headquarters and had dinner with the Brigadier; he seemed to get on well with Grisewood and I was hoping that their relations might now be pleasanter, but after dinner he asked Grisewood to let him have plans immediately for a raid, as he wanted one to be carried out on the following night. Grisewood jibbed a bit at the short notice, but said that he would immediately make a personal reconnaissance. This he did, but discovered that the lie of the land was extremely complicated, and he informed the Brigadier that the raid would not be successful unless he had three or four days for preparation. The Brigadier was furious and immediately

The Brickstacks, Cuinchy.

Page 38.

Raiding Party leaving a Sap-head.

took steps to get rid of him; the raid was carried out by another battalion, but, needless to say, it was a hopeless failure; several men were killed and no identifications were obtained. The 'no-man's-land' in this sector was entirely composed of mine craters; these were defended by sap-heads run out from our first line. At night time we used to climb about these craters and lob bombs into the German saps; it was admirable country for patrol-work, as there was plenty of protection from traversing machine guns, and at this sport we were greatly superior to the Germans. The unpleasant thing was morning and evening 'stand-to,' for at these times the Germans constantly exploded their mines; luckily we were getting even with them also at this form of warfare owing to the splendid work of our tunnelling companies, chiefly composed of professional miners. Several small mines went up while I was there, but they were only protective mines and did no damage. It was difficult to get men to stay properly at their posts at night, for they had to lie outside the sap-head in order to have any field of vision, and in such places the feeling of uncomfortable loneliness is almost overpowering. One of my sentries that I had thus placed on one occasion thought that things would be more sociable inside the sap, and not many minutes afterwards the sap was rushed and we had a job to dislodge the Germans. At the same time that they got into this sap, they made a much bigger attack farther down the line, but we were by this time on the alert and gave Fritz all he wanted with Lewis guns. It was during this attack that I received the visit from Colonel Spurrell, mentioned above. Also in the middle of this attack I had an earnest appeal from our Adjutant to make an accurate return of all the maps that had been issued to the Coy. since landing in France. Those of you

who have ever seen Bairnsfather's picture of Colonel FitzShrapnel being called upon to make a return of jam tins during a bombardment, can easily picture my attitude under these similar circumstances.

Before long the division moved out of this sector and without any rest went into the line again in the neighbourhood of Richebourg St Vaast; during the preliminary reconnaissance of the line, I visited by night the church of Richebourg St Vaast village. It was then bright moonlight, the ruin looked magnificent; it was an eighteenth century building and a short time before the Germans had bombarded it with eight-inch shells; the round classic arches were laid bare where the roof had given way, also the tombs of the departed had been churned up, and it was curious to read *Requiescat in Pace* on the tombstones and then to see the skeletons of the deceased underneath performing a sort of *danse macabre* with emphatic gestures of horror and disapproval. The German line ran out into a sharp point in this sector and almost touched our sap-head; the place was known as the 'Boar's Head.' We were soon informed that we were to attack this 'Boar's Head and that the main object of our attack was to cause a diversion from the big Somme offensive; a secondary object was to bite off the 'Boar's Head' and 'straighten out that bit of the line.' We began to dig assembly trenches, the new work being perfectly visible to the enemy; also several pieces of heavy artillery rolled up by daylight and began to register in a deliberate manner such as was our practice at that period of the war. The task allotted to my company was to hold the line prior to an attack and make careful observation on our destruction of the German concrete gun-emplacements. Our shooting was shockingly bad and our heavies never touched one of these emplacements, a fact

which I reported regularly every night and morning. The Germans, on the other hand, knocked our line about considerably, and the fire on both sides was so intense that no sleep was possible for eight days that I held the line prior to the attack. Meanwhile Grisewood had been sent home.

Extract of letter. '28-6-16.

'Eight nights running without closing an eye is a bit thick, isn't it, and the noise has been too much to sleep by day, and the rain and mud terrible. I am out of the trenches for one night—perhaps two. I hope at any rate to have some clear sleep. These are exciting times, and I don't expect there will be much rest. I am well, though tired.

'Alas, my dear Colonel has gone. He had to go quite suddenly without even saying good-bye. It was a bitter moment for me. I wish I could say as in the Book of Job, "And yet he reviled not God."'

Letter of Colonel Grisewood to me.

'MY VERY DEAR NEVILLE,—An order has come from the Brigade that I am to clear off at once. I am too miserable to come round and say good-bye. Anyhow, you know I hope all I wish for yourself, and how much I valued your real friendship during the two years that have passed.

'I am off to the Division to-night to try and fix up staying on until this show is over anyhow. The whole thing is utter misery.

'My dear old boy good luck—God speed you.

'Ever yours,

'W. L. G.

'I will write the first chance I get.

'Explain to them all the how and why of this rotten business. 'W. L. G.'

The plan of attack, which had been advertised as skilfully as any patent medicine, was to contain this one element of surprise—namely that a big bombardment was to take place at 5 o'clock one evening, and that the infantry attack would not take place till the following morning at daybreak, after a much shorter bombardment. The first bombardment was a very successful one, and had our chaps rushed over to bayonet the survivors and come back again, it might have been quite a good little show, but during the night they put in new troops and evacuated the wounded, and at zero next morning there was a barrage of artillery and machine-gun fire on our trenches so precise that hardly a soul escaped; of the men who went over about ninety per cent became casualties. This accurate German artillery barrage on our front line and assembly trenches proved that our counter-battery work was completely ineffective. The plan as regards its local effect was a complete failure—indeed the conception of the attack was so futile that nothing but failure could have resulted. Then as a diversion to the Somme offensive, where some forty divisions were concentrated, it was absurd to do a show where only one brigade was involved. The Divisional General was ungummed, but it seemed to us that there were others who were responsible, and, if they had lost their commands after this failure, possibly greater disasters might have been avoided, for a similar experiment was made a little later on with two divisions and the result was exactly the same. Naturally in the Communiqué our attack appeared as a successful raid—nothing more, and yet our casualties were in excess of the casualties of the worst day in S. Africa when *The Times* was printed with black borders. After we were relieved and were resting just behind the line Grisewood turned up again; he had been sent to England

on leave, and as soon as the leave expired he returned. They were not at all pleased to see him at divisional H.Q., but he told them that if he were not posted to another battalion within one week, he would demand a Court of Inquiry. Of course, he was appalled at the news of our attack, and he was the more depressed that he had always prophesied that some such thing would happen. Our battalion, as a matter of fact, was not very heavily involved, but Grisewood's other brother had been killed, and his heart was very much in his boots. Within a few days he went to take command of a Manchester battalion on the Somme.

After Grisewood's departure the Brigadier, thinking that I needed a rest, and that possibly I would not get on well with our new Colonel, attached me to his brigade staff. He had a strong prejudice against me for being Grisewood's friend, and he had a further prejudice against men who belonged to the so-called gentlemen class, and had received a public-school education. At first he gave me nothing to do, but I used to sit with an open map and a prismatic compass lost in contemplation, and I think he mistook this for industry, for, little by little, he gave me more and more work till I was as busily employed as any one on the British front. Among other things he made me take on my old sniping job again, and though I was miserable at being away from my old friends in the battalion, yet I did undoubtedly enjoy the work. In the first place I had movement; instead of sitting down in a dug-out waiting for a direct hit, I used to cover the whole brigade front, starting my rounds at daybreak. Then I had a certain amount of regular sleep every night, which greatly improved my health; further, I had the training of observers as well as snipers, and the intelligence side of the job interested me

enormously. I got a really good knowledge of the habits of German gunners, and it was astonishing to me to find out to what an extent their national characteristics came out in fighting; day after day they would fire at the same targets at the same hour, and in all they did they were actuated by method, method, method. I am sure that a less capricious people has never existed.' After the 'Boar's Head' show we returned to our old haunts at Givenchy and Festubert; these sectors had now become exceedingly calm owing to the Somme offensive farther south; it was midsummer, and the absence of artillery fire and the long grass suited my snipers to perfection. I used to cover them with long grasses and then place them, before it was light, either just in front or just behind our line; every day they would take up different positions and we often got as many as four Huns a day on a brigade front. The sniperscope rifle had by this time been invented, and a couple of snipers used to be employed all day, on each battalion front, with this weapon, firing armour-piercing ammunition at the German loop-holes; the true snipers on the other hand only fired when a good target presented itself. One misty morning I was observing in a sniper's post for one of my snipers and a magnificent, fierce-looking German sniper exposed himself to the waist and proceeded to take a good look at our line. I gave the target—'two sandbags left of centre loophole' —to my sniper, and he had a shot which carried too low and hit the sandbags just below the German; he ducked instantly and then came up again for a second to shake his fist. Stupidly, I did not notice that his post faced up our line at an angle, and, going on to our next post and opening the loophole, I must have been plumb in the middle of his field of vision, for as my eye was at the loophole three shots struck the armour plating about

one inch from my eye. For the rest of that morning the German's post had a bad time, but I could not help thinking that I did not deserve such luck after doing such an idiotic thing. A few more ill-prepared raids were carried out without success; the Festubert line consisted of an irregular line of island posts, and at night or in a bad light it was extremely difficult to find one's way about. During one of these raids a gallant Colonel thought it was about time that he should do something courageous, and he led the raiding party himself; losing his direction he mistook one of our posts for the enemy line and charged it with fixed bayonets. Naturally enough some of his own men were killed by the defenders, and when the episode was over he discovered that he had captured with some loss that which already belonged to him.

We were not left long in these peaceful parts, but were withdrawn and taken back to a place called Monchy Breton, to do some intensive training preparatory to an attack on the Ancre in the neighbourhood of Thiepval-Beaumont Hamel. On my way through Bethune I was met by Grisewood who was going north with his new unit. I was able to get leave to dine with him, and we had a couple of hours of blissful intercourse. The poor fellow looked at least twenty years older than when I last saw him, and his hair had gone absolutely white; he had taken over the command of his battalion in Trônes Wood, and a few days in that nightmare of a spot had turned him into an old man. He said that we had no conception of the horrors that awaited us, and no conception at all of what really big concentrations of artillery meant. Grisewood was particularly annoyed at the cheerful view the British Press took of the Somme offensive; he, like the rest of us, was incensed at the impression conveyed that when troops go over the top they felt as if they

were at a football match or a picnic. We were convinced that German, French, or British, all were of the same mind—namely, that these offensives were undiluted hell, and we had a most bitter feeling against all those who preferred to take pleasure, vicarious or otherwise, in the pestilential business. I think his experiences on the Somme destroyed his health, for not long afterwards he was sent home to England with rather serious heart trouble, and he never came to France again.

Our training was like any other preparation for attack; the lie of the land was similar to the land over which the actual attack would take place; we had facsimile trenches laid out according to air photographs; we even had smoke bombs to imitate barrage fire. The men practised walking over the course very slowly in the modern formation of attack, keeping extremely close to the barrage; the first wave reaching their objective started to consolidate and the other waves passed them, leap-frog fashion. In this practice every attention was paid to the smallest detail, and each man knew exactly his task and his relative position; the only drawback to such rehearsals is that the men act exactly the same in the real attack without paying sufficient attention to some unforeseen circumstance that throws the whole thing out of gear. This actually happened later on as will be seen.

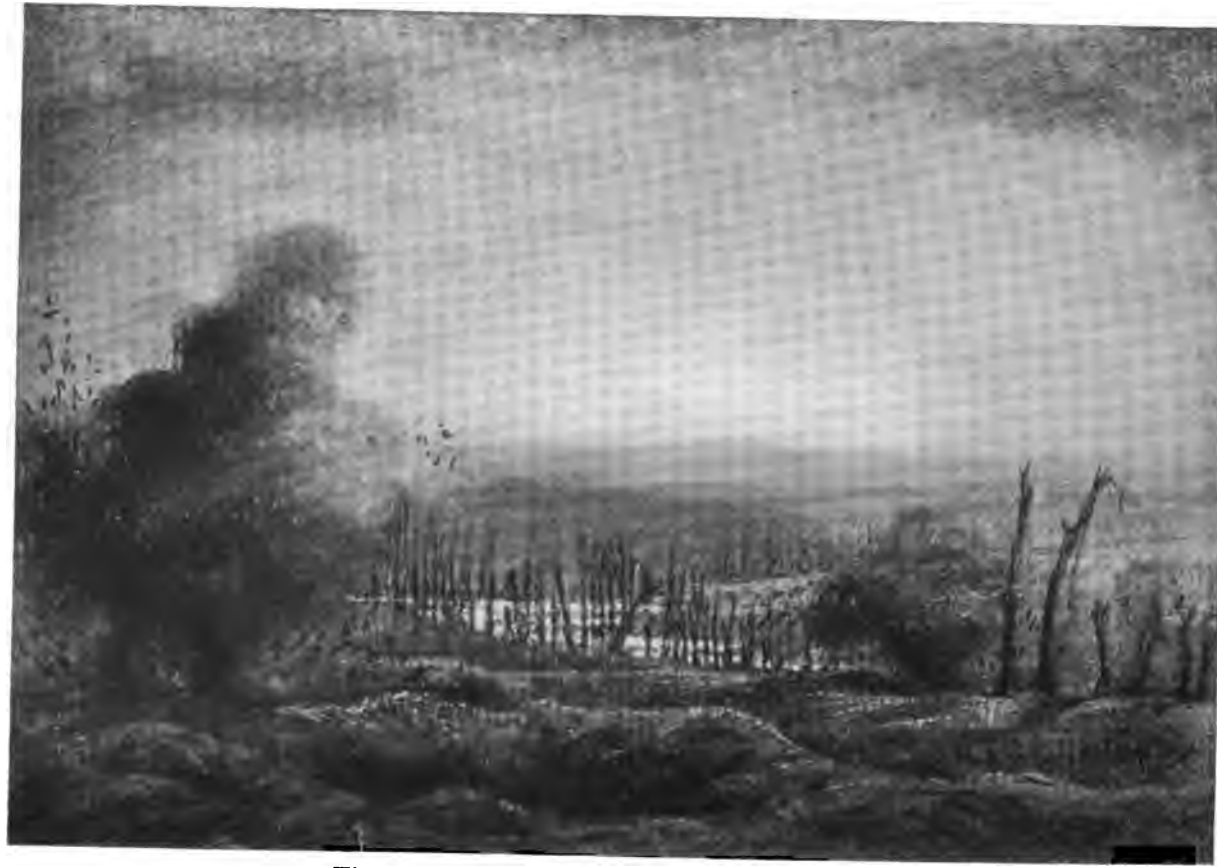
Before the main body moved south I was sent on in front, by the Brigadier, to make a thorough reconnaissance of the sector, and to make sketches of the Ancre Valley. Besides my own mare, I had a pack pony, that carried my tent and four day's rations; unfortunately, my groom sprained his ankle during the first few kilometres, and so I made him ride and walked myself. The weather was magnificent, and this was a real Cobbett's rural ride; we passed throught St Pol and Doullens and eventually

fetched up at a village called Englebelmer. Between St Pol and Doullens we came across some Indian cavalry, looking superbly dignified with impeccable discipline; a short way beyond Doullens I lunched on the second day with some Australian gunners. It was the first time that I had seen these magnificent men in any numbers, and I was struck all of a heap with their astounding beauty of physique; a glance was sufficient to show that their discipline was entirely different to our own; they were much dirtier, and their hair was almost as long as the hair of Red Indians. Of course, they were just out of the line and were considerably battle-stained; they had loose, lithe bodies and expressions of extreme cruelty, such as you see on the faces of birds of prey; they never troubled about saluting, and they called me 'mate' whenever I spoke to any one of them; they seemed to me frightfully efficient, and never required any order of any kind, every one knew just exactly what to do. I reached Englebelmer at sunset of the second day since leaving Monchy Breton, and I dined and slept with the town major; he had a very comfortable little cellar as a dormitory, his office and mess being on the ground floor. It seemed to me a dreadful thing to sleep in a cellar after these two days of uninterrupted pure air, but during that night a big shell landed in the neighbouring house and killed seventeen men; after that, I felt very grateful to have such protection. The next day I went carefully round the line with the intelligence officer of the Brigade that we were about to relieve; there was desultory shell-fire going on, but nothing out of ordinary. We went on beyond our own front line and sat in 'no-man's-land,' and for the first time I got a clear idea of what a colossal disaster to our army was the battle of the first of July, 1916; there were literally avenues of graves. Wave

after wave must have been mown down by the German machine-gunners. We were able to sit in 'no-man's-land' then unmolested, because the Germans had some eleven rows of barbed wire in front of their trenches, and it would have been impossible for them to see anything of our line. I made a very thorough reconnaissance, taking copious notes, and then began to think of my sketches; there was a communication trench called 'Jacob's ladder' which ran over a hill immediately east of Mesnil, and from this hill I got a magnificent view of the Ancre valley, which was at that time a fine classic landscape in the manner of Claude Lorrain. No greater contrast could possibly be imagined to the horrid flat marshes of Flanders; here was fine rolling country in the midst of which was a winding marshy stream of great beauty. The valley was still green and the German lines stood out in white (the soil being chalky) as clearly as the lines of a lawn-tennis court on an English lawn; the trees had not been seriously destroyed by shell-fire. I reproduce here the sketch that I made during this afternoon, and at the same time another sketch done three months later, showing the astounding change brought about by modern shell-fire.

I had almost finished my sketch on this lovely summer evening, when the Germans started a terrific bombardment; the show began like a clap of thunder, and in about five minutes the hill south of the river was one blaze of shell-fire. It was the first time that I had seen a perfectly up-to-date bombardment and I was amazed and appalled; the Germans were using thermite shells, which sent out great tongues of flame, and as the light got lower from the setting sun these flames showed up more and more brilliantly. By great good fortune hardly any shells fell on my side of the river, and yet I was not more than five hundred metres from the attack; the valley was very

The Valley of the Ancre. August 1916.



The Valley of the Ancre. November 1916.

soon filled with black smoke and field-glasses became quite useless. Our guns were not slow to reply, and at one particular moment they went off like a pack of hounds that have recovered the scent. In vain did I search for human figures; I could not make out a living soul. Gradually night came on and the fire died down. When I got back to Englebelmer I inquired what had actually happened and this is what I was told; I give the story for what it is worth. Battalions of Wilts and Worcesters were holding the line, and the Colonel of one of these battalions got anxious about his front-line companies; when the bombardment started, his telephone wires were all destroyed, and so he sent a runner to find out the situation. This runner lost his way owing to the complete churning up of the trenches, and he reached a point close enough to the German line to see troops of the Prussian Guard assembling for the attack. He managed to get back safely through the German barrage and informed his Colonel of what he had seen; the Colonel immediately sent a message through to the gunners, who concentrated on these trenches, and the attacking troops were entirely wiped out. Certainly no infantry attack did materialise, for in that boiling furnace I could not distinguish a human figure. The really extraordinary thing about this war is that there should be a single survivor; statisticians affirm that it took at least a ton of metal to kill a man, and yet during a big bombardment it would seem that even a small field-mouse could not escape.

Four days later the brigade turned up and I made my report to the Brigadier; our headquarters were in a corner of the village called Vitermont. Here there were three magnificent dug-outs built by the French; they were built right down into the bowels of the earth and were proof against any sort of shell, no matter how large.

The Brigadier lived in one of them, another was occupied by the Brigade-Major and the Staff-Captain, and the third was inhabited by the 'learners.' There were eight or nine of us in this last and I christened it 'the girls' school'; we generally got to bed about midnight, and though we had to be up again at five, we generally gave vent to some hilarity before falling asleep. Each of us in turn would act the part of the Brigadier giving orders to his Brigade-Major; he had a voice like a sanctimonious clergyman schoolmaster, which lent itself admirably to caricature, and we put into his unctuous mouth words that would have curdled a cup of fresh milk. The truth is we were all of us regimental officers and we had the true natural antipathy to the general officer and his staff. When one is in the front line one cannot help having a fairly deep sympathy for the wretched fellow in the other front line across 'no-man's-land'; one knows that he is going through just as many dangers and discomforts, and that he is simply carrying out the orders of some general whose dangers and discomforts are infinitely less, and the hatred that you both have towards these generals breeds a common sympathy that is irresistible, except of course during a show. There are no doubt certain generals whose simplicity, honesty, and sympathy for the sufferings of men are such that they remain truly beloved throughout a desperate war such as this one (among these can be counted Haig and Plumer in our own army or Petain and Gouraud in the French army), but they are few and far between. It must be admitted that our Brigadier was exceedingly brave, and therefore he retained our respect to a large extent, in spite of his schoolmaster's manner. Unfortunately, he could not consent to delegate authority, and he left no initiative to his subordinates; he treated his colonels like company

commanders, and they supplied him with any amount of eyewash. He had a terribly symmetrical mind, and symmetry and good organisation rarely go together; also he loved blood, and he seemed callous as to whether the blood was German or British; danger excited him but blood intoxicated him, and his eyes would glow when a show was on. Possibly this more or less homicidal mania took the place of other vices, for both wine and women were a dead letter to him.

Most of the serious fighting, during the first month of our occupation of the Ancre sector, took place on our right flank, *i.e.* on the left bank of the Ancre; we helped with our artillery and made some Chinese attacks only; the Germans opposite us were constantly exposing themselves in their eagerness to see what was going on during the prolonged fight for the Schwaben redoubt, and my snipers had a fine time; there was a small ruined cemetery on the outskirts of the village of Hamel and from this hillock our observation of the enemy lines was magnificent. I was allowed a plentiful supply of ground observers, and I started a new system of intelligence; instead of keeping a log-book of events day by day, I classified all enemy activities under different headings, such as trench-mortars, field-guns, field howitzers, high-velocity guns on railways, machine-gun posts, new defences, snipers posts, etc., and with each battalion relief I would give each incoming colonel an up-to-date map, and he in his turn would fill in any freshly-observed activities.

One day on my rounds I observed a sentry looking intently through a periscope. 'What are you observing?' I said to him. 'The famous Beaumont Hamel crater,' he replied. 'Oh!' said I, 'I think you're wrong, that is a bit of our own line, and to convince you of the fact I will go and put a bully beef tin exactly where you are looking.'

Of course I was right, but this wretched fellow for hours had been serving his ungrateful country by intently watching our own line. This is very typical of the British Tommy, who was exceptionally slow to take in a name or read a map. On one occasion I was told off to pilot General Gough round the line; I first took him to an observation post from where he could see the whole country; he then went on to a forward post, called the 'Bowery,' out of which one of my observers had just been shelled; but this did not deter Gough, who meant to make a thorough reconnaissance, and he did not leave the line till he had seen everything and more than everything.

The day of our big attack (the one that we had rehearsed at Monchy Breton) was now fast approaching. I tried my best to get back to the company both before and after the attack, as I was not happy at Brigade Headquarters, but the Brigadier was adamant and would not let me go. It was bound to be a terrible affair, for the enemy were expecting us and his wire was still immensely strong; on the day, the 3rd of September, 1916, I was liaison officer with a neighbouring unit, and therefore I knew every half-hour exactly how things were going. Of our brigade the 11th Sussex and the 14th Hants attacked; the barrage went a bit too fast and our chaps lost touch with it. The Colonel of the Sussex managed to get into communication with his gunners, and they corrected the pace; this enabled them to take their first two objectives, but the Hants were less fortunate, and they tried to crawl up a steep slope exactly as they had done during the rehearsals, and the barrage having passed over the German front line, the Germans shot them down like rabbits. Hardly a man escaped. The division on our right was also unsuccessful in gaining

Preparing for an attack. Somme 1916.

Page 52.

its objectives, in spite of great gallantry on the part of the officers, and so the wretched Sussex were left to fight it out all day in the enemy lines. Those few of the Hants who got there also fought with the utmost bravery. At nightfall the position became untenable and our own men were withdrawn—that is, the few that were left. The officer who commanded my old company (Lieut. Northcote, a descendant of the biographer of Sir Joshua Reynolds) was killed as he was returning to our lines; one of the men told me that he had fought so splendidly that he must have won the Victoria Cross several times over. All the company commanders were killed except one, and our losses were extremely severe. Another good day for the Germans, I fear; the truth of the matter is that they had such wonderful defences that our artillery fire had not broken the morale of the defending troops, and therefore the situation was not yet ripe for an infantry attack. All through that night and for the next forty-eight hours the Germans mercilessly shot all our wounded lying between the two front-line trenches. This certainly was one of the big failures of the Somme, for many divisions were involved, and not a yard of ground was gained. Our division was now strung out very thin, and we had an exceptionally wide front; all day and every night we plastered the enemy trenches with shells, and in spite of his success on September 3rd we had the impression that he was cracking, and that he would not hold out much longer. This wide front suited my snipers to perfection, for we got cross observation from the crest of each little hill; I had a school just near Brigade Headquarters where I built a range, and the snipers fired at the targets from a proper trench where were three or four sorts of snipers' posts. As soon as they became expert enough I put them into the line alongside thoroughly

trained men, and they very quickly picked up the job; my best results were nearly always obtained from unexpected positions, such as the top of a completely exposed parapet, the sniper clothing himself from the crown of his head to the sole of his boots in sandbags. I only used the obvious posts to draw the enemy's fire by using smoky ammunition. During the whole course of my sniping career I only had two casualties (one killed, one wounded) among my snipers (*i.e.* from enemy snipers) and our bag of Huns must have run into fifties if not hundreds. Of course, I owed a good deal to Hesketh Pritchard and his methods, at whose school I had received a course of instruction.

Though the British were very skilful in practising all sorts of tricks for hiding their snipers' lairs and concealing themselves by imitating the surroundings of nature, yet at the fine art of camouflage the French were ahead of us. On one occasion their camouflage artists made a facsimile of a dead horse which was lying out in 'no-man's-land'; the inside of this facsimile was armour-plated, giving protection to a sniper who fired through the eye of the horse. The real dead horse was removed at night, and the facsimile put in its place.

So life went on, the daily round—the common task; every night that I got into my dug-out I heaved a sigh of gratitude, for this sector was lively, to say the least of it. I still hold that it would have been a disgrace to get killed by a German shell, given the methodical habits of German gunners, but there were places that I had to pass through that were shelled incessantly day and night, and it was difficult to move quick enough; also one night a week we all had to take turns at sleeping next to the telephone, which was not in the dug-out, and as regular as clockwork at 3 a.m. the Germans plastered the

neighbourhood with gas shells. Of course, before very long they got a direct hit on this small cottage and wounded two of the brigade clerks; luckily they destroyed the last bit of shelter, and we moved.

One fine morning a wire came which ran as follows, 'Major Lytton will report to advanced G.H.Q. for an interview with General Charteris, B.G.I.' From that instant the attitude of every one changed towards me from the Brigadier downwards; I heard my worst enemies murmuring that they had always recognised in me symptoms of genius, and some of the more sycophantic ones began to implore me to remember them when I was made chief of the staff to the C.-in-C. Up to then I had always thought, and still think, that there was a prejudice against all completely amateur soldiers; an order had gone forth that all the plum jobs were to be kept for the regulars, and the Colonel who had succeeded Grisewood and who was a regular soldier thought that no irregular soldier could have any serious merit. He thought that the duties of a regimental officer were so intricate and so important that he should be a celibate, like a Catholic priest. I pointed out to him that not only was Julius Cæsar married but he had a wife who was above suspicion. He replied that he did not think that Cæsar would have made a good regimental officer. This foolish man was married himself long before the war was over.

Advanced G.H.Q. was at that time in the neighbourhood of Doullens, and once again I mounted my trusty mare, and taking my groom with me, started westwards. It is a pleasant thing on a gorgeous summer's day, after weeks of narrow escapes, to be trotting leisurely away from the front line; I had nearly worn out all my tunics and they were more like a patchwork quilt than anything else, with constant crawling about trenches, and I am afraid I

cannot have made a very brilliant impression on General Charteris. I found him extremely good-humoured and affable, and the warmth of his greeting was so human that I could hardly believe him to be a regular soldier. He told me that he wanted me to organise a foreign press mission to be attached to the British armies in France; the French especially, he said, had no conception of the greatness of our effort, inasmuch as they followed more or less the attitude of that villain, André Tardieu, who had made a great name for himself in America by running us, the British, down—an unpardonable act on the part of an allied statesman in time of war. He asked me if I had any experience of the Press and I said that I had none, but that I knew the French intimately and was very fond of them. 'Well,' he said, 'you won't succeed. No one has ever succeeded in handling the French Press and no one ever will, but we are convinced that something must be attempted, and you must undertake the job and we shall see how you get along.' The job was to carry with it the grade of G.S.O. 3. I returned to the Brigade and awaited my movement order, which came in about a week's time; I was immensely touched by the good feeling and affection of my fellow learners at the Brigade, and the divisional staff officers were more than charming. They told me that the intelligence of the Brigade had been excellent during the time that I had been in charge, and that the work could not have been better done. One fine morning a superb Vauxhall car came for me and I was whisked away to Amiens; luckily I was allowed to keep my mare, and she followed me with my groom in a few days' time. That night I slept in a bed with sheets, and it seemed so strange, after what I had been accustomed to, and so uncomfortable that I never slept a wink.

CHAPTER IV

'THE ALLIED PRESS'

My immediate C.O. was now Colonel Hutton Wilson, who ran that branch of G.H.Q. known as Id; for a week I stayed with the British Press at Amiens trying to learn the job of press censorship. It is not quite so easy as it might appear, for it has to be done at a terrific pace against time, and the problem of how much information you are giving to the enemy is not a fixed one, but varies every single day. At that time press censorship was in its infancy and the censors were absurdly over-cautious; later on we got a much better liaison with the operation staff of all units and our methods became more elastic. From the very start it was impressed upon me that if I made a mistake I would inevitably lose my job. In the course of my career as a press officer I did make a few mistakes, but I don't think they were ever found out. I spent about a week or ten days as a learner and then I pushed off on my own; I was allowed two officers besides myself, and I insisted that one of them should be a first-class man. I had my eye on a certain Lieutenant (afterwards Captain) Rudolf de Trafford, who seemed to me about the cleverest young man that I had ever met. Naturally my Colonel did not want to lose him and the fight for him was long and fierce, but luckily in the end I got him, and if our foreign press mission was a success—and I think it was—it was largely due to the personality of this exceptional young man. My headquarters were at first

in a small hotel near the station at Amiens, and I started my enterprise with four correspondents—Monsieur André Tudesq of the *Journal*, Monsieur de Feuquieres of the *Petit Parisien*, Monsieur Olivier of the *Matin*, and Monsieur Ruffin of the *Agence Havas*. After our first dinner together I made them a little address in which I said that the most important thing in our army was the fighting man of all arms, and that if they were willing we would start our campaign by visiting the forward areas, and that later on when the weather became bad we would visit the bases and the lines of communication. Every day I would have the summaries of operations of armies sent to me, and I would give them in French a *résumé* of these, also we should have advanced situation reports sent to us every morning, and so we could direct our steps to those quarters where there was the greatest interest. At that time M. Olivier and M. de Feuquieres were not in very good health, and were unable to take long walks, but M. Ruffin and M. Tudesq were full of zeal and anxious to see every phase of a modern battle. The open air life gradually improved M. Olivier's constitution, and before many months he was able to undertake the most arduous excursions, and he became the most dashing and enterprising war correspondent. Monsieur de Feuquieres's health was never very good, and he soon found himself unfitted for the job.

The fighting at this time was almost entirely confined to the Ancre valley and its immediate neighbourhood, and as I knew the ground backwards I was able to be an efficient guide either by day or night. A big attack was made on the 13th November, and it proved to be the biggest success that the Somme offensive had yet given us. The Highland division succeeded in taking Beaumont Hamel, the Naval division had got as far as

Beaucourt-sur-Ancre (here Freybourg won his V.C.), and my own beloved division had taken the Schwaben redoubt and had reached a place on the outskirts of Grandcourt. This was the first bit of luck that the division had had; the troops had performed a cunning enveloping movement, the right flank advancing some considerable distance before the left flank and the centre moved from their assembly trenches; when they had gained the crest of the hill they consolidated, and as they were consolidating they caught a German relief—some columns of Germans marched into their trenches quite unaware that they had been captured. This went on for a considerable time, and altogether the division took over 1800 prisoners. The total bag on the first day was over 4000 prisoners, and the numbers swelled considerably in the next few days. That same evening I managed to get Ruffin and Tudesq into the outskirts of Beaumont Hamel; it was not quite dark while we were going down the communication trenches, but it was complete night before we got back to the car. The whole area had been plastered with tear shells, which excited Ruffin and Tudesq enormously. 'Ça—c'est vraiment la guerre,' they said. The enemy artillery was disorganised, whereas our guns had advanced to new positions and were blazing away like mad. The correspondents had never seen gun flashes at night—they had never before experienced the sort of hell let loose that is a modern fight. They certainly were most courageous, and I thought that with two such companions my new job was going to be fine; we met some tanks coming back from the day's work, and in the dim smoky light they looked most terrifying. One of them had got temporarily stuck on the top of a German dug-out where a German Colonel was working; he noticed that his concrete ceiling was beginning to

crack, and he rushed out in a blue rage; for he had ordered the engineers to make his dug-out *absolutely* safe. As he appeared at the door he saw the machine-gun of a tank pointing at him and he instinctively put his hands up; the tank took him prisoner and absorbed him into its inside and carried him about for the next five or six hours while it slew countless Germans. Another tank had also got stuck across a trench and so it pretended to be dead; at its approach all the Germans had gone to ground, but thinking that the tank was scuppered they had crawled out again, first in twos and threes and then in larger numbers; when there were about two hundred of them the tank opened its blinkers, and all the Germans surrendered and were marched back by the tank commander. Naturally, the two war correspondents were enchanted with these stories. The next day they were determined to go out again, and this time we went over the ground where my division had attacked on September 3rd; the Naval division had lost heavily and the dead were lying on the ground pretty thick; that wretched confounded wire was still partly intact, and some of our poor chaps were hanging to it. On this occasion I saw in the German front line two corpses, one British and one German; they had got each other by the throat, and I suppose a shell had killed them; this is the only direct evidence of hand-to-hand fighting I came across in the whole of the war. Many of these chaps had fallen forward as they advanced with their heads down, and their faces still retained the colour of life; they looked, I thought, extraordinarily beautiful, and I was never so much impressed with the glory of the supreme sacrifice of those 'tués au champ d'honneur, face à l'ennemi.' My companions were as much impressed with the beauty of the scene as I was, and I don't think they will ever forget

what Britain did in the war; from that moment throughout all the vicissitudes of the campaign they and their comrades were unswervingly loyal to the British Army, and is it not right and proper that the good opinion of France towards our country should have been won by our heroes on the field of battle? They will now lie for ever on French soil, and I hope that their graves will keep green the friendship between these two great races so different in character, temperament, and tradition. As the correspondents were writing their articles, I wrote a letter of which the following is an extract:—'I have been to-day to Beaucourt-sur-Ancre, and, though I am now an old and tired soldier accustomed to every aspect of war, I am still capable of being infinitely moved by the sights of a battlefield.'

I have a drawing which I did of the valley of the Ancre, as it was after my ride last summer, which I described to you. I also have a drawing as it is to-day—a bitterly sad landscape with a winter wind.

It is a curious thing to walk over enemy trenches that I have watched like a tiger for weeks and weeks, but what of the boys who took those trenches with their eleven rows of barbed wire in front of them. I don't think ever, before to-day, I have rated the British soldier at his proper value. His sufferings in this weather are indescribable. When he is not in the trenches his discomforts are enough to kill any ordinary mortal, when he is in the trenches it is a mixture between the North Pole and Hell, and yet when the moment comes he jumps up and charges at the impossible and conquers it, and with all this to bear he loves the officer who makes him do it, and he is grateful to the Country who feeds him and clothes him well enough to give him heart to die.

Some of the poor fellows who lay there as they fell

looked to me absolutely noble, and I thought of their families who were aching for news of them, and hoping against hope that they would not succumb and be left unburied in their misery.

All the loving and tender thoughts we have lavished on them are not enough. There are no words to describe the large hearts of these men—God bless them. And what of the French on whose soil they lie? Can they ever forget the blood that is mixed with their own? I hope not. I don't think England has ever had so much cause to be proud as she has to-day.'

In spite of the lateness of the year great pressure was kept up all along the valley of the Ancre; our concentration of artillery in this section was formidable, and the Germans nicknamed it 'the Valley of Death.' Many French visitors came to our front about this time, and they all said that it was more desolate and shot-about than the worst bits around Verdun. On one occasion Grandcourt had just fallen, and I was conducting General Verrau (who wrote for *l'Œuvre*) and the Count de Fels to see the place, and on our return journey we met an officer of the French mission who had received an order from his chief at G.H.Q. to go to Grandcourt and see what buildings were suitable for billets. On hearing this we all of us had a fit of Homeric giggles, for Grandcourt for many months past had been nothing but a heap of spillikens. On this trip also I remember seeing a group of German corpses which had been killed that same morning, and about a few yards from them was a young gunner officer having his lunch spread out on an improvised table; there were all sorts of delicacies and sweets and oranges, a copy of the *Daily Mirror*, a packet of letters freshly arrived, and a gramophone. On another occasion I visited the Trônes Wood sector with two French senators; one was the

The Somme. 1916.

political head of the Catholic party, the other was a well-known Socialist and Atheist. As we passed through the village of Montauban, they were struck by a completely intact painted terra-cotta figure of the Virgin, which stood out most conspicuously in this surrounding of complete desolation. The Germans had made a concrete dug-out underneath the Church, and they probably placed the statue there for safety's sake; when our Tommies inherited the place, as soon as it was no longer under regular fire, they restored the statue to its original place near where the altar once was. The head of the Catholic party would have it that the statue had remained above ground throughout the bombardments, and he saw evidence of the hand of God in its miraculous preservation. The Socialist, on the other hand, scoffed at the idea, and a heated argument arose between the two. A few weeks later the statue fell to pieces; wet weather had succeeded to hard frosts and the fragile terra-cotta which had survived one of the fiercest fights of the war succumbed to atmospheric conditions.

Gradually it became noised abroad in the 'Coulisses' of the French press that French correspondents on the British front were having the time of their lives, and my numbers began to increase very considerably, so much so in fact that my transport was no longer sufficient, and I had to fix a limit beyond which I could not go. Monsieur Raymond de Maratray came as the permanent correspondent of the *Petit Journal*, Monsieur Serge Basset replaced Monsieur de Feuquieres for the *Petit Parisien*, Monsieur Pierre Mille came for the *Temps*, Monsieur Henri Bidou for the *Debats*, and Monsieur Babin of *L'Illustration* and Monsieur Tardieu of the *Echo de Paris*. I had one permanent Portuguese correspondent, Signor Negréros, and several Italians came to my mission,

but only two remained more or less permanently, Signor Bedolo of the *Giornale d'Italia* and Signor Barzini of the *Corriere della Sera;* a few months later I also had Monsieur Matagne of *La Nation Belge.*

During the first few weeks I had a bit of a tussle with Colonel Hutton Wilson on the matter of the privileges that were to be allowed to the foreign correspondents. He lived with the British correspondents, and they not unnaturally resented the arrival of foreign correspondents, and not unnaturally Colonel Hutton Wilson sympathised with them. I pointed out to him, however, that the foreign correspondents rarely bothered the staffs of armies or corps as they could not make themselves understood, but that the news in the foreign papers *must* synchronise with the news in the British papers, also that it was of vital importance that we should show the utmost consideration to the Allied correspondents. Colonel Hutton Wilson saw my point and with great good sense gave me every facility to carry out my programme. From the very first I have always insisted that the attitude of the general staff towards the press must be one of trust; war correspondents must be treated as officers and gentlemen, and if by any chance any one of them should not come up to the standard he must be mercilessly fired out. In my experience I only came across about three who were unworthy of such trust.

My foreign correspondents having by this time visited every part of the Somme battlefield, asked me to arrange a trip for them to the North to see the Lens, La Bassée, Armentières, and Ypres sectors, but before starting this journey they were frightfully keen to have an interview with Sir Douglas Haig. 'We now know your Tommies,' they said, 'and appreciate them at their true value, and by means of our articles the French public is getting to

know them, but the personality of your Chief is shrouded in mystery. Our editors are very keen for us to give them an article on him and we hope that you will be able to arrange this for us.' It must be remembered that in 1914 and 1915 French popular opinion was somewhat anti-British; they felt that they were carrying too much of the burden of the war on their shoulders, and their losses had been so great that their nerves were very much on edge. The Somme battle had to a very large extent changed all that; we had the French vingtième corps, which was a corps d'élite, next to us and their verdict was 'Les Anglais sont très chics.' That was good enough for the Frenchmen who were in the know of things, but the mass was still anxious to be informed whether this new British army was a great striking force composed of many divisions of shock troops, or whether they were simply troops who could hold quiet parts of the line and so release other troops for attacking. The moment was therefore ripe for such an interview, and I explained the matter to General Charteris, who said he would do what he could, but warned me that the Chief loathed interviews. My efforts were eventually successful and the interview came off; my correspondents were charmed beyond measure at the personality of the Chief; his distinguished appearance and his perfect manners struck them as being a glorious contrast to the typical German military man. Haig began by asking them whether they had been to see the men in the trenches, and they pointed out to him on a raised map all the places they had visited, and I think he was pleased that they had been so enterprising and so thorough. They then asked him whether he was confident that his armies could attack with success and bring the war to a successful issue, to which he replied that they had proved their

fighting ability on the Somme, and that the experience that they had gained would make them most formidable in the coming year. 'What about cavalry, sir?' said one of them. 'It is almost certain that cavalry will be as essential as all the other arms before the end of the campaign.' The conversation then turned on the material side of the war, the immense amount of ammunition that was required and the constant repairs that were necessary for guns of all calibres. He spoke in a charming manner of his relations with the French. Throughout the interview he spoke in French, which was extremely good; he is not fluent in any language, but he is not much less fluent in French than he is in English and he has very little accent; moreover, his words were well-chosen, and I was surprised at his thorough knowledge of the language.

I don't think I shall ever forget the impression that the Chief made upon me; it was the first time that I had ever seen him, and I fell immediately under the spell of his personal magnetism. It is one thing to see a great General riding triumphantly through the streets of London in a victory pageant, it is quite otherwise seeing him in his office in the thick of the fight when the issue is still most uncertain. I felt that if only he had been my Colonel or my Brigade Commander, instead of—— but no matter, I would have been willing to die for him a hundred times over. I confess that I am one of those who will do anything for one sort of man and nothing for another; well, with Haig I felt immediately such a longing to gain a word of praise from him that I should have liked him to ask me to do some impossible exploit that I might prove my devotion to him. The common saying is, 'Oh! Haig is not a clever man.' I don't think he is very clever; personally I have never admired cleverness, it is the attribute of small successful men. Haig's

qualities are much more moral than intellectual; what intellectual qualities he has have been used almost entirely within his own profession, but he exhales such an atmosphere of honour, virtue, courage, and sympathy that one feels uplifted like as when one enters the Cathedral of Beauvais for the first time. Surely it is this sense of trust that has made Haig come out on top in spite of a terrible rough passage; not one of his subordinates has ever suspected that he could act from any motive of self-interest. It is largely the great character of the Commander-in-Chief that brought about the astounding result that Great Britain had the finest field army of the world in the autumn of 1918. Where I think Haig fails is in being too insular; he thinks too much that the Britisher is the only man who can fight. He got on with the French because he is such a gentleman, but his temperament would not be in harmony with any Latin; he cannot conceive that moral frivolity can go with intellectual severity. It is the old tug-of-war between the romantic and the classical, the Christian and the Greek. I only met one man like Haig in the war and that was Gourand; I don't know how much Latin blood flows in Gourand's veins, but he seems to me eminently a Celtic type. I had the task of taking him round our front for two days once, and I noticed the same qualities of sublime virtue; it seemed to me also that he and Haig were like two brothers. There is a very charming story told of Gourand; when he returned from Gallipoli, having been badly wounded and having lost an arm, he was met at the station by his mother. As his mother caught sight of him with his armless sleeve, she burst into tears, whereupon he went up to her in a most tender manner and said, 'Comment, Maman, n'es tu pas contente de me voir?'

My correspondents were naturally delighted with the interview and spread themselves considerably over their articles; when they had finished them they brought them to me for censorship, but I warned them that General Charteris wished to censor them himself; they informed me that they had notified their editors to reserve the best place in their papers for these articles, and they hoped that there would be as little delay as possible. In journalism what is a good copy at twelve o'clock on one day is hopelessly out of date at eight o'clock the next day; my friends were terrified lest some event of world-wide importance should take place and so spoil the effect of these articles on Haig. I took them to Colonel Hutton Wilson, who in his turn took them into G.H.Q. without delay, but as ill-luck would have it General Charteris had gone to England on leave. To my mind it was out of the question to wait ten days for his return, so the articles were sent to England where General Charteris censored them. Censorship is a thing which should be done every day or not at all; it is only constant habit that can give people the requisite judgment to admit as much of the truth as possible without letting pass any indiscretions. Therefore I think it would have been better to let me censor the articles right away; if I had censored them badly it would have been so easy to say that a subordinate officer had blundered and had, in consequence, lost his job. As it was, I think General Charteris censored them too much with a view to the foreign press only, and did not gauge the effect they would have when they appeared, badly translated, in the English papers. Their effect in the French papers was indeed exactly what was wanted, but the English translations caused a storm of disapproval; the translations were *much* too literal, and it appeared as if Haig had been

boasting and vainglorious. The rumpus was so great that it seemed as if Haig might lose his command. I was sent for by telephone and had a brief interview with the Chief, who sent me forthwith to London to explain to the War Cabinet exactly what had happened.

I had no kit with me, not even shaving materials, but there was no time to be lost, so I motored to Calais where, I was told, a destroyer would be waiting. To have a destroyer told off specially for me seemed to be the very summit of human greatness, and I felt proportionately proud, but at Calais I was met by a Staff officer of the base who informed me, with a disappointed air, that he was expecting a *distinguished* soldier, and he asked me if I had seen anything of him. I nearly said, 'I *am* the distinguished soldier,' but luckily I refrained. It transpired shortly afterwards that Sir William Robertson was the person in question, and that it was his pet private destroyer, and that I was only an insignificant portion of his excess luggage. We travelled from Dover to London in a special train, and during the journey the distinguished soldier sent for me and said, 'Well, 'ave you anything to say to me?' I related to him the story of the interview in all its details, and I also read to him a letter from M. de Maratray, in which he said that some one was evidently seeking a pretext for shooting Haig in the back. Robertson said, 'Ah! read that letter to the War Cabinet.' He then told me to be at his office at 9.45 the next morning, and to be careful to have all my facts at my finger-ends as the meeting was one of vital importance.

I was there to the minute, and at ten o'clock I followed Sir William into the room where those great deliberations were held. The rooms of our Government offices generally give the impression of gloom and respectability, and this room was a very good sample of the species. In the middle

was an oblong table. Lloyd George was sitting at the centre of the table on the fire-place side, and the other members of the War Cabinet were on the opposite side, with their backs to the windows. Immediately opposite to the Prime Minister was a vacant place left for me. When I had taken my seat I noticed on my right Lord Curzon (who was next to me), Arthur Balfour, and Mr Bonar Law; on my left were Lord Derby, Mr Henderson, and Sir William Robertson. There may have been others present, but if there were I did not take them in. Lloyd George appeared to be in a towering passion, and I saw that my job was not going to be too easy. Without delay he asked me to explain what had occurred, and I related to him what happened as I have told it above. I mentioned to him also that the articles were destined for the French press and that they had been censored no doubt accordingly, and that the translations which had appeared in the British press were ridiculous as is often the case when French is translated too literally into English. The Prime Minister seemed unwilling to believe a word of what I said, and I, in turn, getting angry, very nearly left the room. I was shocked that any one could so misinterpret the character of Haig, who is the most modest man on earth; besides, if what I said was not believed, I was better back in France, where I had important work to do. Lord Curzon now took it upon himself to become the 'advocatus diaboli'; he persistently called me 'Mr Lytton,' ostentatiously emphasising the 'Mr.' He asked me why I had not censored the articles myself, and I said that I had received an order not to censor them: this reason, I could see, he

thought was entirely inadequate. Luckily, Mr Arthur Balfour came to my rescue: he emphasised the points that I had made in more suave and parliamentary language, and his wisdom turned the opinion of the Cabinet in the right direction.

Sir William Robertson said nothing during the meeting, but before dismissing me he said, 'You see what I have to put up with every day.'

I was not over-confident of what might happen, so I immediately telephoned to Lord Northcliffe, and he asked me to come and see him that evening in the country. I had met him in France, and he had given me every support in my efforts with the French press, also I knew that his actions during the war had always been completely disinterested, and that he was one of the few men who had had the courage to swim upstream against the current. He had had the courage to attack a popular idol (Kitchener) when he thought that he was no longer up to his job; he had helped very considerably to get rid of the Asquith Government, because he thought that Asquith's brain was not suitable to such a war. Later on he let Lloyd George have his way about Sir William Robertson, but he undoubtedly maintained Haig where he was. On this occasion he immediately grasped the situation, and the articles which appeared in his press on the following day calmed matters down and the episode was at an end. I returned to France immediately and told the Chief what had happened; naturally he was less surprised than I had been at the Prime Minister's attitude, for no doubt this was not the first episode of the kind.

What would have happened if Lord Northcliffe had not upheld Haig? In my opinion Haig would have gone.

I dined with him that night, and I spoke to him on this occasion, as indeed on many others, of my deep attachment to the French race; his staff were very anti-French, and I don't think they liked me for my opinions; but the Chief enjoyed the argument, and I am sure that he liked me for expressing my preference so frankly in spite of the awe-inspiring surroundings.

We now started on our northern tour, and as the countryside was covered in deep snow we had some difficulty on the steep hills. Our first visit was to Arras, which then was and still is the most magnificent city; I know nothing finer than Hispano-Flemish architecture. It is inconceivable to me that the French do not fix their northern university there instead of at Lille. The one thing that we inartistic English people think essential for youth is the environment of beauty; what could be more lovely than Eton or Winchester, Oxford or Cambridge, and yet here in artistic France is a city as beautiful as Oxford, and before the war it was just a dull garrison town. We then went on to the Canadians in the Lens area; unfortunately, the weather was so misty that we could see practically nothing, but the French correspondents were much moved at the evidences of heavy French losses on the crest of Notre Dame de Lorette. In the neighbourhood of this hill the Canadians had a corps school, and we were shown their system of preparing raids, and they gave us a display

of rapid fire with stokes guns; during this demonstration there was an accident with a premature burst that very nearly polished off the lot of us. This school was the best thing I have ever seen of the kind, and we were immensely impressed with the Canadians; their system of light railways in forward areas was perfection itself, and everything about the corps seemed first-rate, including the discipline. Sir Julian Byng was then in command, and, though he disliked press-men as a rule, he received my foreigners with the greatest goodwill, and gave them a talk about the front that his corps held, which was a model of its kind.

After that we visited the Hohenzollern redoubt, and my old friends Givenchy, Festubert, and Richebourg St Vaast; General Horne, the Commander of the First Army, received us to dinner at Lillers and also gave a most valuable lecture on the special features of his army front. The next day we went on to Armentières, and that night we slept at Cassel, and then proceeded to explore the Second Army front from Ploegstreet Wood to Ypres. At Ploegstreet there were some marvellous dug-outs, where more than a brigade of men could be concentrated without danger. They were quite as fine as any German ones that I had seen on the Somme, and much finer than anything else on the British front. In Ypres itself I found my old Brigade in the ramparts; they were having a fairly quiet time, but Ypres was always being shelled. In the winter of 1916-1917 the city was still a magnificent ruin, but what a death trap; I have since been through the place hundreds of times, but never without coming across exploding shells.

After visiting practically every sector on the British front, we went to see some of the big aviation camps, the big railheads, and the bases. The bases give a better

idea of the scale of the war even than the front; the food store at Calais was amazing, and the ordnance repair shops were a miracle of human ingenuity. Gradually we worked back again to Amiens after one of the most interesting tours it is possible to imagine. Since then I have seen the Belgian front from Ypres to the sea, and also the sector from Peronne to La Fère, so I can claim to be one of the very few British officers that have been in every sector of this vast battle area.

Earlier in the year I had visited a French regiment in the line in the neighbourhood of Rancourt. It was an important part of the line and the Germans plastered it with shells; in order to diminish casualties the French used tiny little Moroccan donkeys for carrying up ammunition and rations. These little fellows got very clever and, when shelled, used to lie down quietly in shell holes till the firing was over. I lunched with a staff of a Regimental Commander and I was amazed at the amount they ate, but I forgot at the time that even in the trenches they only have a cup of coffee in the morning, and so by twelve noon they are capable of eating anything. The cooking was as good as at a first-rate Paris restaurant and the wines were delicious. We fell to discussing the different attributes of English and French soldiers; these officers maintained that when we had done washing and saluting there was no time left for anything else. One hefty looking warrior who had been through the original retreat, the Marne, the Aisne, Verdun, and the Somme declared, 'Un soldat doit manger quand il peut—doit boire quand il peut—doit faire l'amour quand il peut, mais quant à se laver, ça *jamais*.' I was introduced to the Brigade Commander, who had been wounded many times; he was well advanced in age like all French senior officers, but in spite of his wounds and years he had

refused important staff jobs in order to stay with his men. I have often said to the Chief that if he could see the French regimental officers in the line he would find them inspired by a white fever heat of patriotism. The French had an excellent system of runners for carrying messages; throughout the shelled districts they would construct bomb-proof dug-outs at distances of about 200 metres; in each of these dug-outs there were relays of runners; each runner had only to sprint these 200 metres and then he would get to ground and another runner would take a similar sprint. They had learnt by bitter experience in the first two years of the war that each man's life was worth its weight in gold.

Soon after we got back to Amiens the first symptoms of the big German retreat to the Hindenburg line began to appear; fires and explosions were visible every night behind the enemy's lines; prisoners told marvellous tales of this trench system which was on a new model, superior to anything that had yet been thought of. In the Somme valley during the winter there are incessant mists, and a carefully prepared retreat is fairly easy to execute. The Germans gradually held their trenches lighter and lighter; a few men were employed at night to walk up and down the line putting up 'Verey' lights from different positions, so as to make it appear that the trenches were held in force. Then they retired altogether, simply leaving rearguards of highly-trained machine-gunners. Throughout the war, whether in attack or defence, these machine-gunners fought magnificently; the Germans realised that in a war where every single man between eighteen and fifty is used, it is quite out of the question to expect a very high general level of efficiency, and therefore they went through their classes with a fine comb and separated their athletes from their crocks; their athletes were trained

and trained, either as expert machine-gunners or as expert bombers, or as expert light trench-mortar men. The crocks held the line, and as a rule kept themselves under cover as much as possible. Thus we were nearly always master of the situation in 'no-man's-land'; the only activity the Germans went in for was wiring, and in this respect they were streets ahead of us. We, on the other hand, squandered our enterprising athletic types to a ridiculous extent; in my brigade, for instance, there was a young officer who for many seasons had played cricket for Surrey; like many athletes he was clever as well as strong. One night our Brigadier met him and asked him if he had been out with a patrol, and he said no; and when the Brigadier asked him why, he said that he was acting company commander and thought that his duty (quite rightly) was to stay in the trench and supervise his company. The Brigadier then ordered him to go out, and he walked straight over to the German wire and was killed. Our 'no-man's-land,' as a rule, even on bright moonlight nights, was like Hampstead Heath on a Bank Holiday; with such numbers exposed to the traversing machine-gun fire, no wonder that we lost men who were quite irreplaceable. I remember hearing a French officer remark, 'We always thought that our Generals were butchers, but they are not in it compared with yours.'

It must be admitted that the time for this retreat was well chosen, and the Germans did not lose a man or a rifle more than was absolutely necessary. Furthermore, their public at home had been well prepared, for they were told that it was a strategic retreat, which typified the extraordinary genius of Hindenburg, and as soon as it was completed their papers were full of enthusiastic articles on the masterly manœuvre. Certainly they worked

absolutely to their time schedule, for at that season of the year it was impossible for us to hustle them.

One day I set forth with Monsieur de Maratray and a young American officer; we expected that we might possibly get into Le Transloy, and with this view we called at an Australian Bde. H.Q. in the neighbourhood of High Wood (le Bois des Foureaux). He told us that the Boche was on the move, and that we might possibly get into Bapaume; we therefore made for the nearest hill-top where we could get a view. It was a brilliantly fine day, and we could see that the country was empty as far as the Bapaume ridge, where there was a lot of shell fire; whether they were German or British shells it was impossible to distinguish at that distance. There was no other way of going except on our flat feet, for there were no roads; I knew that it would be a tremendous walk, so I made my companions eat their sandwiches before starting. As soon as lunch was over we marched straight across country to Bapaume; at first the going was good, but soon we came to the old front line area in the neighbourhood of the Butte de Warlencourt, where the ground was entirely churned up by shell fire; for each step we took we were up to our knees in mud, and we had to zigzag round the lips of the shell craters full of loose wire. At last we got beyond this area on to the green slopes leading to the Vauban fortifications; Maratray had stuck it most pluckily (he was no longer in his first youth, and he had had trouble with varicose veins), and we had a short halt. We could now see that Bapaume was in British hands, but the Germans were indulging in harassing fire, which is the most disagreeable kind of shelling, for, inasmuch as there is no guiding principle behind it, it is a pure fluke whether you get hit or not. A number

of men were being hit by the shells, and the stretcher-bearers were fairly active; we pushed on therefore without delay, got down into the moat, climbed the brick walls, and established ourselves in a high garden which overlooked the centre of the town. It was a wonderful sight, for the town was in flames, and the Germans were shelling the cross roads; our artillery had not yet come up, but our machine-gunners had occupied all the high ground, and were giving Fritz a shower-bath as he retired down the roads. The Australian battalion that had captured the town an hour or so before had rounded up a good number of prisoners; we met the battalion commander shortly afterwards, a young Australian major bursting with good humour and self-confidence; he gave us the story of the capture of the town; the Australians are always doing the unexpected in war, and they had managed to do a pinching movement which had bottled up a number of Germans who could not get out of the town in time. Having finished his account, this young man dashed off to find a dug-out, if possible, free from booby traps. Our return journey was a wearisome business, but Maratray was buoyed up with the thought that he was the first war correspondent in Bapaume; as a matter of fact Philip Gibbs of the *Daily Chronicle* had got there about the same time, but we did not know that then. There were an extraordinary number of unburied German corpses all over the old front line areas; our artillery on the Pozières ridge had evidently made life extremely unpleasant for the Germans. After passing through the village of Le Thilloy we got a lift from some Australian gunners, but along the tracks there were many concealed shell holes filled to the brim with mud, and we had some narrow shaves from drowning in mud, which would have been an inglorious death. We reached

Amiens after dark, having been about twelve hours on the go; that evening Maratray went out to make some purchases in the town, and he fell down in a fainting fit. I came across him quite unconscious, and immediately undid his collar and drove back the crowd that was round him, for he was getting no air. I was with Pierre Mille at the time, who is a bit short-sighted, and, on seeing this prostrate figure, he said 'Oh, pour celui là, il n'y a plus rien a faire, il est complètement fichu.' This immediately brought Maratray to his senses, who jumped up completely recovered.

The following day Peronne fell, and we were all off to get into this important city as soon as possible; as a matter of fact the Germans had gone back a good way by the time we reached the town, and there was only very infrequent shelling by guns firing at extreme range. Our troops had already gone through; the abomination of desolation was frightful; these vile Huns had blown up with explosive every building in the place, and then had stuck in the main square a huge notice board with 'NICHT ÄRGEN, NUR WUNDERN' written on it. Peronne is beautifully situated with hills all round and with the Somme flowing through it and round it in the most attractive way; many of the buildings were old and beautiful and the general aspect of the place, before the barbarians destroyed it, must have been like an illustration of Pol de Limbourg to some Flemish book of hours. What the feelings of Frenchmen were, who had been born and brought up in such a place, is hard to imagine. I did see some French troops in the neighbourhood and they were murmuring, 'Ah, les salops, les sales Boches, on n'en tuera jamais assez.' It is at such moments that one thinks of Kipling's saying, 'There is but one good Boche, and he is a dead Boche.' After

going through such experiences it is hard for the returning soldier to stomach the attitude of many stay-at-homes, mostly pacifists, who throw up their pious hands in horror at the revengeful nature of the French. What is sweeter than vengeance when you catch your enemy red-handed in the act of wanton unwarrantable destruction, for what was the military use of destroying these beautiful buildings? In a week from the day the town fell, thousands of troops were billeted there, and there were officers' clubs and all sorts of things. If the French had lynched every German they caught from then on to the end of the war, their conduct would have been fully justified. Did not Christ chase the moneylenders from the Temple? is there no such thing as justifiable anger? For a people whose leaders are so barbaric, violent brutal vengeance is the only cure, the only remedy. Thank God, the German army did contain some human souls, for among the letters which we captured sentiments of utter disgust at this useless destruction were expressed. A week later I took Mr Sharp, the United States Ambassador to France, to see Peronne, and his feelings of rage were as great as mine, and I know that he wrote a despatch to his President expressing his feelings most definitely.

For the next few days our front line consisted of an advance guard of mobile troops, cyclists and cavalry; in fact, it was very hard to know whether one was in German territory or not. Of course, as the Germans got nearer to their Hindenburg line their resistance stiffened and they started counter-attacking our advancing troops.

During the latter half of this winter John Masefield came out to France; I had lately read his book on Gallipoli and it had made a profound impression on me. It seemed against the fitness of things that no one should

record the amazing feats of arms and the superhuman endurance of our men, but here at last I thought was a second Homer. I found him wandering about Colonel Hutton Wilson's headquarters like a soul in distress; no one seemed to be looking after him and his opportunities of getting into touch with the war appeared to me to be nil. The ignorance and irreverence that professional soldiers have in regard to the great men of other professions is astounding. Directly I found out Masefield's identity, I applied to have him attached to my mission and my request was granted. Of course, he had nothing to do with foreign press, but there was often a vacant place in one of my cars, and when I could not send him out he used to 'lorry-jump' with consummate skill. To my amazement I found that he had come out to write about the Somme battle, which was just drawing to a close. How can the greatest genius in the world do anything good when he writes about things that he has not experienced? There were to be two years more of war containing the most stirring episodes, and yet Masefield was confined to writing about the Somme, which was over, and then was sent to America to do propaganda. It is incredible that, after producing such a masterpiece as Gallipoli, his unique gifts should have been wasted; and yet masses of 'stunt' artists were employed who have produced an exhibition of pictures which are the pictorial equivalent of a jazz band—such indecent irreverence towards the most sublime of human tragedies is without parallel in history. Masefield was at first a great puzzle to the French correspondents; they could not understand his shy, unassuming manners. 'Mais voyons, c'est une jeunne fille,' they said, until gradually they found out that he knew considerably more about most things, including French literature, than themselves,

and that his remarks, uttered with a voice no louder than that of a mouse in a cheese, were full of point and wit. Prior to the German retreat to the Hindenburg line, I had taken Masefield on an expedition to Beauregard Dovecote in the neighbourhood of Miraumont, and I had done my best to describe to him the colossal struggle there had been around Beaumont Hamel and along the valley of the Ancre. He was wonderfully quick to take everything in, and he was untiring in his zeal to reconstruct the past, but there is no such thing as vicarious inspiration. Had he come on with us to follow the Arras campaign, the Battle of Messines, the Flanders and Cambrai offensives, the big retreat of March 1918, and the final glorious victory beginning on August 8th, 1918, we might have had a narrative poem of the calibre of Dauber, The Everlasting Mercy or Reynard the Fox, and England would have been the richer. Masefield had done his best to get into the army when war broke out, but he could not pass the medical examinations; failing this, there is nothing he would have liked better than to occupy a post such as Mr Bean had with the Australians, but we are less patriotic than the Australians, and Masefield was wasted.

When this big retreat to the Hindenburg line began, it was a curious sight to see all our heavy artillery hurrying away from the retreating enemy instead of following him up; the explanation was that our next blow was to be in the Arras sector and therefore the heavy guns had to side-step along the main lateral roads. The Somme battle was now definitely over, and though the honours rested with us it must be admitted that the enemy put up an extraordinarily successful defence; every step was gained at a terrible price. This fine fighting on the part of the Germans is all the more extraordinary as their

Limbers on the Road.

Page 82.

morale was never high during this period. Russia was still in the war, the Germans had failed at Verdun, and they were now thrown back on the defensive and were likely to remain so till the end of the campaign. Letters captured in enemy trenches were invariably gloomy in tone. I am convinced that the war should have ended now; had there been a Generalissimo of the skill of Maréchal Foch, the French success of the first few days of July might have been exploited, and the fresh British army, if used as reinforcements to the tired French army, might have turned the Somme from the South and have avoided that pitched battle between the Somme and the Ancre where the Germans were expecting to be attacked and where the defences were wellnigh impregnable. The Germans supposed that the French were done for after Verdun, and they did not believe them to be capable of taking part in any offensive; therefore they caused a surprise when they attacked with us on the Somme, and therefore they scored a great success. That success was never exploited because the rules of the game then were that the British should fight on the British front and the French on the French front, that there should be a point of liaison but never an amalgamation. Therefore I think that the British forces were not used to the best advantage. It may be that our staffs at that time were not sufficiently experienced to do a 'passing through' movement, but French troops were already at the outskirts of Peronne in the first days of July, and then there was no Hindenburg line in the Cambrai-St Quentin area. It is impossible to say what might have happened, but I firmly believe that a big initial victory on the Somme, with the German morale very low, would just about have done the trick. That big victory was impossible without a Generalissimo, and so it never happened. If only the war could

have ended then, and according to the pieces on the board it should have ended, the world would have been saved from this terrible exhaustion which has made victory almost as bitter as defeat. It seems to me that history will for ever blame Great Britain for standing out against the appointment of a French Generalissimo; I have had many conversations with General Charteris on this subject, and he always maintained that what was important was unity of intention rather than unity of command. This contention is rubbish; you might as well say that it suffices to have unity of intention among four company commanders. Every military text-book says that an order must be an order and not a request, and that the responsible officer must give his orders clearly and concisely, and he must see that they are rigorously carried out. At the beginning of the war it would have been so easy to give the French supreme command on land, all the more so because our generals were unaccustomed to armies on a Continental scale. In exchange we could have insisted upon the supreme command at sea, and the Allies generally would have profited enormously thereby. As it was, we were competing in a race with Germany, who was running like a single athlete on two legs, whereas we were, with France, like two competitors tied together in a three-legged race. Naturally Germany had an immense advantage, and possibly we should never have won at all had not the disaster to our Fifth Army in 1918 brought about the creation of a Generalissimo.

CHAPTER V

THE CAMPAIGN OF 1917

DURING the brief rest that occurred during the final stages of the German retreat to the Hindenburg line and our spring attacks, I happened to make the acquaintance of the commandant of a German prison camp in France. This officer was singularly efficient; he managed to get the utmost work out of his prisoners and yet he administered them in such a way that they all adored him. One day he asked me if I would like him to arrange a small concert among the prisoners, which might possibly be of interest to my correspondents. I jumped at the idea, and accordingly one evening I motored to his camp with two French correspondents. It is difficult to find any group of Germans that does not contain some excellent musicians, and this camp was no exception to the rule. Some of them had got mouth organs, and others portable instruments, and their little concerted pieces were excellent in tone and rhythm; also their part singing was admirably directed by a private, who, in civilian life, was a schoolmaster. They also performed a little play; the acting was somewhat gross but not unskilful. Then they sang a Berlin night song, which apparently was extremely improper, full of 'double entendre,' but I do not understand German well enough to seize more than a single meaning. It was a very catchy tune (which is running in my head at the moment) and immediately it was over the English Sergeant in charge of the escort asked the

commandant whether he would have any objection to his singing a parody to this song. Apparently he and his Corporal had spent many hours in selecting an English version of the song, finding with some skill English words that had a likeness to German pronunciation. The Colonel gave his leave and they got upon the stage; their accompanist was the German schoolmaster and he appeared to take no interest in the words of the song, which were most ribald—full of allusions to old Hindenburg and big and little Willie, but he did take a huge interest in making them start each verse on the right beat, and one heard him whispering 'Ein-zwei-drei,' and then saw him give a vigorous nod of the head. This occurred before each verse, and his complete indifference to the 'lèse majesté' of the words and his extraordinary desire that they should keep good time was one of the most typically German and strangely comic things that I have ever seen. Before the end of the concert I asked the Commandant to let them sing the 'Wacht am Rhein' in part, as the tune is so magnificent, and he gave his consent on condition that we all immediately replied with 'Rule Britannia.' They divided up into tenors, altos, and basses, and they gave a first-rate rendering of their national song. Quite recently, since the signing of peace, some British officers were in a café in Cologne where the 'Wacht am Rhein' was played, and the Germans were much surprised to see these officers standing up while the air was being played. They asked them why they stood, and the British officers replied, 'Well, you see, we *are* the Watch on the Rhine. Immediately every Britisher in the room replied with 'Rule Britannia,' sung with great feeling. At the first note the senior German N.C.O. shouted 'Achtung' in a voice of thunder, and every German clicked his heels and stood to attention, looking straight to his front without

so much as a quiver of an eyelid. The Germans then all filed out and we sang 'God save the King'; many of the prisoners joined in outside the hut. I think my French friends were a bit shocked at the amount of good treatment that was accorded to the Boche, but in my opinion, once the enemy has been captured and has left the battlefield, his person is sacred, and he must be treated with humanity and common sense. Unfortunately, the Germans themselves are without this military virtue; here is an extract of a letter which I wrote on April 10th, 1917. 'This morning I saw one of our men, a private in the 5th Dorsets, who had been taken prisoner by the Germans on Jan. 11th, and had just escaped. He was a walking skeleton. His diet was one-quarter of a loaf a day and a plate of thin soup; sometimes he got a piece of meat the size of a lump of sugar and sometimes a little coffee. One foot was completely frozen and his toes were gangrenous. He had had no treatment except that his toes were cut open with scissors. He had never been allowed to wash. All our men in that camp were covered with lice and boils. This poor chap was quite listless and seemed never to have had any pleasure. He was thirteen stone when captured and now he is under eight stone. It will take some forgetting what these brutes have done to our poor fellows!'

General Nivelle was now in command of the French forces; he had made a successful offensive in the Autumn of 1916, and had recaptured at Verdun all the territory won by the Germans at great cost in their big Verdun offensive. This victory was said to have been achieved at very small cost, and our politicians at home had not hesitated to point the moral and adorn the tale, comparing this inexpensive French victory to General Gough's costly victory on the Ancre. There was, however, a

strong suspicion in the British Army that the French casualty returns were not strictly accurate. Anyhow, this achievement secured for Nivelle the supreme command of the French Army, and General Joffre, who had commanded since the beginning of the war, went into retirement. Nivelle drew up a plan for 1917 in which the main attack was to be carried out by the French Army on the Chemin-des-Dames, and the British were to do the containing attack in the Arras sector; the British were to begin and, over and above any local success which they might obtain, they were to pin down as many German divisions as possible. Haig certainly conformed to the French in every respect, and agreed to undertake the minor rôle without a murmur, but it is a great question whether this was the best way of using the available forces. It is probable that great pressure was brought to bear on Haig by the Prime Minister, and that he (Haig) was not allowed to give free vent to his genuine opinions. I cannot help thinking that had Foch been then in supreme command he would have regarded the forces under him as being composed of so many 'A' divisions and so many 'B' divisions quite regardless of nationality. As it was, the French Army was exceedingly tired and no wonder, for, up to the beginning of the Somme offensive, they had carried the whole war on their shoulders, and had taken a considerable share in the Somme battle. Moreoever, at the beginning of 1917 there was some discontent among the *poilus*, as there were many injustices in the French Army in regard to leave, distribution of honours, etc., and it is doubtful whether at the moment they could have carried out successfully a gigantic offensive without the co-operation of first-rate fresh divisions. The general attitude of the senior officers of the French Army was lacking in confidence

in the success of Nivelle's plan, and Nivelle himself said that if it did not succeed during the first few days it would not succeed at all.

Haig started his attack with some considerable success, for he swept the enemy off the immensely strong fortress of the Vimy Ridge; on the north the British reached the outskirts of the town of Lens, and on the south they advanced along the Scarpe as far as Rœux. This success might have been even greater if we had at that period of the war known how to take enemy trenches without churning up the ground to such an extent that it took days to make roads sufficiently good to carry heavy artillery. The cavalry were used on the Third Army front, but most people thought that they did not come into action till twenty-four hours too late. They suffered very heavily in the neighbourhood of Monchy-le-Preux. After the first few days the enemy's resistance stiffened and the fighting became exceedingly severe. Every one felt that somehow or other we had only just missed a huge success, but, as we had missed it, it seemed to most of us incredible that we should go on attacking in that sector, with the element of surprise completely absent. The enemy had not fought well on the Vimy Ridge, and once again it was proved that regular lines of trenches were quite useless against a heavy concentration of artillery. But as in most battles throughout this war on the Western front, the enemy drew very clear deductions from his initial defeat, and fought a losing fight with the utmost skill and determination. He fought specially well in the neighbourhood of Rœux and the chemical works; abandoning his trenches he defended his ground with groups of machine-gun nests skilfully concealed in the rushes of the Scarpe Valley. These nests were sited without any regularity, diamond-like so that each nest

protected its neighbour. This defensive system was so successful that it was rapidly developed and improved upon; each nest was given protection from enemy shell fire by concrete structures, and thus the pill-box (which was originally called the pillar-box) evolved from the machine-gun nest. These pill-boxes were small fortresses garrisoned by about a dozen men; they were completely bomb-proof, and from them the machine-gunners could fire in every direction. In our Flanders offensive later on during this same year we found these pill-boxes to be the most horrible obstacles to our rapid progress.

Our losses in the Scarpe Valley became very heavy, and yet we continued to attack. The explanation no doubt is very simple, namely, that we had to 'amuse' as many German divisions as possible in order to help the coming French offensive. Haig started his big attack on April 9th, 1917, but previous to this date General Gough had tried to force the Hindenburg line at a spot where it hinged on to the old line, in the neighbourhood of Bullecourt. For this attack he was without much artillery, as all our guns were wanted farther south, but he devised a plan whereby tanks were to take the place of barrage fire and the infantry were to get through the formidable wire in the wake of the tanks. For this task he used Australian troops; the Australians had had an awful winter in the Somme mud, following the most desperate fight for the Pozières ridge in the Autumn of 1916, and they were sorely in need of a rest, but in spite of this they were still probably the finest attacking troops in the world. If, therefore, this attack did not succeed, it must be put down to an unskilful plan. The attack was a most ghastly failure; the tanks lost direction; even where they broke the wire, the wire immediately sprang up again; the losses were very great, and absolutely

nothing was achieved, except that the Australians felt most bitterly towards General Gough. Possibly the staff of the Tank Corps did also learn some most valuable lessons.

Following this failure, as I have related above, there came the successful attack of April 9th, which ended in very fierce and costly fighting along the Scarpe Valley. Then the great French attack on the Chemin-des-Dames, which, alas! was unsuccessful; certain French deputies followed the fight from observation posts and they were appalled at the losses. Returning to Paris, they made vigorous protests to the Minister of War, who called for a return of casualties and then stopped the offensive, dismissed General Nivelle, and put General Pétain in command in his stead. Pétain, shortly after he had taken over, went to Haig and told him that the French Army was in a rotten state, that there were thousands of mutineers and that the British must attack and continue to attack throughout the rest of the season, and thus secure for the French a complete rest from all fighting. The situation was not pretty; Haig had humbly taken the rôle that was allotted to him; he had done his part of the job, on the whole, exceedingly well, and he was now told that he must devise a new plan to fight the enemy single-handed till the winter came on. This interference with commanders in the field on the part of French politicians caused a very bad impression at G.H.Q. and made it more difficult than ever for our military experts to submit to the idea of a French Generalissimo. Haig had always wished to carry out an offensive in Flanders, but the season was now well advanced and it would take time to change the centre of gravity from Arras to Ypres. So far the fighting in 1917 had tended to prove that the *limited* objective was much more reasonable than any

idea of piercing completely the enemy's lines. Pétain was of this opinion. Accordingly, the next step was to capture the Wytschaete-Messines Ridge preparatory to the larger offensive in the direction of Paschendaele. Unfortunately, the enemy knew all about the state of the French army, and therefore it was certain that whenever we attacked we should have the whole of the German army opposite to us. Furthermore, the Germans were pleased with the results of their submarine campaign, and it was obvious that Russia would soon be out of the war, so the state of morale in the German army was manifestly better than during the Somme battle. The Messines attack was entrusted to General Plumer and, in the meanwhile, General Gough was sent north to take over the sector between Plumer's army (the Second) and the Belgians. This, to my mind, is one of the most difficult things to understand in the whole war. Plumer stood very high in the estimation of all those who had served under him and, moreover, he knew the Ypres sector like no other living soul. Gough had done fairly well in the latter stages of the Somme and then had failed signally in his attack at Bullecourt; immediately after this failure, he was sent north to prepare for the biggest and most important offensive the British ever undertook.

Before going on to describe these northern battles there are many things yet to be said about the Battle of Arras. Here are extracts of letters written by me.

'April 10th, 1917.—Yesterday was a glorious day and must be remembered alongside the 13th November, 1916, as one of the great achievements of British arms. I had reconnoitred the ground round Arras a few days beforehand. The landscape is not unlike the weald between the North and South Downs, but much less wooded, and

divided up by three straight French roads lined with trees. I stood on a small hill slightly south of Arras and looked right across the valley to a hill called Monchy-le-Preux (which is rather like Crooksbury Hill in Surrey). Arras was like a town in a beautiful Turner drawing, surrounded by trees, and beyond I could see the ruined church of Mont Saint Eloi (this is like St Catherine's Mount at Guildford), and the Vimy ridge. The bombardment was terrific, more intense than any bombardment during the palmiest days of last August. My correspondents all went out at midnight previous to the attack; they got on to the battlefield at about 3 a.m. A good deal of shelling was going on, but it gradually died down, as is usual before daybreak. I don't know whether this calm took in the Boche, but it certainly took in the larks, who gave us their sweetest songs. At 5.30 all the batteries opened fire as one gun. It was still quite dark and each gun flash told, and each shell that burst sent up a shower of golden rain; added to these fireworks the Boche sent up every variety of coloured rocket to signal to his gunners that it was time for their counter-barrage. Soon after daybreak a violent April shower came on with sleet and snow and hail. Notwithstanding this storm, all our airmen came out directly it was light enough to see, and all our kite balloons went up. At one moment the sky and the earth had the appearance of a room where windows and doors are blown open and everything in the room is scattered. In spite of these conditions each detail of the attack was carried out like a book. The gunners' fire was admirably directed by the airmen, and all counter attacks were squashed. One Canadian coming back with his arm shattered by a shell was asked by one of my correspondents if he was in pain. 'Oh! what does that matter so long as we are beating them!' he replied. For

the last few days the exploits of our airmen have been stupendous; their courage and skill, in spite of very heavy losses, is sublime. No doubt this battle has been hell, as all others have been, but our men can now keep their heads in hell.'

'April 13th, 1917.—Yesterday I went on to the Vimy Ridge and saw some of the Canadians who had done the job. They all say that the Boche is not fighting nearly so well as last year, but you have no idea of the weather. When I started out there was a very hard frost, as on the coldest days of winter; then there were a couple of hours of sunshine, then a terrific hurricane like the worst moments of an Atlantic gale, then a blizzard which lasted all through the night. When you think of chaps lying out with a leg blown off, you can hardly wonder that everybody in the army wishes to murder those correspondents who bring in 'the bank holiday touch.' Neuville St Vaast was full of dead horses; I saw two of them killed by shell splinters. The prisoners were more dishevelled than ever they were last year; a more unmilitary looking lot could not be imagined.'

'May 5th, 1917.—Yesterday I passed the day with the flying men; the more I see of them the more impressed I am. It is not that we are better at inventing or workmanship or dash and daring than other countries, but we have a higher all-round average. I believe that as in the past we have been the great sailors of the world, so in the future we shall be the great airmen. In other armies the discipline of flying men is slack; in ours it is superb. I saw Ball; he had just got back from downing a Boche, though he had got a bullet in his engine. He has now accounted for thirty-nine of the enemy; he is a marvel.

He is short and wiry, rather like a Welsh light-weight boxer; his hair is longer and wilder than mine at its wildest; he has quick alert eyes, wide apart, and he moves his head just like a boxer; his appearance made me think of the Fuzzie Wuzzies; he neither drinks nor smokes.'

'May 10th, 1917.—Have you heard this story of the Kaiser, who is very fond of going about in the parts of France that are occupied by Germans. One day he saw a little boy playing and he went up to him and spoke to him kindly. Before going away he said rather pompously, 'Do you know who I am?' and the little boy answered, 'Je sais que t'es un Boche, mais je ne sais pas lequel.'"

During this Arras offensive Winston Churchill (who was Minister of Munitions) came out on a visit to the front, and I piloted him for two days. On one of these days we lunched with the Chief and it was one of the most unpleasant lunches that I have ever attended. Haig was not pleased with the way things were going in the valley of the Scarpe, and no doubt he was already aware of the state of affairs in the French army, and he was in no mood to regard politicians with a favourable eye, least of all Winston. Possibly also Haig thought that Winston was intriguing against him, but, though I know that Winston did not approve of Haig's Flanders offensive, he was, I am sure, a most loyal supporter of the Chief's throughout 1918, both in good and bad fortune. Winston had really come out to talk about tanks, and I fancy that on this subject his conversation with Haig was all that was satisfactory. As we were motoring towards the front he asked me if I did not think it was very courageous of Lloyd George to bring him back into power after the Gallipoli affair. I answered that I thought he was the courageous one in daring to show his face in public after all

the mistakes that he had made. I did not really think that he was to blame for the Gallipoli failure, but I was annoyed with him for going back to politics instead of sticking to soldiering ; however, I was no doubt wrong, for, from the army's point of view, he was a first-rate minister of munitions and rendered incalculable service to his country. He took my insults with good humour and we spent a delightful afternoon together. We passed over the Vimy Ridge at the point where the Bois de la Folie once stood and, beyond a sunken road on the forward slope, we had a magnificent view of the Lens-Lievin district. The light was behind us and we could distinguish every detail through our glasses; any amount of shelling was going on and we could not have had a better sample of a 'paysage de guerre.' The next day we went to a small machine-gun post on Greenland Hill from where we had a splendid view of the Scarpe Valley. On the way home, via Bapaume, we ran into a daylight raid which was taking place in the neighbourhood of Croisilles; it was a most curious sight, for the sun was shining from a clear blue sky and yet, for a stretch of about three kilometres, complete night was brought about by a smoke barrage, and in the midst of this dark smoke the thermite shells with their fiery tongues looked most diabolical. I did not see Winston again till the Autumn of this year, just after the Germans had made their successful counter-attack in the Cambrai district. We were dining together in Amiens at the Restaurant de la Cathédrale, and two young subalterns, who had wine taken, sent him a note saying, 'Are we winning the war?' Winston chucked it across to me and said, 'What shall I answer.' So I simply wrote on the same note, 'Wait and see.'

During the Arras offensive operations were confined to the Third and First Army fronts; before the 9th of

April, General Charteris had given us the general outline of the offensive from the G.H.Q. point of view, but he had not gone into details. Now, however, we were to go north and reside with Plumer's Army for some time to come, and General Harrington (Plumer's Chief of Staff) received all the correspondents, Allied and British, and gave them a complete lecture before each attack. The first of these lectures took place the day before the Messines offensive, and General Harrington began his lecture with these momentous words, 'Gentlemen, I don't know whether we are going to make history to-morrow, but at any rate we shall change geography.' He was right; at, five o'clock the following morning Hill 60 was a valley. He then went on to explain to us how many tons of ammonal were underneath the Boche; what troops were to take part in the attack; how the artillery was disposed; exactly what German troops were in the line and in reserve. The artillery barrage map was itself a miracle of intricacy, worked out with the utmost perfection of military science, with the pauses clearly marked on each objective; the whole thing looked like the astronomical reckonings of some expert in the higher mathematics, and yet this complicated arrangement, carried out by thousands of men, thousands of guns, thousands of lorries, thousands of horses, was absolutely adhered to during the attack, and there was not five minutes difference with scheduled time even on the final objective. The truth is that the Messines show was a bijou attack of its kind, *i.e.* the kind that has a limited objective; it did not represent an innovation in tactics such as the Cambrai show later on, but it was a perfect demonstration of that which before had only been done imperfectly both on the French and British front. No doubt the orders for this attack will be carefully

studied by all future staff college students, for it represents a watershed in this great war. It required years of trial and failure to reach this state of perfection, and almost immediately these same methods became obsolete because inventions and armaments were making such rapid strides.

After the correspondents had digested this amazingly interesting lecture of General Harrington's, they went off to dine and sleep before motoring to a hill-top in the neighbourhood of the battle. There are not many hills in Flanders, but the Messines-Wytschaete Ridge is just the right distance from the Kemmel range, and it is possible to get a good view of a battle in this neighbourhood without excessive danger, for one can run to ground if the enemy's artillery becomes a nuisance. The day previous to the attack had been a boiling hot day, but a few drops of thunder rain cooled the night. The moon was shining through clouds as in the Ruskin drawings of Venice in *Modern Painters*. There was desultory artillery firing, quite normal, and the usual number of 'Verey' lights on both sides. When the great moment came one huge mine went off a second before the others. Then all down the line the rest followed. The sky was dark enough still for the flames to make their full effect. The hills of Flanders shook till it was difficult to stand; at the same time there was a roar of guns such as has never before been heard. The large number of heavy batteries were impressive enough, but the drum-fire of the field batteries was more terrifying still. The sound is quite uninterrupted; it is exactly like the roll of a drum that is used in music-halls before the star athlete dives from the roof into a tank. One could not help thinking of the months of suffering endured by our men in the Ypres salient; the suffering had to be reduced gradually

by better trenches and more skilful engineering; then came the moment to get a little of our own back. Was ever vengeance more sweet or more complete? The few German survivors probably suffered more in ten minutes than we had suffered in two and a half years. The first batch of prisoners said that any defence was out of the question; there was hopeless confusion, and our men were on them and beyond them before they knew what had happened. The battlefield itself was an extraordinary sight; many of the enemy had been killed by the concussion of the mines and they were lying with cigars in their mouths reading newspapers, and it was hard to believe that they were not still alive. Our losses during the early stages of the attack must have been extraordinarily light, for I saw hardly any British corpses, but during the wait that followed the attack, when the enemy saw that we did not mean to press our advantage, his harassing fire became very troublesome and our casualties increased. One day on the ridge it was as though some one had a pepper-pot full of shells and were sprinkling them from above. Under such conditions the work of consolidation had to be completed; this sort of job carries with it no glory and no honours, and yet it is poisonously dangerous. Herein lies the great drawback of the offensive with limited objective; if the plan is perfectly conceived all goes well on the day of the attack, but the moment that objectives have been reached and movement stop, the men who occupy the newly won territory become a target for the enemy guns. On the other hand, the offensive which seeks to pierce the enemy's lines, if it succeeds at all, is much less costly and is more exhilarating to the attacking troops, but if it does not succeed on the first day, it can never succeed. During 1917 none of the Allied attempts to pierce succeeded, except the Cambrai offensive;

the explanation of this great innovation in tactics will come later.

Finding that we had gained a very big victory by means of minute preparations on a vast scale, and yet had been content to sit down on the position newly won, the Germans can have had little difficulty in sizing up the intentions of Haig; from the Battle of Messines onward they must have foreseen the coming offensive farther north. They began to construct pill-boxes all over the place; these, like the machine-gun nests in the Scarpe Valley, had no regular formation, except that each one could cover another with protective fire. The weather, which had been hot and fine up till the end of July, broke, and it rained continuously for three months. Most of that Flanders country is below sea-level; the soil is heavy clay and it is intersected with countless water-courses. The big attack was launched on the 31st July, and up to midday things were going very well for us; from then onwards there was first a Scotch mist and then a deluge. Our airmen could render no service. It was shocking ill-luck; what success we should have had under favourable conditions it is impossible to say. We know from Ludendorff's memoirs that he was extremely anxious about these attacks from the British; notwithstanding the fact that there was no other fighting on the Western front, he was hard put to it to prevent us breaking through. Had we got well on towards Passchendaele during the first few days, and could have made an attack from the sea coast as well, it is quite possible that a sensational victory might have been achieved, but this was out of the question in such incessant downpours of rain. The men in the front line areas were up to their waists in water; their feet became swollen and useless; the moral depression was ghastly. In order to carry up

shells to the guns and rations to the men, roads had to be made entirely of wood. These showed up distinctly on the German photographs taken from aeroplanes, and they shelled all our transport to blazes. Already from Poperinghe the roads were kept under intense fire, and from Ypres onwards the battlefield was a nightmare. Under these circumstances was it wise to go on fighting in this slough of despond? Even Haig's last reserve corps (the Canadian) was involved before Passchendaele was finally captured, but was it worth it? No doubt Haig had to go on attacking or else the Germans would have gone for the French and there might have been disaster. However, when the whole army was absolutely exhausted (each division having been in the boiling pot two or three times), one of the most brilliant and daring offensives was carried out under Sir Julian Byng in the neighbourhood of Cambrai, but it was too late; the tired troops could not force a big decision at that stage of the season. As the offensive in Flanders dragged on, it became obvious that Plumer handled his army with infinitely greater skill than Gough. Plumer made his objectives more and more limited, and the perfection of detail in all his arrangements was remarkable. He took over more and more of Gough's front, and it is doubtful whether any commander in the world could have done better than he did under the circumstances; but at best it was a very costly affair, and the sufferings of the men surpassed anything hitherto experienced by any troops in any area of the war at any time of the war. A French army under General Antoine co-operated with the British in the neighbourhood of Houthoulst forest and they accomplished all that was asked of them with the most consummate skill, but they were not placed in a key position and their losses were insignificant compared with our own.

During this period the great French aviator Guynemer was killed; he was brought down in the neighbourhood of Houthoulst forest, and, later on, the ground where he may have fallen was captured by our men. Two of my French correspondents saw a chance of a 'scoop'; and they determined to set forth and find the remains of Guynemer's plane. Of course, on such a battlefield there is a wreckage of countless planes and those correspondents had little difficulty in finding a derelict machine. They invented a purely imaginary story about the Tommies discovering the plane and, out of reverence for Guynemer, tying small bits of the propeller round their necks as mascots. This made other correspondents furious, who denied the 'canard' in their next articles. I quote this as it is one of the rare instances of a search after the clap-trap that occurred during the war. It was not one of the censorship rules of the General Staff to insist upon the truth, and I am sure that this should have been otherwise. Had I had to censor the Guynemer story myself, I would never have allowed it to pass. Furthermore, no 'scoops' were allowed at all; correspondents were invariably accompanied by an officer, and the officer disgorged all information, gleaned from whatever source, even if the correspondents were unwilling to do so. This excellent principle emanated from the British correspondents, who saw with admirable good sense that the war was too important to admit of individual rivalry, and that the only way to cover such a vast front was to pool all information.

An instance occurred during this Flanders offensive of Press camouflage which shows what a dangerous weapon it can be. The Canadians made a containing attack in the neighbourhood of Lens. We wanted the enemy to think that this was likely to be a big offensive

Pit-head near Lens.

Page 102.

and to withdraw divisions from the north. General Charteris therefore told me to make much of it in the Press. I thought it would not do to use all the big Paris papers for this purpose or else the Boche would smell a rat, so I simply threw out dark hints in one Paris paper (the *Débats*, whose admirable correspondent was M. Henri Bidou—every word of his articles was carefully studied by the German General Staff) and one provincial paper, the *Telegramme de Boulogne.* Unfortunately, General Charteris did not inform the officer in charge of the British Press of his intention to magnify the Lens affair, and so the note struck in the British Press was exactly the opposite to the attitude of the *Débats* and the *Telegramme de Boulogne.* For the purpose of throwing dust in the eyes of the German General Staff I consider that this discrepancy was ideal, but it annoyed the British Army Commander concerned, as, naturally enough, he only read the British papers. Possibly it did deflect some four to five German divisions, but what was not foreseen was that public opinion in America was adversely affected, inasmuch as they accused the British of not being able to accomplish their designs, which were announced beforehand with a flourish of trumpets.

The Allied Press had by now become a very flourishing concern—so much so, in fact, that the articles of the French correspondents concerning British operations were so well documented and so well presented that Monsieur Painlevé sent for the principal editors of French papers and complained to them that their issues contained nothing but news about British operations, and there was never any mention made of French fighting and the *poilus* were beginning to resent this. The editors replied that the British Staff gave their correspondents such admirable opportunities for following operations, whereas

the French Staff held them at a distance. As a result of this interview, I soon had at my headquarters two French officers who wished to know how I managed their own Press. I told them that if I had had any success I thought it was due to the fact that the correspondents had unlimited facilities for visiting battle areas and that they were allowed to consult all summaries of intelligence and operations. A mission was founded shortly afterwards at French G.H.Q., but in my opinion they never gave their correspondents the same facilities that we gave ours, and therefore they never got the same value out of them. What the public wants in war time is facts; it does not care a hang for the lyrical descriptions of the dash of the *poilu* or the self-control of the Tommy, but precise accurate detail both in good and bad fortune.

Here are some extracts of letters dealing with the Flanders offensive.

'7.8.17.—The aspect of this battlefield is exactly the same as that of Verdun, the Somme, the Ancre, Vimy, Messines, etc. Yesterday there was a November mist and therefore the war looked itself. No one should ever paint this war in summer time. Gaunt wizard trees and stinking marshes—villages like spillikins—dead horses—dead men—bursting shells and silent agile soldiers—the deafening noise of countless batteries, and above all the smell of three years' decay. The smell of Flanders trenches goes back as far as five miles behind the line, and it is quite different to a new corpse, which has a sort of sweet sickly smell.

'One of our airmen the other day had many fights with different enemy aircraft, and was obliged to descend to within a few hundred feet of the ground; finally he had a steeplechase, pursued by a Boche, rising like a driven

Page 104.

Wood near Ypres.

partridge over each hedge and ducking again on the other side. This continued till the Boche ran out of ammunition and then it was the other way on. The duel ended by the Boche failing to avoid a forest and crashing into the trees.

'You see, the fight over here is some fight. All the great episodes of great wars happen over and over again every single day. Battles go on for months instead of hours, and there is never a moment of silence or respite from danger day or night.'

The Canadians now made their containing attack (which has been referred to before) in the neighbourhood of Lens.

Extract.—'16.8.17.—It is difficult for any one to realise what a modern assault is, but I will try to give you an idea. I am not speaking of the days of preparation beforehand, because that would be too technical; but on the actual day before the assault, you pound the enemy trenches and he replies by pounding yours. When you have levelled him out, you run across; this sounds simple enough, but in the meantime the Boche is levelling you out and so you have a turmoil of fighting infantry under a tornado of shells. The whole battle area becomes filled with smoke, and out of this chaos the airmen have to make sense and reason and report back to H.Q's. When the enemy has found out where the attacking troops have got to, he turns all his guns on to them and then counter-attacks. However, our chance comes when he is assembling his infantry for counter-attack; our airmen have to spot his assembly place and our guns have to deal with it. This is where liaison between aeroplane gun, and rifle comes in. Yesterday and last night eight counter-attacks were dealt with by the perfect co-operation of all arms; but think of the poor men who are

within a quarter of an inch of death and mutilation not once but a million times during these proceedings. The Boche will probably hold on to Lens a bit, but he will continue to lose heavily. On my way up I passed through a Canadian Brigade on the march; they were the same men that I used to see at Hythe at the beginning of the war; then they seemed to be lacking in discipline, though they were very fine in appearance; yesterday I thought that I had never seen such discipline. Our wounded were coming back with their clothes saturated with blood, and that expression of divine patience that is beyond all praise when one knows what they have to endure.'

I received a message from G.H.Q. that this attack was coming off and I suggested that, as it was summer time, we should spend the night on one of the neighbouring hills, so as to be present for the opening barrage. Unfortunately, the attack was postponed twenty-four hours and my Colonel forgot to let me know. It became very cold during the night, and most of these gentlemen, being unaccustomed to open air life, passed a very uncomfortable night and were furious with me when they found there was no fight, especially as I slept extremely well. Monsieur Matagne, the correspondent of the *Nation Belge*, was the handy man of the party, for he had roughed it in the Congo and he was up to every dodge of camp life; we had no matches and yet he managed to make a fire in an old German dug-out, which eventually caught fire and made a horrible bright blaze. The Boche could not help seeing such a light and their gunners loosed off a few shells, which fell in a wood about a kilometre to the rear, where our chauffeurs had parked their cars and were preparing to have a comfortable night. However, we soon got the fire out and no harm

was done. My friend Monsieur de Maratray surpassed himself on this occasion; he professed himself at all times to be a lover of the simple life, and one of his excellent theories was that we moderns wore too many clothes, and that we should do better to imitate the ancient Greeks and let the air of heaven nourish our skins. At times he put this theory into practice, for he used to do his Swedish exercises in the garden of the Allied Press château dressed in nothing more substantial than a shooting cap. On other occasions, however, he would clothe himself inordinately, putting on several coats, several capes, several caps, and several helmets, blue spectacles and anti-dust goggles. This was one of these occasions, but, in spite of such precautions, he seemed paralysed with cold, and, striking the attitude of Rodin's Balzac, he remained like a fancy dress Patience on a monument, motionless and mute throughout the entire night.

Considerable advance was made by the Canadians during this attack, and my French correspondents got very much excited at the thought that Lens might fall; I did not think it likely and told them as much, but they were bent on getting as near to the town as possible. I took a party up to an O.P. in front of the Bois des Hirondelles, and from here they got a magnificnet view of the town and surrounding country. One of the party was Monsieur Serge Basset of the *Petit Parisien*; on the following day he was again extremely anxious to see if he could get into the town, and he went out with Signor Bedolo and Monsieur Ruffin under the guidance of one of my officers, Captain Hale. Monsieur Basset was at all times a man of complete fearlessness, but he had not got a good eye for ground and he did not realise that, when in the immediate presence of the enemy, certain precautions were absolutely essential. On this occasion

there was a complete calm after the storm of the last few days and Captain Hale was able to conduct his party right on to Reservoir Hill, the eastern slopes of which were still occupied by the enemy. In spite of his warnings, that in such a forward area the greatest caution must be observed, Monsieur Basset stood up in a shell hole, exposing at least half of his body and a German sniper shot him right through the chest. It was a very difficult situation for Captain Hale, as he had to get Monsieur Basset under some sort of cover, the while Signor Bedolo went for some stretcher-bearers. As soon as these appeared, naturally the gunners started firing and plastered the hill-top with shells. Poor Basset did not survive long, and died without pain about forty minutes after he had been hit. His comrades, Ruffin and Bedolo and Captain Hale, behaved under the circumstances with a fine contempt of their own personal safety, but the body could not be moved till after nightfall.

The loss of Basset cast a terrible gloom on our mess, for he was an enchanting personality; he was like some French knight of the Middle Ages—chivalrous, brave, and honourable. He utterly despised those who shirked the dangers of the war on the ground that they were indispensable to their country owing to their artistic genius or what not. He loathed the German. On one occasion he fired off an eight-inch howitzer, and he said with a look of ecstacy on his face, 'Peut-être cet obus va tomber sur la gueule d'un Boche!' He had perfect manners and a delicious sense of fun. He was like Cyrano without the bombast. I shall never cease to be proud that I enjoyed his friendship, and I shall always regret that his untimely death deprived the world of one of the few perfect gentlemen.

I am pleased to say that our army gave him a funeral

Notre Dame de Lorette from Reservoir Hill. The spot where Serge Basset was killed.

Page 108.

with full military honours; it was the most impressive military funeral that I have ever seen. The Catholic service was held in a little chapel at Nœux-les-Mines, a small mining town under the enemy's shell-fire, and there was a rumble of guns throughout that lovely summer afternoon. The priest who said the service was wearing a cope of sumptuous design, and he intoned the magnificent 'Deus Iræ' with fervid dignity. Six N.C.O's of a battalion of the Buffs stood at attention either side of the coffin, which was covered with the French tricolour flag, and on the top of the coffin was the Cross of the Legion of Honour and the Croix de Guerre, which had been specially sent from Paris by the Minister of War. There was little light other than that of the tall candles that surrounded the coffin. As the coffin was carried out, I noticed that the senior sergeant had no less than eight wound stripes. The coffin was taken to the cemetery on a limber, the band playing the Dead March in Saul; the road was lined with soldiers with reversed arms and bowed heads; the beauty of this gesture is indescribable, indeed; the beauty of the ceremonial of a British military funeral is one of the finest things in the modern world. After the coffin had been lowered into the grave, a volley was fired and the bugles sounded the last post. There was then a pause of some five minutes while the attention of all the mourners was concentrated on the dead hero; after this pause the réveille was sounded by the bugles; the drums then beat réveille accompanied by the fifes playing the réveille tune, like some traditional Morris dance, as though the spirit had left the body and had become part of eternity; thus grief was finished and destiny fulfilled. My French friends were immensely impressed with the amount of tradition that was still alive in our British customs. Before the war they had,

I think, the idea that we were a race of shopkeepers, now they saw that our roots went deep down into the soil of our country and that our sap was nourished with true poetry. Once during the previous winter we had been visiting Arras and the trenches in that neighbourhood, and on our return journey we had passed through a small village, three parts destroyed by shell-fire; there was a thick winter mist and everything in nature oozed moisture; the sun was set and the light was fast failing. In this village a Highland battalion was billeted, and at retreat the pipes were playing a lament to slow time; with their tin hats and their khaki shirts they looked like some of Cæsar's legionaries. They were extremely stalwart, and the virility of their appearance contrasted strangely with the tenderness of their lament, and yet this sad tune was the very expression of the spirit of nature at that moment; these great traditions are the symbols of the great qualities of an ancient race; they compel admiration and respect, and I hope they will never fall into disuse, even though the league of nations may triumph in overcoming war.

If I had succeeded with the French Press contrary to all forecast and precedent, I think it was due to two reasons: (1) that I like French people (I like even their faults); (2) that I like Bohemians and hate people who cover themselves with a great hide of respectability: I have always lived among artists, where there is no class and no grade, and it was in France that I served my social apprenticeship. I left Eton at the age of seventeen and went to the *École des Beaux Arts* in Paris; during my second year I was billeted at the *pension* of a certain Madame Casaubon, who was one of the most charming women that I have ever known. Under her hospitable roof were gathered together the most extraordinary

antagonistic groups of people that could be imagined. In the first place she kept a school for small boys, and the teachers of these boys were young men preparing for their *baccalauréat*: she gave them board and lodging, and in return they taught the boys in their spare moments. All these students belonged to the 'extreme left' of politics, in fact they were anarchists; at the same time there were certain civil servants in Government employ, among others a certain Monsieur le Sage, who was secretary to the Colonial minister of the time, Monsieur le Bon, who was the man who put the high wooden palisade round Dreyfus on the Devil's Island to prevent him seeing the view. The Dreyfus case was in full swing, and every evening these students waged a most violent warfare against the civil servants on the question of the guilt of Dreyfus and Jews in general. Their language was violent and insulting, and yet Madame Casaubon had a kind of power over both camps that was miraculous; night after night I used to sit at her table and try to analyse her extraordinary social gifts. This apprenticeship helped me with my journalists, and I was never the least disturbed by their individual and combined mutinies, which were of frequent occurrence. For great occasions I had certain parlour tricks which they liked: I remember once in Belgium we were to receive at luncheon the visit of the French journalists attached to the French G.Q.G. My own correspondents asked me to try and be at my best as they had already sung my praises to their *confrères*. Towards the end of the feast every one became rather merry, and we all began to imitate the noises of animals, and when it was my turn I imitated ducks lapping up weed on a pond, and this delighted our guests so much that they all cried 'Voilà ce qu'il nous faut pour nôtre mission au G.Q.G! Donnez nous un commandant

qui sait faire le canard.' To which I replied 'Donnez moi un journaliste qui ne sait pas faire des canards.' For extreme cases of open revolution I had a prescription : for many years I have played an eighteenth century ivory flute such as was used by Frederick the Great. This little flute has an exquisite tone capable of soothing the most diabolical passions, and it rarely failed to produce its effect. Whether it was the likeness to Frederick the Great or the infinite charm of the old English airs that I used to play I don't know, but 'le commandant et sa flute' became an institution and made them willing in return to submit to the very slight discipline that was essential. Just after I left them in order to go to my new job, they gave a dinner on the anniversary of the foundation of the Allied Press; all through the meal farcical telegrams were brought in to me in official envelopes as though from signals. They were, of course, composed by the correspondents, and some of them were extremely funny; I remember one which was supposed to come from General Cambronne of Waterloo fame and said, 'Tout est oublié.' Later in the evening the officer who had taken over from me was about to propose my health; he intended making a little speech, but his inspiration forsook him and he stood getting redder and redder, without being able to produce a single word. At last one of the correspondents said 'Tout est oublié,' and there were shrieks of laughter, which relieved the awkwardness of the situation.

Shortly after I had returned to Flanders, General Charteris sent for me and ordered me to take charge of all the Press units attached to our armies; recently there had been a certain amount of trouble with the British Press, and the correspondents had threatened to down pens and refuse to send home any despatches. I don't know what the trouble was about, as it occurred before

I took over. My first chief had been Colonel Hutton Wilson, and he had been appointed to another job some months back. My second chief was Colonel Fawnthorpe —a famous sportsman and a most charming man, whom I was most sorry to lose. I was sorry also to leave my foreign correspondents, with whom I lived in perfect harmony and for whom I shall ever have the deepest affection. I was apprehensive also of becoming the master censor of the army (as regards Press); I had had experience of the fury of politicians over mistakes in censorship, and I knew that there was great public hostility at home towards the censorship in France, because the names of units were so little mentioned except in the case of Colonial units; besides, the British correspondents were in open revolt, and the situation generally seemed to me thorny. I felt also that my new duties would be principally those of organisation and that I should be kept too much on an office stool. However, one of the advantages and one of the drawbacks of the army is that one has to do what one is told.

The British correspondents were very sorry to lose Colonel Fawnthorpe, but they in no way visited their discontent upon me; indeed, from now onwards till the end of the war I never had a word of difference with any of them. I found Mr Perry Robinson of *The Times*, Mr Percival Philips of the *Daily Express*, Mr Beach Thomas of the *Daily Mail*, Mr Philip Gibbs of the *Daily Chronicle*, Mr Simms of the United Press of America, and Mr McKenzie of the Associated Press, also of America. The British correspondents had been in France since the system of accredited correspondents was first instituted; they were men who knew their job from A to Z, and they worked with untiring zeal; during operations they sent a despatch home every single day. There

had been incessant fighting since April 9th, and I found them very much over tired and yet sticking to their highly responsible work with the utmost tenacity. Whatever any one may think of the respective styles or methods of the correspondents, or of their psychologic interpretations of the emotions of this ghastly drama, I can testify to the thorough seriousness of their endeavour. They were fully aware that their duty was to inform the near relatives at home of the doings of their men folk, and they spared no pains to get at the truth. It is not for me to criticise their achievement; that is the province of the public. I can simply say that they did not spare themselves, and I hope that the Government will one day see that they are properly rewarded.[1] They were not always in the front line, but every day one or other of them was in a forward area, and at the same time they had the necessary tact to get on the friendly side of the staffs of all units. They knew that I had not the smallest wish that they should not tell the truth as fully as possible, and they have informed me on several occasions that, had there been no censorship, they would have written in just the same strain. If any one ever cares to consult the duplicate files of the correspondents' despatches, he will see that there are no big alterations and that many articles went home untouched by my censors. The correspondents were as much in sympathy with me as I was with them; we were out to help each other in all good faith. During this Flanders offensive they spoke of the angelic patience of the men and of their great sufferings; they did not actually say that the task was impossible, but they gave clearly the impression that to fight the whole German army, on that narrow strip of land between the Belgian inundations (on the north)

[1] These gentlemen have since been knighted.

and the industrial valley of the Lys (on the south) in torrents of rain, was almost hopeless.

The representatives of the American Press used to billet and work with the British correspondents, but I never thought that two correspondents was sufficient to keep the vast continent of America informed of our doings, and I am not surprised that the Americans never realised the greatness of our military effort. I immediately applied to my chiefs to allow me to form a separate unit for the American Press, and this was eventually granted. In 1918 our American Press unit was on the road to being the success that the Allied Press had been. When I first came to G.H.Q. there was only one American correspondent, Mr Frederick Palmer; he worked like a Trojan on our behalf during the Somme battle and then went to America to lecture on our achievements. The amount of trouble and risk he took to convince his countrymen that we were great fighters was amazing.

About this time also I started a Neutral Press; at first it was only an auxiliary to the Allied Press, but it gradually became a seperate unit and yielded admirable results. It seemed to me absurd that neutrals should only hear the German point of view, and it was absurd also that we should not use this means of conveying unpleasant news into Germany. There was certainly some risk, for these gentlemen might have left our front and have gone straight into Germany, but there is very little military news that is worth much when it is three weeks old, and that little we naturally did not communicate to neutrals. As a matter of fact most of those who came out stayed as permanent correspondents and were very grateful for the confidence that was placed in them. The following is a list of those that were attached to G.H.Q. MM. Belaustegregoitia, Maeztu, Calvet, Bolin (Spanish),

Mjelde (Norwegian), Major Goudet, Castell, Zimmermann, (Switzerland), Van Houten, De Tong, Van Shrive, Dr Geyl (Holland), Brantnig, Nordström, Cederschiöld, Mr Henriksson (Sweden). Of these, Mr Cederschiöld, Mr Henriksson, Major Goudet, Mr Mætzu, and Mr Bolin became permanent correspondents and followed the campaign with passionate interest; some of them actually applied for commissions in the British Army after the armistice.

Besides the British, American, Allied, and Neutral Press units, I had under my command the photographic and cinematographic section. Since the beginning of the war this section had been run in a haphazard fashion, and the War Office had not conceived any higher aim for photographers and cinema men than to provide material for our cheap illustrated Press. As the war dragged on, the propaganda value of photos and films was appreciated, but there had never been any serious attempt to produce a methodical photographic record of the war. For this purpose it would have been necessary to have several operators with each army and a reserve at G.H.Q. to throw into any part of the line as occasion demanded. I could never get sanction for such an establishment until the War Museum took an interest in the matter and then it was too late, for the necessary authority from the War Office did not arrive at G.H.Q. till the armistice. At the moment of taking over my new job there were only two photographers, Lieut. J. W. Brooke and Lieut. E. Brookes, and they had to cover something like twenty corps every day and get back with their plates to a small château in the neighbourhood of Hesdin. These two men worked incredibly hard and showed any amount of pluck, but it was more or less luck whether they ran into good material for photography. Lieut. J. W.

Brooke had served in King Edward's Horse and had won the D.C.M.; as an official photographer he gave proof of exceptional courage. He was always in the forefront of the battle; he had taken part in numerous daylight raids and patrols in order to attain records of those episodes of battle that no man can imagine; on many occasions men were killed all round him. An appropriate reward would have been a V.C.; but though I recommended him time and again for a M.C., he never got more suitable recognition than the O.B.E.

I was at once impressed with our lack of operators and lack of organisation in this branch, and I sent one of my officers, Captain Holland, to find what the French were doing They, of course, had something like forty operators on their front and a most perfect system of recording every phase of the campaign. Captain Holland made a report which afterwards formed the basis of a discussion which took place at the War Office. For the moment operations were in full swing and no reforms were possible; Lieut. Bartholomew was sent out from England as being an expert in photographic matters, and I found him to be extremely clever and enterprising, and till the end of the campaign he worked wonders with his scanty material. As soon as winter came on and there was a lull in the fighting, Captain Holland, Lieut. Bartholomew, and I journeyed to London and took part in a conference at the War Office. Sir Reginald Brade, Sir George Riddell, Colonel Fisher and Major Holt (representing Lord Beaverbrook) were present besides ourselves. We stated our case and showed that, with such inadequate numbers of operators, we could not compete with the French or even with our own Colonies in the matter of propaganda, and that the photographic record which we should hand down to posterity would

be inadequate and trivial. We recommended that there should be official photographers with each army (at least two to each army) with a proper reserve at G.H.Q. No one disagreed with our suggestions, but after the meeting was over I was informed privately that nothing could be done because Sir Reginald Brade was afraid to take any action independent of Lord Beaverbrook, and that Lord Beaverbrook was expecting to be made Minister of Information (with portfolio), and until this appointment was ratified he refused to sanction any reforms no matter how urgently they were needed. It seemed to me a 'non sequitur' that Sir Douglas Haig's armies should be kept short of photographers because Lord Beaverbrook wanted to be a Minister of the Crown. However, even after Lord Beaverbrook had been appointed Minister of Information hardly any more operators arrived in France, and therefore some of the greatest episodes in our military history will go unrecorded except by means of the lurid imaginations of the 'Jazz' painters that happen to be the fashion of the day. Brookes was shortly afterwards sent to Italy, but Brooke continued to the end to do splendid work in France and Belgium, and Bartholomew certainly achieved what no other man could have done in the way of making bricks without straw. Considering that the number of official photographers was totally inadequate, our War Office made a great mistake in forbidding cameras to be used except by official photographers. It would not have been wise to allow every officer to have a camera, but from the record point of view it would have been a good thing to allow at least one or two per battalion or battery. General Cox, who was at one time head of the Intelligence branch in France, was emphatic on the point that we had never gained the slightest useful information from enemy photographs

taken with private cameras. Our principal cinema operator was Lieut. Macdowell, M.C.; he started his career at the front under the guidance of Colonel (then Capt.) Fawnthorpe, M.C., who was an admirable guide in front line areas. Showing great enterprise and daring, Macdowell provided the bulk of the material that went to form our big war films, and he may well be proud of his achievement. It cannot be said that great literary talent was displayed at home by those who composed the titles for these pictures.

There was also a photographer attached to the Canadians, and one to the Australians (Capt. Wilkinson). Captain Wilkinson produced a superb set of photographs. Of course, it was much easier to cover one corps than twenty, but if any one should doubt the value of photographic records, let him examine the collection taken by Captain Wilkinson of the great advance of the Australians along the Somme in 1918. The series dealing with the capture of Mt. St Quentin are specially fine; in them one sees the Australian infantry attacking in open order with the German infantry firing at them. These photographs are equally valuable as historical records or as text-book illustrations for training recruits.

Besides the photographers attached to the Colonial corps there were also correspondents. Unfortunately, I did not know the Canadian and New Zealand correspondents as intimately as I could have wished, but I became a very close personal friend of Mr Bean (Australia), for whom I had the greatest admiration. Here again the task of a correspondent who only wrote about the operations of one corps was much easier, but to give first-rate accounts of operations is never easy. Mr Bean's cables were perfect; he would watch a battle from a shell hole with his notebook in hand, and he would

describe the special features of each fight like an impressionist painter. He knew almost every man in the corps and his great personal courage made him respected by every one. Outside his own special work he had many great qualities and he thought deeply on all human tendencies. He told me that the Australians had the highest admiration for our Navy, and thought the particular blend of initiative and discipline in the senior service was perfect; they admired our guards division but thought that the Prussian discipline, typical of the guards, did not produce such fine fighters as the Australian elasticity. They thought that the average Tommy was disgracefully servile and that his extreme obedience killed all cleverness and originality. Bean himself thought that many of our important appointments were made through influence and class preference, and that we were often content to put up with second-rate men in high places when first-rate ones were available all the time. To my mind Bean had but one fault, namely that he was too partial to his countrymen; but his was a high-minded patriotism, and I must admit that most of his criticisms of the Mother Country were justified. I wish that some of our big lecture associations would invite him over here and ask him to tell the British public throughout the land what he told me in our conversations during the war. Bean is now writing a history of the Australians achievements in the war, and it should be one of the most interesting of all war books, for he has seen and felt. We make a great mistake in choosing historians who work solely from documents; facts need inspiration as well as fiction. The French know this and they appointed the 'Officiers informateurs,' to whom reference has been made in the preface. These officers were men who, in civil life, followed the profession of letters, and they were attached

to the Staffs of armies only after having had experience of front-line work. One of their duties was to collect dramatic stories from the fighting troops; from these stories they compiled short pamphlets, which appeared from time to time under the heading 'En marge du communiqué.' Their other duty was to act as liaison between the General Staff (operations and intelligence) and war correspondents and visitors. Our British correspondents were obliged to collect information from the 'G' or 'I' officers of armies or corps, and during offensives this was not always quite convenient. The 'Officiers informateurs' had the situation at their fingers' ends by the time the correspondents called; also, when visitors arrived they were capable of giving a little lecture on the problems of the army front and of imparting to them some military knowledge before they went into the front-line areas. I knew one of these officers, Lieutenant Ménabréa, who was the 'Officier informateur' of the First French Army. I made his acquaintance on the Somme; he was then serving with the Vingtième corps as a chasseur Alpin. He had fought with great gallantry as a light infantryman and had had his hand and arm crumpled up with German machine-gun bullets; he was about forty years old and much better educated than the average Englishman. His lectures on operations were models of precision and clarity, and all that he wrote had the quality of inspiration that comes to a man who has held his life in his hand not once but a hundred times.

My first object, in taking over all the Presses, was to make our system of censorship more elastic. One of our greatest difficulties was to see that the correspondents' despatches tallied, not only with events, but with the official Press Communiqué; for instance, if the correspondents were to announce that Passchendaele was taken

and the communiqué did not mention the fact, the fat would be in the fire. Very often correspondents, calling at a Divisional headquarters on their way back from the front, would be told that such and such a place had fallen into our hands; by the time they reached their billet, the place might have been taken back by the Germans, and by the time again that the communiqué was issued it may have been retaken by our troops. Fortunately, we established very close relations with Major Boraston, the officer at operations advanced G.H.Q. who drafted the communiqué, and thus we synchronised our information. If there were any doubt as to the exact definiteness of the situation, the conditional tense would be used such as 'The position around Passchendaele is not quite clear; the town appears to be in our hands.' As to naming regiments who had done well, we adopted the following plan. Sometimes the mention of Sussex troops, Yorks or Lancs, etc., did not give away the composition of a division as other battalions of these regiments existed in other divisions; in such cases we allowed the naming of these troops to pass; otherwise we waited to hear from divisions themselves whether they had actually lost prisoners to the enemy, in which case no harm could be done. It must not be forgotten that in a long war like this, with everything depending on man power, the order of battle is a very important thing, and, if through lack of care and censorship, information is brought to the knowledge of the enemy, the result is loss of life among our own men. Moreover, as it is against the existing rules of censorship for correspondents to bestow praise or blame, it would be better for the communiqué to give the lead in the matter, which indeed was the case during the last months of the war.

The actual collecting of news on such a vast front was

a very difficult matter; the system of pooling which had been initiated by the British correspondents was now carried a step farther. Correspondents went forth from all four Press units, British, Allied, Neutral, and American, also the operators from the photographic section; some of them visited one corps front, others another; some went to aerodromes, others to tank battalion headquarters or gunner group commanders. Each one brought back some bit of information and, immediately on returning, the officer in charge of each batch of correspondents communicated his story to those on duty in my office either by word of mouth or by telephone, and from my office it went out again to all press units. Thus I became a clearing house for news. The British and American despatches were sent by cable generally from Montreuil, and the signal master undertook to send so many words a day provided the messages were delivered at his office by six o'clock in the evening; they were conveyed by despatch rider from British Press headquarters to Montreuil. The correspondents did not as a rule get back from the front till 2 p.m., and then the despatches had to be sent off between 4 and 4.30; in this brief space of time they had to be written and censored. Luckily the officers under me were first-rate men and could do their job without referring to me, except on rare occasions. The French, Italian, Spanish, and Swiss articles were sent by despatch rider to Paris, and the other neutral articles were sent to London by the King's messenger's bag. It was very important that all despatches, concerning England and France, should appear in London and Paris on the same day. The co-ordination of the supply and transport of news from the front to all parts of the world needed ceaseless attention. I am convinced, however, that it is impossible to dispense

with correspondents in war time; they know the technique of their job, and it should be quite easy for the General Staff to put them on the right lines. The public and the editors of newspapers not unnaturally suspect official eyewitnesses who are soldiers; it is true that the 'officiers informateurs' are soldiers, but they in no way try to keep pace with events and thus compete with correspondents; their duty is rather to make small monthly histories.

These different Press units were situated at different places behind the battle fronts; in normal times the British and American Presses were in the neighbourhood of Hesdin, near St Pol, *i.e.* behind the First Army front, somewhat north of the centre of our line; the Allied Press was at Amiens, *i.e.* behind the southern portion of our line; and the Neutral Press was sometimes near Amiens, sometimes near Hesdin. At all times of the day and night situation reports reached the various Press units, so that the correspondents knew what was happening, and could direct themselves to whatever part of the front that they considered most suitable. If the enemy attacked unexpectedly at any portion of the line it was always possible for me to telephone to one or other of these Press units, and within an hour a correspondent and an officer could reach the scene of action. As a rule the correspondents of the Neutral Press and some of the Americans went for tours up and down the front, along the lines of communication and round the bases, whereas the British and Allied correspondents and the representatives of the American cabling agencies kept themselves in readiness for important events. Supposing that the Germans attacked in the neighbourhood of Cambrai, I would telephone to my officer at Amiens, who would set out at once with a correspondent; he would probably

call at Army H.Q. on his way to get the exact situation, and then he would go on as near as was possible by motor, and finally pick his way on foot to some point of vantage where he could take in the situation, talk to the troops who had been in action, and get some precise news; he would probably call at division and corps on his way back. On reaching his headquarters he would telephone to me a *résumé* of all that he had found out, and the news would thus be disseminated among all the correspondents, who would then have material for writing preliminary despatches. If, while this attack had been going on at Cambrai, there had been another attack in the neighbourhood of Ypres, the British correspondents would deal with that in the same way. On the following day, according to the development of the situation, the correspondents themselves would decide whether to alter their headquarters so as to be nearer the interesting part of the line. Such alterations of the position of Press headquarters involved considerable difficulties, as all the cabling, telephoning, rationing, and billeting arrangements had to be reorganised at a moment's notice. Each Press unit possessed a certain number of cars and despatch riders: The D.R's from the Allied and Neutral Presses would take despatches by road from Amiens to Paris, and the D.R's from the British and American Presses would carry despatches to Montreuil or St Omer, from which places they would be cabled to England, or, in case of long despatches, sent by King's messenger. The photographers' headquarters was situated near Hesdin, where their photographs were developed and sent to Montreuil for censorship: a copy of each photograph was filed at Montreuil and a duplicate sent to England for publication. The British Press was financed by the Newspaper Proprietors' Association, and the other Presses by the

Ministry of Information. These arrangements were moderately simple when the front was stationary or when we were on the retreat, but as soon as a big advance was made, correspondents' cars, motor-cycles, and officers were on the verge of collapse. The colonial correspondents were billeted on their respective corps, but they sent their despatches to me for censorship, and I undertook to forward them either by cable or King's messenger.

My new promotion brought me into close touch with General Charteris, who was at that time B.G.I., that is, the senior officer in the Intelligence branch. He was a man of great nimbleness of mind, and certainly the most intelligent officer that was ever my chief.[1] He was not popular with armies on account of his extraordinary optimism; this optimism was specially trying during the Flanders offensive of 1917, for the intense misery of the men permeated even the staffs of armies. It was often my lot to dine with him on the same day as I had been on the Pilkem Ridge or the Westhoek Ridge, and I used to give him the most emphatic descriptions of the wretched conditions. This misery and depression was much more noticeable in the army of General Gough, and it is not too much to say that the vast majority of all ranks under his command had their tails right down. I used to try and drive some of this sense of tragedy into the temper of General Charteris, but I was not altogether successful; he used to say to me, without sufficient conviction, I thought, that war was an ugly thing. When he was removed from the Intelligence branch at the beginning of 1918, torrents of criticism rained on his head, much of which he did not deserve. He had been the chief agent in creating the finest intelligence machine in any

[1] This in no way reflects on his successor, General Cox, who, to my great regret, refused to keep the Press under his command.

army in the world, and when that machine put before him the most priceless information, his deductions and conclusions were always slightly too favourable. He knew exactly the requirements of the Press, and my work with him in this respect was a delight and pleasure. He was a much-travelled man; he had known 'many men and cities'; he was witty and widely read, and he was infinitely less narrow than the average soldier. He served his chief with chivalrous devotion, and when his downfall came he took it like a man.

Having put my house in order as far as possible, I now began to renew my acquaintance with battlefields. Here is an extract of a letter :—

'29.9.17.—The fighting on the 26th was unusually bloody and fierce; the enemy attacked us the day before, starting his attack at 6 a.m. with enormous concentration of artillery. The fighting went on practically the whole of the 25th and by about 6 p.m. we had driven him off, and our line was much as it was at the beginning of the day. Nevertheless, even in those places where the German attack was fiercest, the units in line were able to prepare, assemble, organise, and attack at dawn. By the evening of the 27th every single objective was attained. Ask any soldier, who knows what modern battles are, what he thinks of this. It is almost incredible. The Germans have got a record concentration of guns up here and nearly all these guns were put on to one little knoll; our troops bore that hell of shelling and then attacked with success the next day.

'I got up on the Westhoek Ridge between 5 and 6 p.m. of the 26th; it was the moment of German counter-attacks. Our aeroplanes came over like startled plovers and gave us warning in plenty of time. We knew the

only places where the enemy could assemble; what did he get? Full measure—running over. It is small wonder that the German prisoners look like the fox after the hounds have got at him.

Coming back I saw a burying party in charge of a non-commissioned officer (at Givenchy we used to call him the ghoul N.C.O.) They had just come from the ground where the fiercest fighting was the day before; they had buried 580 Germans to 120 of our own and yet we think that the enemy losses were much heavier over on his side of the line.

The battlefield was an extraordinary sight; the slopes of the ridge are as bare as the Mokhattam hills above Cairo; a few gaunt stumps surround the pools. The transport was rushing forward amid bursting shells—tongues of flame from every fold in the ground—the piercing noise—the acid smell of high-explosive and, above all, the sweet sickly stink that is the last legacy of frightfulness that Germany's 'unbeatable' soldiers leave to this world.

From the ridge we saw Zonnebeke at our feet and Passchendaele on the hill in front of us—four miles behind us was Ypres. From the ridge of this recently captured ground the Germans had bullied us for two years; all that they are now getting is not enough for them, even though each prisoner wants peace.

I see in this week's *Punch* there is a column headed 'An Extraordinary Day.' One extraordinary day is when a staff officer goes up to the front and does not have a narrow escape. It *was* an extraordinary day and I did have plenty of luck, and the sweat was rolling off me and my two companions. What of those poor chaps who are in it day and night?

My old battalion was in the show and did magnificently,

establishing posts beyond the objectives and repelling five counter-attacks, and yet one cannot mention them by name without giving away the order of battle. What a pity we have not got the Fouragère in our army. The Germans still fight well at moments and in places; in the last battle there was a great deal of hand-to-hand fighting, but most of the prisoners are too old or too young; one sees several thin ones, and a thin German is almost unrecognisable as a German.'

This account is typical of all the attacks that went on all through that Autumn right up to the capture of Passchendaele, which fell to the credit of the Canadians. It rained ceaselessly, and it would have been difficult to walk over such ground even if there were no enemy, but added to the bad weather we had the *whole* of the German army. Every yard of progress was at the cost of countless precious lives. Was it worth it?

After the capture of Passchendaele I went on leave and so missed General Byng's attack on Cambrai, greatly to my regret. There was no stopping of leave as is usually the case during big attacks, and in this, as in all other respects, the guarding of the secret was perfect. General Byng accomplished that which no other General had been able to do; he attacked without any previous bombardment; consequently the ground was not churned up and the guns and supplies could follow the infantry at a reasonable pace. Had the offensive succeeded completely it would have cleared out the pocket made by the Sensée and the Scarpe and we should have held a line which would not have been too much exposed to counter-attack. It was within an ace of complete success, but it just failed and, though our gains were considerable, I think it would have been better to retire to a suitable

line rather than to try to remain in such a sharp salient. There was no thought, at such a late season of the year, of attempting a complete break through. The conception of the attack was the most brilliant thing that had as yet happened in the war; there was a formidable concentration of tanks, and to concentrate tanks secretly is a big achievement in itself, because they make a prodigious noise. That part of the Hindenburg line which was captured was specially designed as an anti-tank trench, and here is an instance where Hindenburg and Ludendorff failed absolutely, for the tanks went through it 'comme une lettre à la poste.' Many of the tanks carried small pliable bridges, made of fascines, which were completely successful as a pathway to infantry and light vehicles. This attack was similar to General Gough's attack at Bullecourt in the spring of the same year, only it was successful instead of being a complete failure. Further, it caused the German infantry to regard the tank as an engine of terror for evermore. A German prisoner said, 'Our papers at home make fun of the tanks, but we in the front line know better. We are terrified of them.' One German battery commander on the Flesquières ridge fought magnificently and succeeded in putting several tanks out of action; eventually all his guns were scuppered and he was killed. His heroic defence probably just saved the Germans from disaster; it is such action in warfare that changes history, when a man or a handful of men go on fighting against heavy odds to the bitter end without a chance of saving their lives or of wearing the halo of glory that is their due.

I arrived back in France the day that the Germans made their counter-attacks; they had concentrated a great mass of divisions in a very short time, and I think their extreme rapidity surprised our General Staff to a

certain extent. Our troops in line had been warned that they would be attacked, but the Germans, copying our methods, dispensed with a long preliminary bombardment. They kept the heads of our infantrymen down with low flying aeroplanes, which machine-gunned the front-line trenches. Considering the sharpness of our salient it was not surprising that the enemy, breaking through on the southern flank, should soon be threatening our Infantry Brigade headquarters and guns. I lost no time in getting to the scene of action and here is an extract of a letter written immediately afterwards :—

'2.12.17.—The Boche put up a terrific counter-offensive against our Cambrai salient; he tried to pinch the head of the salient by attacking both sides of the neck. He threw in an immense number of divisions—in fact, it was the biggest attack we have had against our lines since the second battle of Ypres. It was naturally to be expected that he would counter-attack, but these enormous numbers are quite out of the ordinary; it was an anxious day, but the whole of our defence was remarkable for, on the south, he clearly got through and for a time there was a complete severance of communication between staffs and regiments, and yet never for a moment was there panic or loss of common sense. Our counter-attacks were extraordinarily prompt and beautifully led. Since the 20th we have become acquainted with elements of twenty different divisions on the offensive front. Compare this with the number of German divisions which were used against the Italians. The Germans were not left long enough in conquered territory to get away many of our guns. In the north he practically had no success at all, for though he pierced our line for a second he was immediately outdriven. The gunners say that

they could fire into the brown, it was not necessary to select targets, the enemy formations being so dense; in fact, it was like the early days of the war when they attacked arm-in-arm.

To-day I have been up into the salient and have seen all the famous spots, Bourlon Wood, Masnières, le canal de l'Escaut, Rumilly, Villers Plouich, etc. Bourlon Wood is much bigger than I expected from the map, and it is right at the crest of the ridge and visible for miles around. The general lie of the land consists of a series of crests and valleys with little villages dotted here, there, and everywhere. They are almost intact and the church spires are clearly visible through the winter twigs. The soil is up to now untroubled with excessive shell-fire—the grass is fresh and springy and all surface water drains off quickly. What a pleasant contrast to Flanders! I could see Cambrai through my glasses as plain as could be wished —a very large town full of churches. The old 'no-man's-land' between the old front lines hardly had a shell hole; it must have been a delightfully quiet sector before the push. There was our modest thin weedy line of wire and there were the four sumptuous rusty walls of wire in front of Hindenburg's ditch. The trench itself is immensely wide; no doubt with the idea of being a hopeless obstacle for tanks. It is a wavy line like a communication trench, but it is not traversed. The fire step is about two yards wide; the dug-outs are many and deep and well strutted with wood, but there is no concrete anywhere in the part in which I was. It must have been an extremely comfortable, pleasant trench to live in, and was designed for this purpose more than anything else, no doubt. What a wonderful change for the Germans after spending a winter in the valley of the Ancre. However, if it had been bombarded with heavy artillery it

would not have given very much protection. How nice to think that it failed absolutely in the respect in which it was meant to be most successful, namely, as an obstacle to tanks. I followed their broad and spacious paths through the rows of wire. Their success was absolute, and there is no doubt that their achievements on the 20th were completely unforeseen by the enemy. That day is a red letter day in the tactics of this war.

To-day the enemy was doing all the shelling; he was indulging in what is called 'harassing fire,' dealing them out in fours all over the place. He was firing from north and south across the neck of the salient. How funny the swish of shells sounds again after this interval; they appear to me more deadly than the most fiery glances of the great ladies of London. (Did I tell you that at my last visit to the Opera a fair Countess beckoned to me from a box, where she was sitting with other great ladies, and she said to me:—"Now tell me—is Mr Mozart a Frenchman?") I was glad to keep to the trench because of them, and also still more because of the piercing wind, which made me feel naked for all my buckskin coat. You ask for the human touch. Here it is. Out here we use traffic-control men at cross-roads; these men are in every respect like London policemen except that they add saluting to their other accomplishments. They hold up their hand to traffic coming from one direction and they wave vehicles forward coming from another direction. During this famous German counter-offensive on the 30th, the Boche reached Gouzeaucourt as our fellows left it. These last, looking over their shoulders to get an idea of how close the Boche was, had the pleasing sight of the traffic-control man at the cross-roads of Gouzeaucourt with his arm up, barring the German advance till the road was clear of our men. We know that the Germans

are a well-disciplined people, and it is evident that they respected the arm of municipal law. No doubt the reason that they left the town in less orderly fashion was that this poor policeman was probably killed or taken prisoner.

I can't quite forgive myself for having missed the offensive; it was admirably devised for my kind of job, and such a suitable country.

In our attack and the German counter-attack there was, as there always is, a mixture of qualities of fighting—some magnificent and some otherwise. In the exchange of pawns we are left with the bulge on the Boche—especially in the matter of killing; in his counter-attack he assembled in the open in full view of our gunners, who on many occasions fired over open sights. In the course of this fighting we have so far 'amused' twenty-seven German divisions.'

At this particular moment it was most important that the Germans should not have a lot of spare divisions to send to the Italian front. After this fighting matters quieted down on the Western front, but one had an uncomfortable feeling that we had missed our good chances and that the initiative had once again passed to the enemy. We ought to have had the enemy down and out at the end of 1916; we had not got the punch because we had not got the Generalissimo. In 1917 we fought him practically alone, and he had hung on, though he had taken plenty of punishment. Now he had managed to get rid of the Russians, and we saw clearly that he would have a try to knock us out with the help of his trained divisions from Russia before we could sufficiently train the troops arriving from America. We knew that the next few rounds could not be ours; how were we going to take our punishment? We shall see.

CHAPTER VI

REORGANISATION

TOWARDS the end of November, 1917, I had an interesting interview with Maréchal Joffre; I was a friend of his A.D.C., Lieutenant François de Tessan, and he told me that, if I cared to let him know when I was next in Paris, the Maréchal would be very pleased to see me. I had always wished to make his acquaintance since I heard his famous remark about the Scotch uniforms. 'Pour la guerre, *non*. Pour l'amour, *bon*.' Joffre had just come back from America where his tour had been a triumphant success. Monsieur Viviani had accompanied him, and it was common knowledge that between him and Joffre no great amount of love was lost. Viviani was much annoyed when he got to the States to find that every one had heard of Joffre and that no one had heard of him; to create a reputation, he had but his eloquence, and this was lost on a people who were ignorant of his language. In the vast audiences that he addressed every day, the only person who was moved by the magic of his words was Joffre, who could never keep dry-eyed when Viviani described the glories of the Marne and Verdun. The situation must have been charming—Joffre annoyed at this 'd—d civilian' attempting to share in his honour and yet being moved to tears by his eloquence. Viviani being mad at finding himself very much a second fiddle, and therefore throwing his utmost passion into his speeches only to succeed in moving the one man who could

understand him and whom he probably wished at the bottom of the sea.

The lustre of Joffre's glory has for the moment been partially eclipsed by the brilliance of Foch's achievements, but I cannot but think that history will give him a very high place among the great soldiers of the world. Even at this critical moment, though he had no official command, he was again giving proof of his prodigious common sense. So many military experts were expressing their opinions in the sense that America should put forth all her energy in order to give the Allies food, clothing, munitions and ships, but Joffre saw rightly that what we wanted above everything was men. Having this opinion, his advice to Americans was invaluable, and naturally they gave him a tremendous welcome. We all know how marvellously hospitable Americans are to all strangers, and one can easily imagine to what extent they killed the fatted calf for Joffre, and I am told that he never refused anything—either food or drink—at any hour of the day or night.

I saw him at the end of his day, which had been spent (entirely, I believe) in interviewing American officers whom he could not understand and who could not understand him; possibly this accounts for his extreme cordiality to me. I expected to have about ten minutes with him at the outside, what time would be spent firing off sumptuous phrases always ending and beginning most correctly with 'Monsieur le Maréchal'; but it was quite otherwise. He seemed so pleased to be understood and to understand that I felt almost as if I were talking to my own brother, in fact too much so. The truth is that I have lived many years of my life in the company of French people whom I know extremely intimately, and therefore the habit of 'tu-toyéing' comes horribly natural

to me. I never thought that this vice would attack me in the presence of a 'Beau Maréchal de France,' but the transition from what I had expected to what actually happened—in fact, the transition from the awkward to the easy, occurred so rapidly that there . . . I am afraid that some of my sentences were punctuated by these emblems of tender familiarity. He paid great tribute to the new British armies, and he said that he thought we could not have achieved so much but for our habits of sport; he thought that the American soldier would be the same and prove himself a splendid fighter. I asked him why the Belgians had never attacked, and he said that he thought that so long as King Albert was in any doubt as to whether he would recover that part of his country which was under German domination, he would not like to sacrifice any part of the male population that was left to him. It will be remembered that, as soon as the complete route of the Germans became probable, the Belgians attacked and fought with conspicuous gallantry. He spoke with affection and admiration of Lord Kitchener. As I talked with him I felt more than ever what a curse it is having to depend on photography for our impressions of human beings; the lens of a camera has no inner eye and therefore it is always false. Joffre is as different from his photographs as chalk from cheese; his hair and eyebrows are snow-white, and his eyes both in colour and expression are curious, rare, subtle, and mysterious. It is true he looks good, but above all things he looks full of ruse and subtlety. There is nothing of the 'bon bourgeois' in his actual appearance, and in his photographs there is nothing else; his distinction of manner is worthy of the great traditions of his race. Maréchal Joffre once went to stay at the home of this same Lieutenant de Tessan, which is situated at Meaux; as Tessan

was showing Joffre round his garden, they came upon a magnificent view of the river. 'What is that river?' said Joffre. 'Monsieur le Maréchal, it is the Marne, and we speak of it with great respect in this household.' Then Joffre, 'It is indeed a fine river!'

During the winter months a period of reorganisation set in both at the back of the front and on the front itself. General Kiggell, who had been Haig's chief of staff, and General Charteris, who had been head of the Intelligence branch, were removed to other appointments. Both these distinguished officers were, to my mind, terribly anti-French, and they influenced the Chief not a little. General Charteris was above all things a business man, and no true business man could possibly admire the French, for in this respect they are a couple of hundred years behind the times. Kiggell objected to our Allies on the ground that they weren't gentlemen—especially their politicians. That a man like Kiggell should harmonise with a man like Thomas was an impossibility. Personally I hate the word 'gentleman'; you may take it as the highest term of praise that can be given to a human being, embodying all the aristocratic qualities of body, mind, and soul, but in the Army and in English life generally it is applied to those who dress conventionally, and who are lacking in all power of thought, imagination, or initiative. I always used to say 'give me Jews and not gentlemen, and we will win the war.' Certain it is that we had many magnificent officers who, by no flight of imagination, could be described as gentlemen. Whenever I had the honour to dine with the Chief I used invariably to talk to him of my deep admiration for the French; I used to describe to him the French regimental officers that I had seen in the line, who had been wounded again and again and yet persistently refused any jobs,

even advancement, that took them away from their men. I pointed out to him that it was impossible to move about in that portion of France occupied by our armies without seeing everywhere evidence of an amazing civilisation. I thought then and still think, and probably shall always think, that the best French brain is the best thing of its kind in the world; also I came across thousands of Frenchmen during the war who burned with a white fever heat of patriotism that should have satisfied even the conscience of a Scotsman. I must say that the Chief was always full of respect for my admiration for the French, though his staff scowled. This anti-French atmosphere was fostered and kept active by the attitude of the Prime Minister, who admired French military genius at the expense of our own soldiers; Lloyd George has never been a soldier or a sailor, and he has nothing in common with them; and it was an enormous advantage when Clémenceau came to lead the whole alliance, and the Chief could be in contact with a politician who was familiar with military principles that are common to all nationalities.

. . . . . .

General Kiggell was replaced by General Lawrence; Lawrence had been in the same regiment as Haig, and had left the army at the time when Haig was given command of the regiment. Since that time he had made a success of a business career, and it was not unnatural

that Haig should wish to have his old friend by his side. The appointment was universally approved, and I never once heard one word of hostile criticism of Lawrence till the end of the war. He had been a Divisional Commander, and his division had had some of the worst fighting on the Flanders front. Had he said that war was an ugly thing, he would have had a right to say so; his face had that glorious sternness that comes to the warrior who knows to the full what humanity is called upon to suffer during such a war.

General Charteris was replaced by General Cox—Cox was quite a young man and a brilliant expert at Ia work; Ia means that vast and complicated organisation that goes to establish the enemy's order of battle. It is one of the most important things in war, for if you know the movements and numbers of enemy divisions you have the main clue to his intentions. General Cox knew perfectly that this was one of the most critical moments of the war, and that if he succeeded in telling the Chief accurately the movements of German divisions from the Russian front and the manner of their concentration behind our battle front he would be rendering him an incalculable service. Therefore he wished to get rid of all encumbrances from the Intelligence branch that might possibly interfere with his main work. He was terrified lest, in the middle of some critical situation on the front, he should find himself swooped down upon by the Northcliffes or the Beaverbrooks and called to task for some error in censorship. Therefore he got rid of the Press and handed it over to another branch. I don't blame him; it is a prickly business and it requires uninterrupted attention; but I regretted his decision, because he was a wonderfully clever man—young, alert, simple, in fact an ideal officer to be under. His work during the

early spring and early summer of 1918 was marvellous, and I am sure that his intelligence summaries during this period will become models for the staff college students of many generations to come. His forecasts were absolutely correct, and his work was much superior to anything of the same sort in the French army at that time. Unluckily he was drowned while bathing, and so we lost one of the best brains at G.H.Q., but by the time of his death the most critical situation was over, the tide had turned, and our victory was certain and inevitable. General Cox during these few months gained an immortal place in the history of this war, and there is not the slightest doubt that his clear-sighted brain and well-balanced judgments helped enormously towards the final complete rout of the German army.

My particular department now underwent the most unholy reorganisation. The ideal of the British army seems to be this—'when you reorganise, put in ten senior staff officers where one junior one would do.' Whole coveys of Colonels turned up, peers among them, none of whom had seen any regimental service during the war. I got on perfectly well severally with each one of them, and I have nothing but pleasant thoughts and guileless gratitude for their admirable manners, but their very charm at times became a nuisance. Surely in such a war the liaison between Press and operations is a very important thing; the officer in charge of the Press should not be a small item in a vast department, he should be immediately responsible to the Chief of Staff. In the palmy days of General Charteris I never occupied more of his time than about one quarter of an hour per week, but that quarter of an hour was of vital importance. One of the hardest things to bear in the army is to see an organisation which is largely the fruit of your own brain given over to the

merciless benevolence of a dozen G.S.O.I.'s. This also was a period of frightful importance for me; one of our armies was about to meet with hopeless defeat; our allies would be cursing us; the neutrals would be cynical, and our friends at home would be in a panic. Never before had it been so necessary for me to be free to take rapid decisions, and to have, if necessary, immediate access to the fountain head of information, instead of which there was immediately over me a civilian colonel to act as a buffer between the General Staff and the big proprietors of newspapers, and a military colonel to tell him how to salute and to show him how to write 'passed to you please for necessary action' on his minutes. We were under a branch of G.H.Q. called Staff duties; now whatever else the Press is, it certainly is not an item of Staff duties. General Dawnay presided over this branch, but he planed too high to have any sympathy with the Press or knowledge of the psychology of the fighting man; to him newspapers were a morass of inaccurate information and bad writing, and he took no interest in them. He was also not sufficiently familiar with current operations to be able to lecture to correspondents with advantage. Our section of Staff duties was called C.P. (Censorship and Press). I used to say, 'Put it up in the window and the van will come round, but it is not the right way to transport stop-press telegrams.'

While these terrible things (to me at any rate) were happening at G.H.Q., even worse things occurred on the front. It will be remembered that since April to November, 1917, we had fought uninterruptedly. Moreover, we had practically fought the Germans single-handed. The French had carried the whole weight of the war on their backs up to 1916, and it was quite right and fair that we should bear the main burden as soon as we could;

but during 1917 we had done so, and no army has ever faced an enemy with greater courage and determination. Now, however, we were very tired, and our losses had been tremendous; also only a bare trickle of reinforcements was coming from England. In these circumstances to extend our line and take over more front from the French, who had been resting, seemed pure madness. I know that Haig protested against this with the utmost vigour, but our Prime Minister was deaf to his wise counsels; furthermore, he kept in England a vast number of men. We know that the men were there, for they came out later on; we know also that Haig gave accurate warning of the German concentration; further, he prophesied that the big attack would come in the Cambrai-St Quentin area and at the junction of our weak attenuated army with the French. Why, therefore, the Government kept all those men in England is a mystery for which hitherto there has been no explanation. Certain it is that the complete disruption of the British Empire (so much wished for by Mr Blunt) was 'moins cinq,' as French sportsmen say. What made the situation even more alarming was that, General Gough was kept in com mand of our Fifth Army and that the Fifth Army was covering that portion of the front that was most threatened. After his failure at Bullecourt in the spring of 1917 and his failure in Flanders in the autumn of the same year, it was not likely that the officers under his command should have much confidence in him. Our line extended to Barisis. It was a terrifying thing to read in the Intelligence summary of the new divisions arriving daily from Russia, and then go up to the line and see how frightfully thin our men were on the ground. What is the use of the finest military position in the world if you have got no men to hold it with, and ours was not the finest position in the world, for the

Germans had seen to that in their 1916 retreat to the Hindenburg line. This retreat had three objects—one, to shorten their line and to avoid our excessive shell fire; two, to spoil our already prepared 1917 offensive; three, to 'reculer pour mieux sauter,' that is, a suitable spot was chosen where troops could be concentrated secretly. This retreat therefore succeeded to a great extent in all three capacities, and it must be considered now as one of the wisest moves ever carried out by the Germans. Not only did they have great railway facilities for concentrating troops in this area, but the lie of ground immediately behind their line favoured concealment; thirdly, if they pierced our lines they would have the old Somme battlefields to fight over, where were no civilians to hamper their progress.

At the same time as the Germans were preparing this offensive in the Cambrai-St Quentin area, they were also preparing an offensive in the Champagne district, and the French were convinced that this was to be the great *coup*. The situation therefore at the beginning of 1918 was this—there were the tired British armies unreinforced with recruits from home and strung out to an impossible extent, the weakest army covering one of the weakest spots where the defences were totally inadequate. The forecast of the British Staff was that the attack would be in the Cambrai-St Quentin area, and the British reserves were disposed accordingly. The forecast of the French Staff was that the main attack would be in Champagne, and the French reserves were disposed accordingly. Hence on the one side you had two armies divergent in opinion with their reserves, disposed solely with regard to their own half front. On the other side you had the whole German army reinforced with their divisions from the Russian front, where they

had been having a bit of a rest cure, under one united command, ready to drive down the Somme and to cleave the British and French armies asunder.

The activity of the Chief at this time was prodigious; he and his chief of staff were round the line almost every day. His anxiety must have been terrible, for each visit to the front must have convinced him more and more that we were too much strung out, and therefore our chance of making a good defence was very small.

The energies of the Fifth Army were mostly employed in strengthening their defences; possibly this was a mistake. It may have been wiser to foresee that under such circumstances the enemy were bound to penetrate, and that a state of open warfare was sure to occur, and therefore to spend all spare time in training the men to a war of movement. It's easy to say this now.

CHAPTER VII

LUDENDORFF'S OFFENSIVE

IMMEDIATELY before the German attack, I was again called upon to do a bit of press camouflage. Our operations branch wanted to delay this attack for about six days, and therefore I gave out to the press that we knew the exact sector of attack and the precise date. Whether this information had any effect on the German higher command I don't know, but the delay did happen. Frederick the Great has said that it is pardonable to be beaten, but absolutely unpardonable to be surprised; it is certain that we were in no sense surprised. We were very unlucky, as we had always been, in the matter of weather. A period of uninterrupted fine weather set in, with cold nights and morning frosts; the contrast between the day and the night temperatures produced thick fogs which lasted till midday, and this favoured the attack tremendously. It must be remembered that all through 1917 there had been a steady evolution of tactics which was bound sooner or later to change the nature of the War. To begin with, set lines of trenches had been abandoned and forward areas were proteced by small posts, and the theory of defence in depth had been put into practice. Then counter-battery work had undergone a great change owing to the immense quantity of gas shells. Aeroplane photographs located the positions of the enemy's guns, and before an attack these positions were saturated with gas. Then gunners had learned to fire

accurate barrages by the map alone, without previous registration; thus masses of guns could be brought up just before the attack and never fire a shot till the day itself. Then the introduction of the sensitive fuse had made it possible to cut wire in a very short time. The old shell used to make a huge crater and throw up a quantity of earth and do little damage; now this new one had a lateral burst and brushed barb-wire away as though with a broom. Finally, there was the tank, but this arm was never developed in the German army; Ludendorff has told us that he had not enough iron to go in for tanks. Thank God for this, for it might have changed the German partial victory into a complete one. In every other respect they had brought these up-to-date methods to the greatest perfection, and they had put them to the test on the Italian front. Perhaps one of our faults of arrogance during the war was not to study the causes and effects of things on other fronts. When the Italians got beaten it was at once a case of 'the good old macaronis are on the run. What price the ice-cream merchants!' and yet in the initial stages of this spring the roast beef of old England was on the run also.

Extract from letter:—

'30.3.18.—On the 21st of March the morning was unusually foggy; the enemy counterbeat our batteries with gas shells and put a good accurate barrage on our front line; it was well done but it had nothing miraculous. This process always wipes out the front lines and the defenders do not have much of a chance, but the few survivors do expect to hold up the attack with machine-gun fire; unfortunately, this mist prevented our machine-gunners and field-gunners from seeing their targets. In many

parts our wire was intact, but, while the enemy was wading through it, cutting it as he went, we could not see him. The second day the mist was even worse, and he was able to pour great masses of men into our positions; a large number got killed, no doubt, but, as in these big pheasant shoots, a huge number were missed. He did his utmost to deceive us as to the sector in which he was going to attack, but in vain. He kept an old Landwehr division holding the line down by La Fère right up to the last minute before the attack. The one point in which he differs from ourselves is that he uses human meat as we use munitions; he pours them into battle, just as he did in 1914, in formations of incredible density; it is in itself an alarming thing to see the whole landscape alive with gray maggots; his concentration worked out at five men per yard on a front of over eighty kilometres. This procedure is like declaring "No trumps"; he leads off with his strongest suit, and in piling trick after trick he produces a most alarming impression; the question is, will he get the odd? From the time the enemy penetrated our line, the whole type of warfare changed; he dispensed with artillery, and simply covered his advance with machine-gun scouts. He gave his men two days' rations and passed division through division. In parts our troops were well handled, and in front of each centre of resistance the enemy lost heavily. It was impossible to relieve our men in such kind of warfare, and if they did not at any time get rushed it was due to very fine discipline; the Germans in their Press allude to this over and over again, 'The British soldier is a very brave man.' If we are not quite so military as the German it is for the same reason that we are not quite so musical; we have not wanted to be soldiers (none less than I). The average German soldier at this stage of the war is

not an 'homme de courage,' but his experts, such as machine-gunners, trench-mortar men, etc., are wonderful; his officers are still awfully good, and the great stupid mass with its iron discipline does exactly what it is told to do.'

In truth, the German machine-gunners fought marvellously well; their system was to try and penetrate, and whenever they found our resistance feeble, they put up Verey lights, and the common infantry followed. This scientific method of infiltration made the defenders think all the time that their flanks were being turned; whereas, really, it is impossible in such warfare to have your flanks turned without also turning the flanks of the enemy. Such infiltration occurred nearly always along the valleys, and our hill-tops and crests were possibly abandoned too readily. Another fault on our side was that our corps and divisional headquarters moved too rapidly to the rear; corps pulled division back, and division brigade, and brigade battalion, and battalion pulled company back, so that the pace of our retreat was more regulated by the senior formations in the rear than by the enemy in front. The sense of being abandoned by the staff is an awful thing for the regiment to feel. Those who fought best were the cavalry and the horse gunners (especially the horse gunners) and the Canadian motor machine-gun section.

After the first two days it was obvious that Gough's Fifth Army was going too fast; Byng's Third Army was fighting wonderfully well, but then the odds against the two armies were not the same. General Gough's fourteen divisions and three cavalry divisions had to fight forty-eight German divisions; the odds of three to one are a bit too stiff. Gough's divisions were unused to open

warfare, and they had little or no confidence in their army commander, and yet on this occasion he proved himself a great man. He never got rattled; he kept his head and he made the utmost use of his scanty forces. It was his idea to make an independent force composed of the sweepings of his army (afterwards known as Carey's force), such as those undergoing instruction at schools, cooks, batmen, light car drivers, etc. I saw this force in the trenches just outside the village of La Motte; they had no company rolls, and the officers were completely unknown to the men, and yet they had some Lewis guns, and I suppose at some little distance they were indistinguishable from a real fighting force.

The situation on the days of March 25th, 26th, and 27th was exceedingly alarming, and it seemed as though the habit of retreat had come upon us and would never cease. On one occasion I was going out at night to get news from the Fifth Army and I found an awful block in the traffic at the level crossing on the Amiens-Peronne road. There were about thirty trains, with steam up, quite unable to move as the line farther up had been destroyed by a bomb from an aeroplane; on the road itself there were miles of traffic of all description, including refugees. An army in retreat is a horrible sight. With the help of some A.S.C. men I manged to uncouple the last two carriages of a train and pushed them back so as to let the stream of traffic through. Each night the moon shone with odious brilliance and there was no wind; the Boche bombed our rear communications 'somethink chronic' as the Tommies say. The night the enemy almost got to Villers-Bretonneux, he sent over to Amiens countless bombing machines in relays; it is not a large town and the chances of being hit were unpleasantly great; his airmen also flew down the streets

firing their machine-guns from a very low altitude. I was staying at the Allied Press Château at the time and houses on either side of us were completely destroyed. It was an unpleasant experience, but the nerviness of the situation was greatly relieved by one of my officers, Capt. Johnstone Douglas, who had a beautiful voice and sang us his most exquisite songs with intense feeling. Every now and then there would be an ear-splitting crash followed by a cascade of broken glass; at these moments Douglas would make a magnificent crescendo, and really I don't think he ever sang so well before. His performance, however, rather scandalised the Havas correspondent, who had gone to bed early; he thrust his pyjamaed figure into the drawing-room for a moment on his way to the cellar and shouted 'Dire que des gens osent chanter quand d'autres ont peur.' We noticed also that our Portuguese correspondent stationed himself continually under the framework of doorways; at first this inadequate protection puzzled us, but suddenly we remembered that it is the best place during an earthquake and probably he must have had some experience of earthquakes in Portugal. We tried to tempt him from his shelter by standing glasses of whisky on the table in the middle of the room; he was extremely partial to this drink, and when the whisky mounted up in the glass to more than half-way, he would make a dash for it, greatly to our delight.

I thought at this crisis that the Foreign Press was of even greater importance than the British. Never shall I forget the admirable behaviour of the French correspondents during these terrible days; they were out at the very front all day and every day. They saw the magnificent fighting of our horse-gunners, and the admirable discipline that was maintained during every

stage of the retreat, and they gave most excellent descriptions to their newspapers. They also went for flying visits to Paris, and were emphatic in their praise of our men to their editors; already there was beginning to be quite a serious anti-British feeling in France. 'Les Anglais f——t le camp,' was on every one's lips, but these correspondents never for a minute thought of their own career or their own popularity; they knew that our chaps were doing their best and fighting against fearful odds, so they told the truth and went on telling it in spite of the scoldings they got from their editors.

I was more than ever convinced that nothing should be kept hidden from the foreign correspondents during this defeat; I gave out every detail of numbers on both sides and of the possibility of the extent of the disaster. I insisted on their writing well-documented stuff and cutting out all vague descriptions of gallantry and heroism. Even the neutrals I took much more into my confidence than ever before, and their loyalty to our arms came largely, I am sure, from their certainty that there was not a shadow of deception in our attitude towards them.

The curious thing is that, though our men were on the run in the wrong direction, their spirits were nothing like as low as when they were crawling forward in the Flanders mud of 1917—anything to be out of trenches, out of mud, and out of devastated areas; many of them were quite unaccustomed to moving warfare and were below their proper form under the novel conditions. What is more curious is that the German officers, who said quite frankly that it was 'der Tag,' were not in high spirits and were not at all convinced that the offensive could be completely successful. The average German officer is such a good soldier that he knows by instinct which

side to back. The soldier who has been through many years of war does not want victory so much as peace. He no longer believes that he is defending his hearth and home; if his life is given to prove the genius of Ludendorff or Hindenburg, that is no consolation to him. Throughout these terrible days General Gough stuck to his impossible task like a great soldier and, having given proof (possibly for the first time during the war) of remarkable qualities, he was removed from his command.

By chance I passed through Doullens on the 26th of March—the day of the great conference that brought about the appointment of the Generalissimo, who achieved the most colossal victory in all history. The mixture of statesmen in civilian clothes and glittering generals in their 'képis galonnés,' as they dashed by in Staff cars, filled me with alarm; it was like a consultation of famous surgeons round the body of a dying man. Would the liberty of the world survive the next few days; it did not then seem possible. Of course, I did not find out what had happened for some time after, but we have Foch's own word for it (in his preface to Sir Douglas Haig's despatches) that at this conference Haig played a very fine and a very unselfish part.

The Germans had now driven the point of their advance down the Somme to the outskirts of Villers-Bretonneux; this gave them a very pronounced salient, and it was obvious that, if he wished to accomplish his purpose, Ludendorff must widen the base of his triangle; it seemed certain, therefore, that he would attack in the neighbourhood of Montdidier on the French front and in the neighbourhood of Arras on the British front. The Arras attack was fully expected by us; in fact it arrived exactly according to forecast on the 28th of March. The ground in this part of the front is magnificent for defence; gentle

folding slopes provide ideal positions for machine-guns. Thank heaven on this day there was no mist; our gunners got the chance of a lifetime and they made full use of it. All through the early part of this summer there were certain days of vital importance, and if these days had all gone against us, where should we be now? On the first of these important days (the 21st of March) the enemy had the mist and he scored a great success; this 28th of March was the next vital day, there was no mist and the enemy took a terrible punishment. Later on he succeeded against the Portuguese and then got held up by Givenchy and the Forest of Nieppe; there were two big battles for Givenchy and he twice failed, but *if* he had not . . . ! Later still he succeeded in taking Kemmel and then was held up in front of the other hills of the same range. So, throughout this period, one knew that certain points must be held at all costs, and the excitement was almost unbearable.

The enemy used the same methods as on the 21st—gas shells for counter-battery work, a trench-mortar barrage to cover the advance of his infantry who were again in dense formations. Some of the prisoners that we captured announced that their objective was St Pol; they had two pair of boots and rations for four days. All day long the gray masses advanced to the attack, and all day long we pumped lead into them. Of course, our losses were considerable; I saw a colonel of a battalion of the London Rifle Brigade; he started the day with 560 rifles and a normal strength of officers; when he was relieved by the Canadians he was reduced to sixty and two officers. He said that he did not know what killing was till that day, that most of his casualties were wounded and not killed, and that the Canadians had shaken the hands of his men (Londoners) as they took

over the line after dark. What the German losses were it is impossible to guess, and their gains were practically nothing.

It seemed probable that the Canadians would become involved in the fighting in the neighbourhood of the Vimy Ridge, and General Currie (the Canadian corps commander) issued his famous order of the day. I give it here alongside of its French translation; it seems to me that this is one of the rare instances of a piece of prose conceived in English being better when realised in French.

SPECIAL ORDER BY LIEUTENANT-GENERAL SIR ARTHUR W. CURRIE, K.C.B., K.C.M.G., Commanding Canadian Corps.

27th March, 1918.

In an endeavour to reach an immediate decision the enemy has gathered all his forces and struck a mighty blow at the British Army. Overwhelmed by sheer weight of numbers the British Divisions in the line between the Scarpe and the Oise have fallen back fighting hard, steady, and undismayed.

Measures have been taken successfully to meet this German onslaught. The French have gathered a powerful Army, commanded by a most able and trusted leader, and this Army is now moving swiftly to our help. Fresh British Divisions are being thrown in. The Canadians are soon to be engaged. Our Motor Machine-Gun Brigade has already played a most gallant part and once again covered itself with glory.

Looking back with pride on the unbroken record of your glorious achievements, asking you to realise that to-day the fate of the British Empire hangs in the balance, I place my trust in the Canadian Corps, knowing that where Canadians are engaged there can be no giving way.

Under the orders of your devoted officers in the coming battle you will advance or fall where you stand facing the enemy.

To those who will fall I say, 'You will not die but step into immortality. Your mothers will not lament your fate but will be proud to have borne such sons. Your names will be revered for ever and ever by your grateful country and God will take you unto Himself.'

Canadians, in the fateful hour, I command you and I trust you to fight as you have ever fought, with all your strength, with all your determination, with all your tranquil courage. On many a hard fought field of battle you have overcome this enemy. With God's help you shall achieve victory once more.

(Signed) A. W. CURRIE,
Lieutenant-General,
Commanding, Canadian Corps.'

L'ennemi, cherchant à atteindre immédiatement un resultat definitif, a rassemblé toutes ses forces et porté à l'armée britannique un coup puissant. Debordées par la seule supériorité numérique de l'ennemi, les divisions britanniques occupant la ligne de la Scarpe à l'Oise se sont repliées tout en résistant vigoureusement, fermes et aucunement découragées.

Des mesures ont pu être prises pour faire face à l'assaut allemand. Les Français ont rassemblé une forte armée, commandé par un chef extrêmement habile et aimé. Cette armée arrive rapidement à nôtre secours. Des divisions britanniques fraiches sont jetées dans l'action. Les Canadiens y seront bientôt engagés. Nôtre brigade de mitrailleuses automobiles a déjà joué un rôle des plus brillants et c'est une fois de plus couverte de gloire.

Me souvenant avec orgueil de vos hauts faits passés, vous demandant de comprendre qu'aujourdhui c'est la destinée même de l'Empire britannique qui se joue, je place toute ma confiance dans le corps Canadien : je sais que, où se trouvent les Canadiens, là il ne peut y avoir de recul. Dans la bataille qui va s'ouvrir, commandés par vos officiers dévoués, ou vous avancerez, ou vous tomberez, face à l'ennemi, sur les positions que vous occupez.

A ceux qui tomberant, je dis : Vous ne mourez pas : vous entrez dans l'eternité. Loin de se lamenter sur votre destinée, vos méres seront fiéres d'avoir mis au monde de tels fils. Vos noms seront révérés à jamais par votre patrie reconnaissante et Dieu vous recevra à ses côtés.

Canadiens, à cette heure supreme, je vous donne avec confiance l'ordre de vous battre mieux encore que vous ne vous étes jamais battus, avec toute votre force, avec toute votre volonté, avec tout votre courage tranquille. L'ennemi, vous l'avez déjà vaincu dans bien des batailles où la lutte fut apre. Dieu aidant, vous remporterez la victoire une fois encore.

I had tea with General Currie about this time and he said with a most perfect Canadian accent, 'I can't see that this kind of Boche is different to any other kind of Boche; he's just as easy to kill.' Note.—General Currie informed me that there was one Canadian Brigade which had never, during the whole course of the war, had a German inside the trenches held by them in various parts of the front.

The Canadians, however, did not come into the boiling pot yet awhile; evidently Ludendorff thought that the combination of Canada and the Vimy Ridge was too

much, and he preferred the Lys and the Portuguese. Now a lot of severe things have been said about the fighting of the Portuguese; even before this attack our General had to check our men, referring to them as 'the ruddy geese,' and remind them that they were our most ancient Allies. During the attack itself a German company commander was captured towards the close of the day (9th of April), and he said that he had ridden on his pony for four hours without having a shot fired at him. This does not look as if much resistance had been offered, but in my opinion the blame rests entirely with the officers. There is no such thing as a bad soldier; there are only bad officers. There are some races that are natural fighters, and certainly the Portuguese are not of these, but during this attack many Portuguese privates put themselves under British officers and then they fought extremely well. Leadership does not only begin during a battle, but in the training camps, and here also the Portuguese officer was defective; they were unable to inspire their men with the necessary discipline and *esprit de corps*. It must be stated in fairness to them, however, that they had been in the line for a long time and they were thoroughly tired; it was bad luck on our higher command that the German attack forestalled the complete relief of the Portuguese troops by a few hours. Also on this 9th of April there was again a fog, which greatly assisted the enemy; in the Lys sector most of the trenches were of the breastwork order and such trenches offer little protection from a heavy bombardment unless they are heavily cemented, but we were never the equal of the Germans in ferro-concrete fortifications. The Germans, having broken through the Portuguese troops, pushed on their advance with incredible rapidity; but they never succeeded in taking Givenchy; the defence

of this little hill was of enormous importance and the achievement of the 55th division who defended it cannot be over-estimated. On the north of the new German salient the fighting was very fierce; troops who had been heavily engaged in the Somme fighting were again in the thick of it without having had any rest; they had to give ground but they fought splendidly. There was another moment of intense anxiety when the Germans began to get unpleasantly near Hazebrouck; an Australian division was coming to the rescue, but the troops that covered the detrainment of the Australians had to counter-attack incessantly to gain the necessary time, and as Haig says, 'No more brilliant exploit has taken place since the opening of the enemy's offensive.' I saw the attack on Bailleul from the Mont des Cats; it was exactly like old-fashioned prints of battle scenes except that there were not formal oblongs of advancing infantry. There were, however, mounted generals and their staffs pointing dramatically to different corners of the battlefield, the famous windmill was still intact, our batteries were spitting tongues of fire from behind every hedge, the German infantry were sending up light signals and star shells, and their black smoke shrapnel was bursting over the town where one could just distinguish the barricades made of wooden chairs and old furniture of all sorts. I saw a woman flying from her home which had already had one shell in it; she was dressed, like all refugees, in her Sunday best, and she had a large collie dog under her arm. One of our Tommies helped her and her burden over a stile, and as she scurried towards safer regions, the Tommy shook his head sadly at her saying, 'No bon, Madame! No bon!'

French troops now came up north to our support; as I was at work in my office one morning I heard the sound

of cavalry passing the village, and I caught sight of the French blue uniforms through the trees. They had made an extraordinary forced march—all the more extraordinary when one saw their horses which were just bags of bones; their baggage and transport also was all tied together with string and they looked for all the world like a travelling circus. By Jove! how pleased we were to see them. Some cavalry officers were billeted on us for a night, and we all agreed that they were as nice a lot as we had ever come across. They had nothing but friendliness and sympathy for the incessant attacks that had been made on our armies, and I could see no trace of reproach in their attitude towards us.

During the Lys fighting, one of my photographers, Lieut. Console, lost a leg. The nation owes a great deal of gratitude to our small band of photographers and cinema men; most of them were in the thick of it every single day; they got quiet nights which the infantry soldier does not get when he is in the line, but on the other hand the photographer never goes near a quiet sector. He has to be at the most dramatic points of the fight, and the most dramatic means the most dangerous. Of all the daring ones Lieut. Brook was the most daring, though he was never wounded; day after day he brought back some plates exposed at the most interesting points along the huge battle front. In his collection can be seen episodes illustrating every phase of moving warfare—small groups of Lewis gunners lying in ditches, hasty barricades put up in the streets of towns, officers engaging the enemy with their revolvers, French and British outpost sentry groups taken during the reliefs that had to be carried out, very often, actually in the presence of the attacking enemy, and many other things of extraordinary interest. Lieut. Bartholomew, the head of the

photographic section, put the right spirit into his men and got a very fine result from material that was all too scanty. Poor Console bore his pain and suffering with wonderful philosophy; he thought it an honour to give something important to so great a cause. I met him not long ago in the streets of London. I have always thought that the feelings of a 'mutilé,' when all the excitement, the honour and glory is over, must be intensely gloomy, but Console was as much without bitterness a year after the war as at the moment of his great sacrifice.

Towards the end of April two very important events occurred; the German Alpine Corps succeeded in capturing Kemmel Hill. The French were holding the hill, the British being immediately on their left. The Germans pinched a pocket on either side of the hill, and though the French held out for some hours yet they were surrounded like crows in a tree and had to surrender. In all our combined actions with the French, we have had the greatest difficulty in keeping time with our Allies, such is the immense difference that separates the temperaments of the two races. The British method is to work out orders as methodically as possible and then compel the men to stick to them precisely and in detail. The French seem to depend infinitely more on local inspiration; at one moment they feel like attacking, and at another they don't. This inspiration that comes to them is probably a right one, but it is fatal to co-operation with troops who are working according to schedule. All through the war the Germans made full use of this difference of temperament, and always attacked us at our points of liaison; when such points of liaison coincided with some geographical feature which was a difficulty in itself (such as the terrain around Kemmel), a disaster nearly always followed. Certainly the capture

of the hill was an immense achievement for the Germans, and none but the very finest troops could have accomplished it. In parts our fighting was excellent, and I know from Belgians living in Menin whom I saw after the armistice that the German losses were colossal and that the hospitals could not deal with the numbers of wounded, but our combination with the French or theirs with us (whichever way you like to put it) was non-existing. At one moment our counter-attacks, if they had been supported by the French, would have recaptured the hill, but the support never came and so this serious loss had to remain. A few days later the Germans again attacked, hoping to capture the remaining hills of the same range (Mont Noir, Mont Rouge, and the Scherpenberg) but they were completely repulsed. The Kaiser is said to have watched the fight from the Messines-Wytschaete Ridge, and, as usual, he brought his side the worst possible luck. Throughout the war the Kaiser's presence near a battlefield was sufficient to cause his troops to be defeated; this fact made me suggest to Lord Northcliffe (who was then in charge of propaganda in enemy countries) that he should make more use of the fact that the Kaiser was the evil genius of his country and that he had the evil eye. This can be traced right back to his quarrel with Bismarck. His very appearance suggests it, with his superficial good looks and his withered hand. The remarkable thing about the defence on this occasion was the excellent fighting of the young raw recruits who had just come out from England and had had no previous experience; they repelled the waves of attackers by rifle fire alone, giving convincing proof of the value of our musketry practices in recruit training.

While this disaster was happening on the Flanders front an equally great disaster occurred before Amiens,

but luckily the success of the Germans in this case lasted but a moment. They attacked the village of Villers-Bretonneux with large forces and with tanks, and succeeded in capturing the village. Villers-Bretonneux stands on a knoll and overlooks Amiens; from this place the Germans would have had direct ground observation on to Amiens and could have placed their shells when and where they liked; as Amiens was a great railway centre (even at this time) and some ninety trains a day went through the station, the importance of Villers-Bretonneux cannot be over-estimated. The German tank was quite useless over rough country and was never able to negotiate trenches, but, in village fighting, this lumbering clumsy weapon did serve its purpose. In this battle, for the first time during the war, our tanks fought the German tanks and defeated them, but the German infantry had got to the railway embankment west of the village and could not be dislodged. The Australians, however, made a counter-attack at night which was completely successful. There was a moon, but the sky was overcast; the plan of attack was to make a wide encircling movement, the attackers separating and joining again on the east side of the town. There was no time to issue complicated orders; hastily written messages in pencil on the leaves of field notebooks was what produced one of the most astounding manœuvres of the war. Everything worked out according to plan, thereby proving that the battlefield discipline of the Australians must be absolutely perfect, no matter what their billet discipline may be; the Germans holding the railway embankment only discovered that something was wrong when no rations reached them, for they were completely cut off from their own side. Even if the Australians had achieved nothing else during this war but the recapture of

Villers-Bretonneux, they would have won the right to be considered among the greatest fighting races of the world; as it is, the French ought to put up a great monument in their honour in the town of Amiens, for without them the town might have been completely destroyed.

Throughout this period of Ludendorff's offensive, countless defensive lines were prepared right behind our front almost as far as the coast, and the energies of all our labour companies, but especially the Chinese, were remarkable. These Chinamen were almost invariably light-hearted and cheerful, they seemed to imagine that the war was one mammoth music-hall entertainment provided for their entertainment. Tanks, aeroplanes, officers, staff cars, etc., were a never ending source of merriment to them, and in return for this gaiety, which we provided, they used to provide us with food for fun in their choice of head-gear. Out of a normal company of 200 men there would be as many different sorts of hats and types of coiffure. Some had their heads shaved, others wore long hair, like women, done up in a chignon. On one occasion I saw a Chinaman resting on his pick: he was stripped to the waist, and on his head was perched coquettishly a little straw hat such as used to be worn by early Victorian governesses, the hat was kept on by an elastic band which went round his hair, done up in a bun at the back. His appearance was excruciatingly funny. Sometimes, however, their camps, which were in the neighbourhood of munition dumps, came in for night bombardments by Gothas, and then their joy turned to the wildest misery. Early one morning I once came upon two utterly unshaved chinks sitting by the roadside under one tin hat looking preternaturally yellow: their camp had been bombed and they were

told to scatter, and these two miserable human beings had walked for twenty miles without stopping. On another occasion there was a mutiny in a chink company over a question of rations; they had been accustomed to receive a quarter of an English loaf per man and then the English loaf was changed for a heavier French loaf and they only received a fifth—hence the mutiny—The chief interpreter was called and brought a pair of scales to show that the fifth of the French loaf was heavier than the quarter of the English loaf, but to the Chinese brain a fifth must under all circumstances be less than a quarter. After much argument one platoon was persuaded to go out and work, but they were continually interrupted by the fractious platoons who looked on, uttering celestial oaths and giving graphic descriptions of the reception the good platoon would receive on returning to camp. This eventually worked on the nerves of the good platoon, who downed tools and made off; whereupon the remaining platoons picked up their tools and put in the best day's work of the war.

During the fighting round Kemmel, the Belgians were twice attacked on the Ypres-Staden railway, and on both occasions they gave the Germans a severe hiding. I saw a photograph of the battlefield taken after the second of these attacks, and the numbers of German dead was prodigious. I have always had a very high opinion of the fighting qualities of the Flemish and of the Walloons; they have a good deal of self-control and yet at times they are intensely fierce. They are a very scientific race, and, though they did not fight much in the latter stages of the war, they always fought methodically.

During the fighting on the Somme this spring, the

great German aviator, Richtofen, was brought down; some of our airmen claimed him as their 'bird,' and some Australian Lewis gunners did the same. The claim of the Australians was eventually upheld, but there was no absolute certainty about it. He was given a magnificent funeral; it is an extraordinary thing that throughout the war the airmen of all races managed to preserve some chivalry. They fought as gentlemen, and were not above honouring an honourable opponent. I have described how impressive is the ceremonial of a British military funeral; in this case it was more than usually impressive, for numbers of our airmen turned out to escort the soul of this hero heavenwards. As though inspired by the example of their German rival, they swooped down almost to the grave's edge and then zoomed up, looped countless loops, fell again like dead leaves and sparred like a flight of homing pigeons in their grace and mastery of every winged movement. Homer would have sold ten times over his copyright of the war correspondence of the Trojan War to have written an epic on this scene.

With the German failure to capture the Flanders Hills and Villers-Bretonneux, our front again became stabilised, and the great German offensive, on the British front at any rate, was brought to a standstill. This period of six weeks' fighting is very complicated and very important; I don't pretend to write a complete history, but I hope to make clear to the ordinary man in the street that which up to now has been obscure. Therefore, in summing up what has already been said, it is necessary to emphasise the following points:—Before the German attack of the 21st of March our tired armies were strung out to an impossible extent; our southern army (the Fifth) which was in liaison with the French, was commanded by

General Gough, who had had an unsuccessful season in 1917; the French General Staff expected the main attack to come in Champagne; the Germans, helped by mist, gained an initial success of importance and proceeded to overwhelm the Fifth Army, making rapid progress towards Amiens; their progress in front of our Third Army (General Byng) was slower and the German losses here were appalling; in face of a desperate situation General Gough showed the qualities of a great man, but was removed from his command; the Germans were held at the base of their big triangle, namely, in the neighbourhood of Montdidier and at Arras; even if they had captured Amiens, they could not have advanced much farther without widening their base; that they did not capture Amiens was almost entirely due to the superb fighting of the Australians; on the 28th of March the Germans launched a huge attack against Arras, hoping to reach St Pol; there was no fog, and they were beaten to a standstill; finding that Arras and the Vimy Ridge was hopeless, the enemy attacked the Portuguese on the Lys, hoping to turn the Vimy Ridge, to capture the remaining coalfields of France, and eventually to capture the Channel ports; the Portuguese officers fought very badly, but some of the privates under British officers fought very well; a great disaster was averted by the superb defence of Givenchy and the equally fine fighting in front of Nieppe Forest; the loss of Kemmel would have been fatal had the remaining hills (Mont Rouge, Mont Noir, and the Scherpenberg) been captured also and had the Belgians failed to hold the Germans on the Ypres-Staden railway; in all this fighting geographical features and weather had played a considerable part; the fog on the 21st of March and on the 9th of April had greatly helped the enemy; the gentle slopes round Arras, the Vimy Ridge,

the straight canal in the neighbourhood of Hinges, the straight canal from La Bassée to Bethune, the little hill of Givenchy, and the Flanders hills had all helped the defenders. We gradually saw that the German reserves were being used up, but they still had enough left to make another big push. Where would the next attack occur? Since Foch had been appointed to the supreme command, Ludendorff's task of separating the British and French armies became much more difficult; a single mind governed a single front; French and British divisions turned up when and where they were wanted, but still our bases were on the coast, and if Ludendorff could continue down the Somme as far as Abbeville, the whole of the north of France and Belgium would have to be abandoned, for it is not the coast line that counts but the last lateral road parallel with the coast. This original plan of Ludendorff's therefore still seemed to be the best one, and it is difficult to account for what happened during the next few weeks.

Towards the end of April three British divisions that had taken a part in repelling both the big German attacks —on the Somme and on the Lys—and one that had been engaged in the Somme only, were sent down to the French front, in the neighbourhood of Rheims, to have a rest(!) I had seen General Campbell, the commander of the 21st at Cléry, in March, and he had said to me, 'Go back to G.H.Q. and let them know that, if I am not relieved before nightfall, I shall not have a thousand men left in the division!' They were not relieved for several days, and then, almost immediately, were involved in the fighting north of the Lys. I saw General Campbell again at G.H.Q. just as he was starting for the Rheims front; he looked to me very sad and much aged, but he seemed full of hope that, if he were given a little rest,

he could soon bring the new drafts up to concert pitch. As all the world now knows, he was involved almost immediately in the fighting that followed the new German attacks on the Aisne. It will be remembered that the Germans had made preparations for an attack on this front at the same time as they were preparing to attack in the St Quentin area. Ludendorff had seen that it was useless to attack at places where an attack was expected, such as at Arras on the 28th of March; he had seen the enormous value of surprise, as on the Lys on April 9th, and the value of catching the exhausted divisions at places where they were supposed to be resting; yet he was absolutely committed to the Somme idea, so much so that it seemed improbable that he would attack elsewhere except as a diversion. Hence it appears that Marshal Foch himself was surprised by this attack on the Aisne front, otherwise he could not have put our tired divisions in line in this sector. Notwithstanding their exhaustion, the British troops fought magnificently, and they only gave ground to conform to troops on their flanks. When it became obvious that throughout the campaign French and British troops were going to be mixed up continually together, I had a section of British Press censors attached to the French Press bureau in Paris; I had given these officers orders that nothing was to be allowed to pass which implied criticism of our fighting. Unfortunately, one of these officers so far neglected his duty that he allowed a passage to pass in an article in the Journal which asserted that this new retreat was started by the British and that their incapacity to hold caused the French troops to retire also. This was absolutely the contrary of the truth, as is proved by this magnificent order of the day, which was published by General Berthelot.

VÈME ARMÉE % GAL No. 371—21-8-18

2ème Bon du Régiment de Devonshire.

'Le 27 mai, 1918, au moment ou les défenseurs des lignes anglaises étaient soumis à des attaques puissantes et incessamment renouvelées, le 2ème Bon du Régiment de Devonshire a su, par sa tenacité et sa bravoure, résister, heureusement à toutes les tentatives de l'ennemi et conserver son front intact jusqu'à une heure avancée de la journée permettant ainsi l'organisation des défenses au Sud de l'Ardre et leur occupation par les troupes de renfort.

Cramponnés à la dernière tranchée conservée au Nord de la rivière, sans espoir de secours, électrisés par leur chef, le Lt.-Colonel R. H. Anderson-Morshead demeuré inébranlable malgré un bombardement qui faisait rage, les rares survivants du Bon voulurent héroiquement résister jusqu'au derneir, comme ils en avaient l'ordre.

Le 2ème Bon du Régiment de Devonshire tout entier, avec son chef, 28 officiers et 552 hommes, a généreusement consenti, en cette circonstance, le sacrifice total qui lui était demandé à la cause sainte des Alliés.'

And yet the survivors of this division who had fought so gloriously were hooted by French civilians when they were relieved and were going back to rest. Naturally, this censor officer was dismissed from his job, but the harm was done, and many French people will go to their graves thinking that we let them down during this battle, whereas some of our battalions died to a man rather than yield a foot to such an enemy when fighting shoulder to shoulder with such an ally. This proves what I have said before,

namely, that Press censorship is a delicate matter; one slip may produce incredible results.

In this battle, which, in my opinion, was certainly a surprise to Marshal Foch, the Germans again made rapid progress, and the threat to Paris seemed, to the uninitiated at any rate, a very serious thing. Besides, it looked at one moment as if the French public opinion was going to turn against Foch and Clemenceau. I did not hesitate to tell my French correspondents that this German success had in no way effected the immense confidence in the Generalissimo that was shared by all ranks of the British Army; they in their turn lost no time in publishing an expression of this confidence in their papers. Things *did* look a bit ugly at one moment. The French believed that Foch had been caught napping. Clemenceau coming back from one of his strenuous visits to the front, addressed the Chamber, and, for the moment, he appeared as an old tired man, and it seemed as if even his indomitable will must give way under the crushing burden that he had to carry. I thought it as well to warn the Chief of this meeting of the Chamber, which had been so hostile to Clemenceau, and I remember him taking me round his garden after dinner, where we spent an hour together. He seemed to me like some saintly father in his miraculous patience and self-control; he gave great praise to the fighting spirit of Foch and Clemenceau, and I could see that it would be a great blow to him if anything should happen to upset such a combination. Clemenceau regained the confidence of his countrymen by marching a couple of American divisions through Paris; a division, to the civilian eye, is like twenty armies, and the Paris crowd thought that the whole population of the United States had landed in France. This produced a tremendously pro-American wave of opinion throughout France,

with a corresponding anti-British tendency. My French friends came to me in despair, and said, 'Why don't you start a vigorous propaganda to counteract this.' I thought it the wrong moment for propaganda, and if the French people could be cheered at such a moment by pro-American sentiments, such a result would be cheap at the price. I said therefore to my friends, 'I am delighted that you should welcome the Americans: they deserve it. Come to me in three months' time (I have always been an optimist), and I will listen to your maturer judgment of the Americans.' Clemenceau went every other day to the most lively parts of the front and exposed himself to danger with an absolute disregard of his personal safety. This cheered the *poilus* not a little. Another fact that cheered the Parisians (strange to say) was the firing of the big long range gun on Paris; the Parisians saw in it something comic; 'La grosse Bertha' became the standing joke of the day. This childlike frivolity counteracted the tenseness of the situation. What I was afraid of was that the Germans might possibly get within howitzer range of Paris, and that having trained a couple of hundred howitzers on to the town, they would say to the French, 'Here are our terms, accept them or we destroy your capital.' If Ludendorff had had the good sense to offer the 'status quo ante' at such a moment, it would have been a difficult thing to refuse. In any case, when his troops recrossed the Marne, it was astonishing that he did not make overtures of peace, for he must have known that trouble was coming. It is my firm belief that there was a big difference of opinion in the German camp. We know that a big offensive had been prepared for some time past in the area occupied by the group of armies of Prince Rupprecht; dumps of ammunition could be seen on the air photographs; a large number

of reserve divisions were concentrated in the Lille-Valenciennes area, and captured prisoners gave us information that pointed to an offensive on a large scale on the front of our first and second armies. Even if Ludendorff could no longer hope to separate us from our Allies, he might still hope to cut us off from our channel port bases, and I am convinced that he himself must have been in favour of an attack in the north. It is probable, however, that the Hohenzollern element in the council of war put the case this wise: 'We have lost the war once by not going for Paris, don't let us be such idiots a second time'; and the 'nach Paris' party carried the day. The original Ludendorff plan was a splendid one; this new stunt was an absurdity. If Foch had been surprised at the attack on the Aisne it was because he could not imagine that such a good strategist as Ludendorff would change foxes at this stage of the run. Once he had assimilated this foolishness on the part of the enemy and had realised that he had lead with the wrong hand, it was not difficult for him to prepare a terrific counter.

Foch foresaw most accurately that the Germans would attack again east and west of Rheims; it was essential that no more troops should be used in the defence than was absolutely necessary. General Gouraud on whom the attack was likely to fall was warned of this, and he prepared a scheme of defence in depth which was a slight innovation on any previous defence tactics. His method proved successful beyond expectation. This enabled Foch to give Pétain enough troops to launch a great counter-offensive on the front between Château-Thierry and Soissons. Four British divisions were engaged in this attack, and again they earned praise from their French comrades. Among these divisions was the gallant

Highland Division, the 51st. While fighting with this division an old friend of mine, Lieut. Tredennick, was killed: this officer had been badly wounded at the Battle of Loos and, after he had recovered, he was posted to my battalion to give us instruction. He was an Irishman with a Cornish name, and he belonged to a Scottish regiment. He was very handsome, very Irish, and as dashing as could be. He had been my Adjutant when I had a sniping school at Aldershot, and he was adored by my men; he had a most fascinating way of lecturing: he would take a subject and deviate from it almost immediately, like Stern: his idea was that if you continually jumped from one subject to another it kept the men interested. When we went to France he was in command of a company of the 12th Royal Sussex: as a company commander, he was almost too fond of dangerous enterprises: he spent all his nights crawling about 'no-man's-land' and he used to come back to the trenches in the morning covered with mud from head to foot. One day our Brigadier ran into him and said to him, 'You are the dirtiest thing I have yet seen. Go and have a wash.' This was too much for Tredennick, whose fiery nature would not stand such an undeserved rebuke. I think he would have murdered the Brigadier, had he not been wounded again the next evening: a rifle grenade burst near him and his back and shoulder were full of bits of shrapnel. He came to my room to say good-bye before he went down to the C.C.S: it was about five o'clock in the morning, and his large dark eyes were surrounded with black circles from many sleepless nights. He looked handsomer than ever—a perfect picture of the ideal soldier—full of daring and chivalry. I never saw him again: he recovered from his wound as from the other and then married Colonel Grisewood's sister. Even happiness could not

keep him away for long, and he died 'face à l'ennemi' like the lion-hearted fellow he was.

While these events of passionate interest were taking place on the French front a calm, very naturally, set in opposite the British armies in the north, but the anxiety about Paris was just as poignant with us as with the French themselves. However, this tragic moment was relieved by an episode which had a great effect on the spirits of the army. I refer, of course, to the Pemberton Billing case. On one particular day I passed through many units from front to rear and I found every one, without exception, waiting watch in hand for the arrival of the newspapers. The disruption of the British Empire and the collapse of civilisation was as nothing compared with the odds on being one of the 47,000, or with the satisfaction of seeing the names of the witnesses called before the court to vindicate the purity of English society.

Prince Rupprecht's long-prepared offensive was abandoned; his reserves were thrown into the fight on the Crown Prince's front, and his ammunition dumps vanished like lumps of sugar in a hot cup of tea. Simultaneously the attitude of the British changed from the defensive to the offensive, especially on the Australian corps front. The Australians had never left the enemy alone; no sooner had they stopped him before Amiens than they began to nibble into his line, rounding up his machine-gun posts and putting terror into his quivering outposts.

There is not enough paper in the world to contain in writing all that has been said about discipline during the war. Our regular officers told us that discipline would win the war; they told us also that the Australians had no discipline, and yet the Australian soldiers made rings round the very best German troops, with all their iron

discipline. The truth is that the Australians had battle-field discipline to perfection, and their initiative and dash had not been crushed by traditional servility. Very often the average English Tommy thinks that, if he is impeccably clean, and salutes, and says 'Sir' on all and every occasion, his duty is done. There are as many different temperaments as there are men in the world, and each temperament requires a different form of discipline; it is impossible to deny that the combination of the Australian discipline with the Australian temperament has produced the most magnificent fighting in the war. Here is an instance—An Australian infantry colonel was going round his line at ten o'clock one morning, and he found every single man asleep, including the sentries; there had been some liveliness during the night and this colonel said to himself, 'If my chaps are asleep probably the Boches are the same.' So he woke up his men and called for volunteers to surprise, surround, and capture a German post that was opposite to his front. Naturally, they all volunteered, and from among them he chose a sergeant and ten men, who crawled through the growing corn in broad daylight and came back with the whole garrison of the German post and their machine-guns. Surely this was a perfect instance of the punishment fitting the crime.

The patrol activity on the part of the Australians led to a big battle for the capture of Hamel; General Monash (the Australian Corps Commander) with considerable cunning had carried out, for some days previous to the attack, demonstrations of smoke barrages mixed with gas shells; the Germans, surprised at first at these phenomena, gradually got accustomed to them, and when the attack was made with a smoke barrage, but without gas, they were found sitting, with their gas masks on, quite

unprepared. The new tanks took part in this attack, and were a huge success; during the last few months tank tactics had improved out of all knowledge, and the new tanks were a great improvement on the old ones. These latest models could be manœuvred with such ease and were so fast that shock tactics could be employed as well as fire tactics. An instance of this occurred during the battle—one tank officer spotted a German machine-gunner firing at our stretcher-bearers, so he went straight for him, ran him over, and pivoted on the top of him. When the German soldier is not protected by marvellous trenches with dug-outs, pill-boxes, and masses of barbed wire, he is not such a wonderful fighter. Americans also operated with the Australians, and fought with incredible fierceness, shouting 'Lusitania' as their battle cry. The Australians said of them, 'They're all right, but a bit rough.' The carefully prepared plan succeeded in all its details. This show proved that the enemy was cracking, and when Marshal Foch called upon Sir Douglas Haig to make an offensive on a large scale, it is no wonder that he chose this sector where the morale of the enemy was probably low.

CHAPTER VIII

'THE BLACK DAY FOR THE GERMAN ARMY'

It is not likely at this period that Foch's programme for the remainder of 1918 included more than the complete relief of Paris and the complete relief of Amiens, and therefore what followed is largely due to the brilliant tactics and determination of Haig. Haig decided on the Amiens front, and his decision was undoubtedly right; but to make a success of this big attack, the enemy must be surprised. The extent of Haig's concentration was three infantry corps, a cavalry corps, and all the extras, such as big guns, tanks, aeroplanes, etc. The main road to Roye runs south-east from Amiens, and at Longeau another road branches off due east to Peronne; the German line was about ten miles away from Amiens. If we take the triangle made by these roads and the front line, we find Longeau the apex of the triangle, and the line Domart, Villers-Bretonneux the base. The sides of the triangle are about seven miles long and the base about four miles. Now this small triangle was the area of concentration, and when we consider that a cavalry corps in column of route takes something like twenty-one miles of road space, it is possible to get an idea of the staff problem with which Haig was confronted. I repeat again, three infantry corps, a cavalry corps, and all the extras were concentrated in this small triangle, and brought up under the nose of the Boche without his discovering it. Such a thing is unequalled in the history

of warfare. I have said earlier in this book that the Flanders offensive of 1917 was a nightmare to all those who took part in it; I think that the losses incurred in taking Paschendaele were extravagant and out of all proportion to the value of what was gained. Haig was lucky to remain in command of the British armies at the end of that year, but no one has ever given him due credit for the great series of victories which began on August 8th before Amiens. The initial success was due to Staff work of unexampled brilliance, and the decision to reap the fruits of this success to the full extent and to bring the war to a victorious finish during this year was an act of genius for which the nation can never be sufficiently grateful. Our armies had been badly hammered and had borne the main burden of the great German attack; our losses had been great, and Haig knew that by August, 1918, he had got all the men he was ever likely to get; but he risked all and won all, and he deserves praise and credit far beyond anything that has ever been given to him. Not only was it a great achievement to inflict such a signal defeat upon the enemy (Ludendorff has called it the 'Black Day'), but it was an important and responsible decision to continue to harass the demoralised enemy till he was driven across the defences of the Somme, right through his old Hindenburg line, and finally brought to his knees in a state of abject collapse.

Great cunning was used to deceive the enemy; some Canadians were sent north and were identified in the line in the neighbourhood of Kemmel. An impression was given that tanks were concentrating in the neighbourhood of St Pol. The Australian corps made a slight movement to the south, and actually lost prisoners to the enemy just before the attack, but the men who were captured held their tongues and gave nothing away to

the enemy. The cavalry did not move till the last possible moment: the noise of tanks crawling to their assembly places was drowned by the noise of low-flying Handley-Page bombing aeroplanes which flew over the enemy lines very low for several nights prior to the attack. I saw a Canadian staff officer some days after the attack and he told me that he had been round the triangle of ground (described above) on August 7th, and could see no trace of abnormal concentration—so carefully were the troops hidden in the little woods which abound in that neighbourhood. The Third Corps, which was north of the Somme, was attacked by the enemy on the 6th of August, and this, no doubt, added greatly to the difficulties of this corps in preparing for the attack on the 8th. The great success of the day was won by the Australian and Canadian corps, and they deserve unbounded honour. The French on our right under General Debeney were also extremely successful.

The morning of the 8th of August was foggy, thus proving that the 'Bon Dieu' does not always fight on the side of the Germans. A terrific bombardment opened the ball, and it was impossible to tell for some time what was happening; then suddenly every battery appeared to be moving forward. There was silence, and through the mist there were silhouettes of things crawling forward; everything that was visible had a forward movement, and, as the mist cleared, the sense of a whole empire *advancing* was most remarkable. The enemy's artillery was first silenced and then captured, and the war correspondents could follow the progress of the fight at very close range; later in the morning they had the astounding sight of the cavalry deploying and passing through the tanks. 'Quel spectacle inoubliable,' was what the French correspondents said; their enthusiasm was

unbounded. Over this same ground they had borne testimony to the value of our chaps during the most anxious moments of the retreat; now they went forward with them in the first step towards the final victory. On the whole this was a rotten war for war correspondents as well as for every one else; from now onwards, however, there was movement and drama and romance. Each day brought some fresh development, and it was not long before the whole British army was pursuing the defeated soldiers of the greatest military nation in the world. Who will ever forget the campaign of 1918? First it seemed as if we British were disgraced in the eyes of the whole world; the line of the coast seemed daily to come towards us. Then, no sooner had our anxieties ceased, than the agony about Paris began. Then the tide turned—victory after victory crowned our efforts. We got into touch with the wretched civilians who had been under the Prussian yoke for four and a half years, and it became obvious that the vile Hun was done to the world. Those who have lived through such times will never forget it; all other great moments in the history of our race seem as nothing compared with these.

Our casualties in the first stage were extraordinarily light, but, as is always the case when the enemy has time to reorganise his artillery, our losses became heavier four or five days after the opening assault. The prisoners were well 'nourished,' well fed, and well clothed, but the rank and file were enchanted to be captured. The German officers admitted that the great Ludendorff offensive had definitely failed, and they saw no possibility of winning the war, but they thought then that they could hang on long enough to make a drawn game of it. Every captured German admitted that the surprise was complete and absolute, and it was obvious from the vast quantities

of stores which we captured that the enemy was preparing for a quiet winter on these old Somme battlefields and had not the smallest suspicion of the trouble that was in store for him.

Towards the close of this first big attack I went out with Mr Nevinson to explore thoroughly the whole area that had been captured from the enemy. Mr Nevinson had come out to replace Mr Phillip Gibbs, who was having a short rest. Nevinson's distinguished appearance, perfect manners, and his great personal bravery made him welcome wherever he went. He told me on this occasion an amusing story of himself in India; he had once been interviewed by a native journalist, who wrote of him as follows:—'Outwardly he has the appearance of a gentleman, but inwardly he is no better than a ranting Socialist.' We saw no traces of heavy casualties till we got close to a little wood called the 'Bois de Z,' on the road to Roye. This wood had been a famous show spot after the original German retreat to the Hindenburg line, for it contained the most marvellous dug-outs ever constructed by the Germans. Here was a little underground palace with large rooms and electric light and every modern comfort; apparently these dug-outs had not been destroyed by us in our March retreat, and the enemy had made a great resistance at this spot. Some young cavalry officer had tried to take the place by direct assault, galloping up the main road; he and his men had been mown down by machine-gun fire, and there was a horrible scene of slaughter on the road. After repelling this attack the Germans came out of their shelters and shook their fists at our dead. This sector was now in French hands and they too had lost heavily and had not captured the wood at the first attack. Nevinson and I went through it on to the high ground beyond and had a

magnificent view of an attack on 'Cæsar's camp' in the outskirts of Roye; masses of the French light Renaud tanks were sailing into action and the German gunners were shooting wildly at them. Behind us several batteries of French 75's were doing a rapid fire; no one who has not seen these guns in action can imagine how quickly they can fire, it is almost like a machine-gun. It was a boiling hot day and the smells were disgusting. The French gunners had had no rest for days and several of them were fast asleep between the wheels of their gun-carriages while the guns were actually firing. The brilliant beauty of the day and the sense of colossal victory that was in the air made the sight of dead young men even more pathetic than usual.

Haig having driven a huge pocket into the German line, had now the possibility of some sort of manœuvre. Ludendorff in his great offensive had tried to pierce our front but had not done so because our weak forces kept on the move. You can snap a taut rope, but not a slack one. Had he had a couple of divisions of good cavalry and had attacked with them along the Villers-Bretonneux-Amiens road, God only knows what would have happened. As it was, he tried to widen the base of his pocket (at Arras and Montdidier), but he failed to do so; after that, his Lys attack and his Aisne attack were 'eccentric' and therefore did not help each other. He was like a man with too many talents for divergent energies that had nothing to do with one another. Haig profited by this mistake of Ludendorff's and made his attacks 'concentric,' so that each fresh attack profited by the success of the former attack, till the main German lines of communication were so threatened that they were quite overwhelmed by the great mass of retreating humanity that was trying to get back to Germany. Hence the

complete capitulation of the enemy. This plan of concentric attacks seems simple enough now, but it had never been done before in the war, and I am convinced that it originated with Haig and his Staff. His method was rather like a child eating a large slice of bread and butter, working gradually by a succession of semicircles towards the centre. The Fourth Army (General Rawlinson), having made the first semicircle, prepared the way for the attack of the Third Army (General Byng). There was a small overture to gain the Arras-Albert railway and then the main attack was launched in a feu-de-joie fashion *i.e.* the different corps and divisions came into action one after the other, the start taking place by moonlight and the other attacks following throughout the morning. This method certainly confused the enemy, who began by making a good defence and then crumpled up. The old Somme battlefield was taken from north to south, and the high ground of terrible memory about Thiepval and Pozières was pinched out. As yet another battle of the Ancre began, I sallied forth, and this is an extract of a letter :—

'22.8.18.—Yesterday I went out again to my old haunts on the Ancre. I stood on the same ground as in 1916; the batteries were in the same positions; the same spots were unhealthy, though not so unhealthy. I passed through Mailly-Mailly Wood, where I was once nearly killed; I saw a Brigade Headquarters in the same old place, but not occupied by my old villain. The valley of the river looked more gaunt than ever under the hot sun that broke through the mist about eleven o'clock. Aveluy Wood is now almost as ghastly as Thiepval; Thiepval was still full of enemy machine-guns, but no artillery. I came upon a packet of Boche prisoners,

and I asked a young lad of twenty how he had been taken prisoner. "Oh! I surrendered," he said with the utmost glee. "Are you pleased to be a prisoner?" "Yes! delighted; every German soldier would like to be a prisoner!" That sounds more like peace, doesn't it? I then questioned the Tommy who was escorting them; he was just like a music-hall comedian with a north country accent. "We was down at t'bottom and we heard a noise oop top and th'officer got his goon (Lewis gun) into action—then a large fellow stood oop and said in English—'We all want to surrender.'" Three years ago he was an inhabitant of Folkestone. The battalion padre went over with us with his soft hat on, saying, "If you're going to hell, boys, I am going with you!"'

As our men advanced towards the river in the neighbourhood of Miraumont, they caught a fox after a short run; naturally, for the moment, Germans and machine-guns were completely fogotten. In this fighting the Welsh Division (the 38th) fought magnificently; the men waded through the marshy river bed and climbed the steep banks towards Thiepval under the heaviest machine-gun fire. We had relieved this division in the Givenchy sector in 1916; then they seemed to me dirty and their trenches were in a shocking state, but now all their transport lines showed marvellous discipline, and there was an air of efficiency about them that was most impressive. They continued to fight for many days after this and had a rough time at the old terror spots, Longueval and Delville Wood; by the time they were relieved they had a wonderful record in captures of territory, guns, and men.

It was evident that the enemy meant to stand on the line Bapaume-Peronne-St Leger; his counter-attacks

were incessant, but in vain, and the morale of his troops was not high enough to withstand the irresistible dash of the British. It was some days, however, before he gave up Bapaume, which was occupied by the New Zealand division on the 29th of August.

The next astounding feat of arms was the capture of Mont St Quentin by the Australians; this hill stands N.W. from Peronne and commands all the surrounding country. From this place the Germans had given us hell during the latter stages of the first Somme battle; I heard General Rawlinson tell one of my correspondents, after the German retreat to the Hindenburg line, that it was impregnable from the west. The thought of rushing the position without a huge artillery preparation seemed fantastic, and yet by now the Australians had such a contempt for the Germans that they were willing to take on anything. General Monash (the corps commander) was specially anxious that the Germans should not be given time to reorganise and hold the line of the Somme. He made no attempt to cross the river opposite Mont St Quentin, but went as far back as Feuillieres and got across on small newly constructed bridges; the attacking troops reached Cléry just as night was falling, consequently all the preparations for the assault on Mont St Quentin and the taking up of new positions on ground freshly captured from the enemy had to be performed in the dark. Such an attack, carried out along the banks of a sinuous river, involves the overlapping of battalions and brigades and can only be performed by perfectly disciplined troops, magnificently led. On the next day the summit of the mount was captured by sectional rushes, according to text-book principles, each section alternately giving its neighbour covering fire. The amazing cheek of the enterprise is as incredible as its

success; Mont St Quentin should become a place of pilgrimage to all visitors from the Commonwealth who take a pride in their history. With this hill in our possession, Peronne was bound to fall, and on the following day the Australians completed the capture of the town.

The Germans were now in a serious position, and if they wished to avert a hopeless disaster it would be necessary for them to shorten their line and economise their manpower. They began, therefore, to withdraw from the Lys salient, and it was not long before we were again in possession of the territory won by them in their offensive launched against the Portuguese. In this salient the enemy had been surrounded by our guns; he was without his wonderful dug-outs and pill-boxes and his losses were tremendous, especially in gunners. Our counter-battery work had steadily been improving all through the war, and proof of our gunners' skill was provided by the German graveyards in the neighbourhood of the Lys.

The success of our Third Army, which had hardly been less great than that of the Fourth, now made the situation ripe for a third nibble at the slice of cake; accordingly General Horne's First Army came into action. The Canadian corps had been removed from the line south of the Australians and now attacked again south-east of Arras. They met with instant success and captured the hill of Monchy-le-Preux. Monchy is a small mountain and we lost heavily here in 1917. This time the enemy put up no sort of defence, and his troops swarmed down the Arras road delighted to be captured; they had packed up their spare kit and were waiting for their first opportunity to give themselves up, determined to enjoy their captivity as much as possible. The rations which we found were excellent—good biscuits, sugar, honey and coffee; all the prisoners were of good physique.

On this same day Foucaucourt, on the Fourth Army front, fell into our hands; it was reported that on the 8th of August some of the Canadian motor machine-gun cars had got into this place by dint of taking a turn in a German traffic queue. They proceeded quietly along, directed by many German military policemen, till they eventually found some infantry in column of fours; they had been waiting for this, and suddenly opened fire, inflicting heavy casualties and causing hopeless confusion.

Such progress was made in this initial attack of the First Army that we were immediately up against the Drocourt-Queant line; this was a switch from the main Hindenburg line, constructed after our Arras offensive in 1917. It was a line of great strength protected with masses of barbed wire, and therefore it could not be tackled without proper preparations; it took a week before these preparations were complete. There was now no element of surprise; in 1917 or 1916 the Germans would have been capable of holding out for months in such a position, but their morale was excessively low, not because of our propaganda, as Ludendorff foolishly asserts, but because of our fighting efficiency, our tremendous artillery, and our tanks. The tanks were becoming more and more objects of terror to the Germans, for they felt that their barbed wire was of no use to them; in this attack on the Drocourt-Queant line forty tanks were used and greatly helped to defeat the enemy. The most severe fighting was in the neighbourhood of Queant, and it is a wonder that our troops could ever get through such solid walls of rusty wire. The capture of the Drocourt-Queant line caused a general retreat in front of our First, Third, and Fourth Armies, and it was a question whether the enemy would attempt to make any further stand

before retreating to his Hindenburg line. A position does not simply consist of one line; to defend a position it is necessary to fight in front of it, and in it and behind it, and so we were obliged to make a fourth nibble at the cake and attack again between Havrincourt and Epéhy These operations were successful and yielded twelve thousand prisoners.

The extraordinary success of the Fourth, Third, and First British Armies had obviously changed the outlook for Marshal Foch;' these concentric attacks, which had taken place principally on the British front, were now to spread all up and down the line. Instead of keeping to a limited offensive with a view to training the Americans during the winter, Foch saw that the enemy was all in, and that, though there were only a few more months of campaigning weather, he could be beaten into submission within the given time. Thus the French and Americans were ordered to attack towards Mézières, the British towards Maubeuge, and a mixed force of Belgians, British, and French, under King Albert, towards Ghent. This last arrangement seems to me a stroke of genius—to give King Albert a chance of sharing in the death-blow struck at the wallowing 'blond beast.' Marshal Foch naturally provided him with a first-rate chief of staff. This was a difficult moment for Sir Douglas Haig; the success of his plans had brought about a complete change in the prospect of the allies, and yet now his armies, which had been attacking incessantly since August 8th, had the most difficult task of all before them —namely, to pierce the strongest parts of the enemy's defences. As I have said before, he knew that he would receive no more reinforcements from home, and a failure on the Hindenburg line would end all hopes of complete victory before the winter. He might easily have said

that his men had done enough for one year (and so they had), but he decided to risk all, and his decision was right.

The attack on the Hindenburg line was started by the First and Third Armies, the while the Fourth Army kept up a terrific bombardment. I went out with Beach Thomas and Philip Gibbs to see the northern portion of the attack, and this is an extract of a letter written at the time :—

'29.9.18.—Yesterday I went to see the taking of Bourlon Wood, which was a wonderful sight. In spite of a start from my headquarters at 4.30 a.m., it was already almost daylight when I got to the battle, and the show was in full swing. Our barrage was fiercer than ever, but the German fire was very weak; as the sun rose, a stiff N.W. wind sprang up, which suited our smoke screen to perfection. Dense white fleecy bursts formed themselves into huge cumulus clouds, blotting out entirely Bourlon Wood; this smoke is almost blue-white like an arc lamp. After the shells have burst, the smoke falls like the spray of a waterfall, and then bunches itself into great fat thunder clouds; in the midst of these clouds you see the jets of flame of the thermite shells. A dawn attack has many curious effects, which I suppose are difficult to imagine; first there is nothing but the usual 'Verey' lights sent up from the trenches to light up 'no-man's-land' and prevent patrols from working up to the lines; then the barrage starts and there are tongues of flame all round in front and behind, and bursts of gold when the shells fall, at the same time all the German S.O.S. signals go up; these are green, red, and yellow rockets. Within a few seconds the enemy guns open up, and there is a moment of some anxiety to know

if you are standing on one of the particular spots where the enemy has registered; if not, all's well. While it is still dark, you are not very conscious of the noise; it is nearly all colour. If you turn your back on the enemy, you see columns of men moving up in single file, silhouetted against the flames of the heavies. The moment daylight appears, you become aware of an ear-splitting noise and a lot of violence going on, some of it unpleasantly near you. Yesterday the German fire was not a real barrage, just harassing fire. Our chaps had to cross the Canal du Nord, and this could only be done in certain places, so one would have thought the Boche would have dammed these places up with his fire, but he came down too late; most of our men strolled across with light casualties. I watched the show from the neighbourhood of Mœuvres; this is in a hollow and the ground slopes gently up to Bourlon. The whole of our manœuvre was complicated, owing to the Canal being unfordable in many places; troops had to cross in bunches and then to expand, fan shape. Our men formed up in solid blocks, like in pictures of old-fashioned battles; as the sun topped the wood, the light caught their steel helmets and their naked bayonets. They moved in mass, company commanders mounted; it was a most beautiful sight. By about nine a.m. the whole of Bourlon and Flesquieres ridges were blotted out by this incandescent smoke and hidden from view; I had my glasses up to see the detail, and could make out small parties of infantry following a tank into the Bois de l'Orival. A gunner observer at my elbow suddenly shouted, 'There's an air fight: by Jove, she's in flames.' By great good luck I switched my glasses just right, and saw the plane, in all its detail, falling like a dead leaf, with its petrol tank sending up a gigantic flame; before reaching the ground, the pilot took a header,

but he must have been smashed to pieces. The plane which had done him in followed its victim down, and then zoomed up and made for the Boche lines; we were aghast for a moment, but he turned round and came right over us, and we saw that he was one of our scouts. By the time this episode was over, the smoke barrage had gone right over Bourlon, and we could see our shells bursting well on the other side; we noticed also that our heavies behind us had their noses well in the air, also the Boche fire was harassing us no longer; I imagine that his gunners were limbering up. It was at that moment brilliant sunshine, and all the valleys in our neighbourhood were alive with things crawling forward. I came back by divisional H.Q's and had the news in precise detail. Small parties of prisoners were coming into the cages, and I went to have a look at them; they were mostly a bit pinched about the gills; German prisoners are always very white; it is, I think, because they live a lot more underground than our chaps do; they are like those white caterpillars that you find under stones. There was a group of officers from the 7th Cavalry division, very markedly cavalrymen, and not to be confused with common infantry soldiers. They had elegant short side-whiskers, like me, and they flicked bits of dirt from their tunics in a most dandified manner, and inhaled their cigarette smoke till it all disappeared. This cage was in the old Drocourt-Queant line, and they were surrounded by belts and belts and belts of impregnable wire; I thought they looked at it rather quizzically. Behind the cage some Canadian Highlanders were moving forward in single file—the most magnificent men I have ever seen, with great muscular knees. Their kilts had the most victorious swing to them. As I close this letter I find we took, yesterday, 10,000 prisoners and 200 guns;

most of these troops have been fighting continuously since the 8th of August—it is marvellous. We have attacked in the north and that is also going well—'on les aura' with a vengeance.

During this attack one of my Belgian correspondents, Monsieur Montagne, who represents the *Nation Belge*, was in our front-line trenches (accompanied by one of my officers, Lieut. MacIntosh) with our assaulting troops—in fact, he made himself most useful by pointing out German machine-gun nests to our men. He was on all occasions absolutely fearless, and he knew the conditions of modern warfare as well as any individual on the western front.

I did not get back to my headquarters till two o'clock, and I found a message waiting for me summoning all correspondents to Fourth Army headquarters for a lecture on the operations to take place on the morrow. I sent this message round to all Press units and then I did about two hours' concentrated censoring, and was off to the neighbourhood of Peronne where the Fourth Army was stationed. We were out again the next morning at dawn; in those glorious days we had no rest nor wanted any. General Montgomery, who was General Rawlinson's chief of staff, gave us a most interesting talk; the coming operation was to pierce the main Hindenburg line at its strongest portion—a heavy bombardment of the enemy's lines had been going on for two days—one of the main features of the enemy's defensive system was the Scheldt Canal; between Bellicourt and Vendhuile, a distance of six kilometres, the canal goes underground, through a tunnel; it was known that the enemy had bolt holes from this tunnel, therefore it was of the utmost importance to 'mop up' the tunnel and all dug-outs in its neighbourhood. General Montgomery did not underrate the

difficulty of this enterprise; he informed us that two American divisions were to take part in the show, and that the Australians would be in close support and eventually pass through the Americans; he underlined the point that everything would depend on thorough 'mopping up' by the Americans, and that they had been thoroughly warned as to the importance of not rushing wildly on.

Unfortunately, on the following day the Americans did not 'mop up,' and the Australians, coming up in close support, found Germans between themselves and their Allies. This caused a terrible lot of unnecessary casualties both to the Australians and to the Americans. Up to now, the Americans, who had fought with the Australians, had fought exceedingly well, whereas some of the United Kingdom troops in the recent fighting had not been quite up to concert pitch. The Australians lost no time in telling *their* American friends that Great Britain was the duddest of dud countries, and consequently the Americans in our area had nothing bad enough to say of poor Thomas Atkins. On this occasion, however, the glory of the day was won by the 46th division, composed of men from this contemptible Island. They stormed the canal at Bellenglise, which in this part has precipitous banks, got across the water by means of rafts and lifebelts (stolen from the leave boat), captured the German trenches on the far side, then swung right-handed and took the Germans in the rear, capturing many guns in action. It was a most astounding achievement, equal to anything done in the whole war; General Campbell, who won his V.C. with the Guards division on the Somme for rallying his men with a hunting horn, commanded one of the brigades of this division. After this episode one heard less of the dud country from the Australians; it is only fair to say that they are as generous with their

praise as with their blame. During this one day the 46th division alone captured over 4000 prisoners and seventy guns.

It was not to be expected that the deep defensive zone of the strongest portion of the Hindenburg line could be captured in a day, but the success on this first day of the attack was sufficient to ensure final success, and, after nine days of intensive fighting, this whole position, with the last defensive positions behind it, were captured. As Sir Douglas Haig says in his despatches, the enemy's defeat was overwhelming and there was now only the smallest chance that he could make any serious resistance against our victorious troops. While these events of huge importance were taking place on the Cambrai-St Quentin front, the King of the Belgians, in command of a mixed force of British, Belgian, and French, launched his attack on the Ypres front. The British forces that co-operated were of General Plumer's Second Army. General Plumer is certainly one of the outstanding personalities of the war; it may truly be said that he never made one mistake.

In appearance General Plumer was like a caricature of a British General in an Adelphi melodrama; he is of full habit of body, with a rubicund face and an expression of benign stupidity. I always thought that his exterior was pure camouflage; every detail of his appearance suggested brainlessness, but underneath there was wisdom and astuteness to an uncommon degree. For a soldier it is not a bad thing to look cleverer than you are, like Kitchener, or to be cleverer than you look, like Plumer.

His troops had been situated in the most difficult sector on the British front; they were in a salient, with the enemy on three sides having the advantage of higher ground. Our casualties had gradually to be reduced by

better defences, and then the time was ripe for the great Messines offensive, which was perfectly planned and executed. After the Paschendaele offensive of 1917 he went to Italy and achieved the impossible by getting on equally well with the Italians and the French. His military wisdom and his personal humility made him an enormous influence for good in this crisis on the Italian front. Now he was to fight yet another Battle of Ypres. The German forces on this front were extremely thin, and our men went over the top with hardly any protection from artillery, but they had instantaneous success, their worst enemy being the Flanders weather. The old battlefields had no good roads and our progress was delayed by transport difficulties. This new offensive caused the enemy to fall back from Armentières and Lens; the country round Lens is like the country between Birmingham and Wolverhampton, *i.e.* street upon street of miners' cottages. No serious fighting could take place under such conditions, but the enemy's rearguards were constantly pressed by our patrols.

While the bad conditions of the Flanders roads necessitated a slight delay in this sector, the same troops of the First, Third, and Fourth Armies, who had been fighting incessantly since August, again advanced to the attack. The Third and Fourth Armies were the first off the mark, helped by tanks; the German defences were incomplete and were not a serious obstacle to the tanks, though the enemy's infantry was pretty tough in the initial stages of the fight and counter-attacked with great vigour. Later they gave way and our cavalry had one of the few opportunities of the war, harassing the disorganised enemy and preventing him from carrying out his demolitions. The new advance to the outskirts of Le Cateau brought about a general German retirement, which

disengaged Cambrai. At last it was possible to go and examine this town that we had so often looked at through our field-glasses. Monsieur Paul Dupuy, the proprietor of the *Petit Parisien*, came down specially from Paris with his own car; his correspondent, Monsieur Jean Vignaud, was of the party, and we started from Amiens after an early lunch. The roads east of Bapaume were in a terrible condition for a light private car, and we had to go at a snail's pace for a few kilometres before reaching Cambrai; this enabled Monsieur Dupuy to have a good view of the defences in the neighbourhood of the Canal du Nord, and he was much impressed with the obstacles that our men had overcome. 'Mon Dieu! que vous avez fait de belles choses,' he said. We found Cambrai still in flames, though most of the worst fires had been got under by the Canadian engineers; bits of stone and timber were falling from the houses, and the few people in the town were in a holy terror of booby traps. A cottage piano was standing in the main square outside the town hall, and grenades had been placed in such-wise that they would have gone off with the first note struck, but luckily this trap was discovered and many others of a like nature. Once more I realised how hard it is for those who have not been at the war to feel the same degree of hatred as the French towards this loathsome enemy. The Germans were within a month of capitulation; they knew that they were beaten and had nothing to hope for except 'the quality of mercy,' yet here they were, burning private houses and destroying property out of sheer mischief, knowing that their actions would cause unnecessary suffering and misery to perfectly innocent people. The town was practically deserted, but there were still flowers in the pots on the tables in the rooms, and many other signs of life that had only just been

interrupted. Cambrai is not a very beautiful town, but its ruins looked wonderfully picturesque; I believe that all towns would look the better for being partially destroyed; just imagine Hyde Park Corner knocked about by shells and its imperfect proportions thoroughly disguised; it might then appear like a genuine Greek monument. The main church was horribly mutilated, and the poor box had been forced open by some more than usually avaricious Hun.

The advance beyond Cambrai made a very big bulge in the German line in the neighbourhood of Lille, and it was evident that the northern army under the King of the Belgians must attack again. When this offensive opened, on the 14th of October, it could have been no sort of surprise to the enemy; he had a strongly wired line, and another line of pill-boxes with much wire, and yet a third line of ordinary trenches. Part of this line was held by troops of the 6th German cavalry division, who had been having a beano in Lille a few days before, to celebrate the advent of peace. Like all 'bons viveurs,' they fought well and, during the first day, our advance was extremely sticky; the mist on the ground was too thick and some of our people lost touch. The following day the attack continued and the Boche line began to yield; we moved up the northern bank of the Lys, avoiding the thickly populated industrial country, and by the time we had got to Harlebeke the whole of the Lille salient began to give and this huge conglomeration of buildings, containing thousands of civilians, was freed from the hated enemy after four years of slavery. I went up to this battle front to see what changes there were since the terrible days of 1917, and, as I stood eating my sandwiches by the cloth hall in Ypres, I thought, 'Now at last one can breathe freely in this spot of ill-omen,

instead of hurrying like a driven rabbit across the broad rides of a covert'; hardly had this idea formed itself in my brain than a familiar swish came swinging through the air, followed by an almighty burst somewhere just behind me. It seemed incredible, for at that moment French troops were entering Roulers; presumably it was a last parting shot from a big naval gun somewhere miles away, for no other shot was fired and there was no artillery fire at all on the battlefield: it was something to have seen the last shell burst in Ypres. The roads were terribly blocked with traffic; French, British, and Belgian transport was struggling forward on the old wooden tracks and a cold penetrating drizzle was wetting the very marrow in the men's bones. Some of the *poilus* tried to be cheerful and shouted, 'Lille-Roubaix-Tourcoing en voiture tout le monde,' but for the most part the men were, as they had been throughout this ghastly war, silent, miserable, but uncomplaining. During Ludendorff's March offensive it was our Fifth Army that bore the brunt of the attack, and by April 1918 this army was practically wiped off the slate; before the end of the summer this same army had been reconstituted, with General Birdwood in command, but it had only played a very minor part in our offensive operations, and yet on account of the glorious victories of our other armies, it had the good fortune to liberate the great industrial city of Lille. It is curious also that General Haking should have been the corps commander to enter the town triumphantly, considering that he had made so many unsuccessful attacks in this neighbourhood.

I shall never forget my visit to Lille; our troops had gone far beyond the town, but had not gone through it, and the Lillois were beginning to wonder what was happening. On this occasion I had a distinguished

American newspaper boss with me, and he thoroughly enjoyed the experience. It was very difficult to get into the town, for it has walled fortifications surrounded by a huge moat, and the bridges through the main gates had been blown up by the enemy. At last my chauffeur found the one bridge that had been repaired, and here we had some difficulty with the local sentry; he was quite unfamiliar with the G.H.Q. colours and he insisted on our having a pass with the A.P.M's signature. I showed him an Adjutant-General's white pass, and told him that the Adjutant-General was the great Panjandrum of A.P.M's, superior to them all; still the sentry hesitated, so I informed him that I had just come from Sir Douglas Haig in person and that he had instructed me to go to Lille; this was not strictly true, but it did the trick. The ramparts right away round the town were lined with half-starved little children, who had been shouting the Marseillaise since dawn. In motoring to Lille I had passed through the Cuinchy sector near La Bassée, where I used to be early in 1916; it was odd to be able to motor gaily along a road which used to be blocked with wire and dead bodies, and to look into 'the Jerusalem crater' in broad daylight, instead of crawling round its horrid lip at dead of night, lobbing bombs into the enemy's sap-heads. Here the enemy made a double attack in one night and I nearly went west from a rum-jar. Perhaps all these reminiscences made me feel all the more deeply the unfeigned joy of the inhabitants of Lille; their warm-hearted gratitude was one of the most beautiful things in the whole war. They kept saying, 'Merci de nous avoir liberée; vive les Anglais,' and then one was devoured by kisses; before we had gone very far we had to make for the deserted streets, for the skin on our cheeks was completely worn away. They gave us huge

bouquets of flowers and then, as we left, they asked for them back again as souvenirs of the British Army; my American friend remarked with a super-twang, 'The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away.' Lille has none of the filth and squalor of our English industrial towns, and there are some fine eighteenth-century buildings; possibly its great cleanliness was due to the fact that the factories were not working. The Germans before leaving had removed all the machinery, with the sole object of crippling France's industry for many years to come. Brutes! Brutes! Brutes! The inhabitants were most of them very much undernourished, and it is extraordinary that they had enough energy left in them to show such enthusiasm. During their occupation, the Germans had finished building the new theatre, which was incomplete at the outbreak of war, and they used to have first-rate performances by the best Berlin actors. Lille was a place of leave, and many officers and men went there for a week when the railways were too congested for them to be sent back to Germany; no doubt they spent a great deal of money in the town, and some of the officers of the administrative staffs lived most luxurious lives with mistresses and other extravagancies out of keeping with the hardships endured by the fighting troops. In all the big towns of Belgium and France there were undoubtedly some women who sold their charms to the hated enemy; but nature is stronger than nationality, and under such conditions it is surprising to me that these occurrences were so rare. Generally speaking, the attitude of the Germans was arrogant and overbearing, and on certain occasions officers committed acts of such gross indecency as can hardly be imagined by civilised human beings. It is unfortunate that our own administration of the town was not wholly wise; certain tiresome

restrictions were imposed upon the citizens that were unnecessary at that stage of the war, though the conduct of the British private was admirable.

I lost no time in taking houses in Lille for all my various Press units; we had had to contend with enormous difficulties during this rapid advance, for the battle areas were in some parts eighty to ninety kilometres deep. Our correspondents had to reach front-line areas almost every day, and yet they were obliged to keep touch with their cabling centres. It was not long before telegraphic communication was established between Lille and Paris, but our nearest cabling centre for England was still St Omer.

During the summer Lord Derby had offered me the post of managing propaganda for him in Paris, but I did not feel justified in giving up the Press on the front, even though it meant promotion for me, as it was certainly one of the most interesting appointments that an officer could hold. From now onwards each day brought the news of the capture of some important town; every part of the front was in motion; the reward of all these years of suffering was upon us. Before each of our big attacks we were privileged to have lectures from the chiefs of staff of all our armies; the enemy was fairly on the run and we were fully conscious that we were living through the greatest moment in the history of mankind. I would not have missed this experience for all the Marshal's bâtons in the world. Two more big attacks were necessary before the enemy threw up the sponge; the first of these was successful in bringing about the capture of the enemy's position on the Selle, and during the last battle (Battle of the Sambre) we captured the forest of Mormal and the strongly fortified town of Le Quesnoy. This was the last serious resistance of the enemy; from now

onwards the advance was taken up by mobile troops, cavalry and cyclists, and the German retreat became disorderly and his dishevelled transport was mercilessly bombed by our airmen.

Extract of letter:—

'6.11.18.—It looks as if the end is more or less in sight now; we seem to have the Boche stiff and I don't see what he can do. There have been some astounding happenings lately; I will start with the most recent. In our big attack the day before yesterday, the New Zealanders captured the fortified town of Le Quesnoy; it is an old town with a double line of moats, earthworks, and walled fortifications. The New Zealanders attacked it originally from the west, scaling the walls in truly Shakespearean manner; they then found themselves in a bad position and were under a terrible machine-gun fire from the inner line, so their General ordered a retirement the while he pressed his attack on both flanks. When he had got his men all round and well east of the town, he sent a New Zealand officer with a German officer to claim the surrender of the garrison; one of our planes also dropped messages to the effect that the garrison was cut off and that if they surrendered they would be treated with the honours of war. However, the German commander refused and so the attack was pushed forward beyond the town for several kilometres; a party of New Zealanders being left behind to deal with the garrison at the appropriate moment. These fellows solemnly began to sharpen their bayonets and the German look-out men reported the event to their colonel; it seems to have had a great effect on the Germans, who then decided to surrender. It is often said that in this war there are no dramatic moments, but, if you can imagine

the scene in the German camp when the commander sends for news of the enemy and he is told that they are sharpening their bayonets, you have one of the finest stage scenes imaginable. The first men to enter the town were met by a nun—Sœur St Jean of the Order of the Enfance de Jésus, who urged them to show no mercy to the Germans as their treatment of our prisoners was beyond all description vile; hundreds appear to have died from lack of food and clothing; all the French civilians say the same thing. I had a long interview with this charming Sister, who used to nurse our sick and wounded; the Germans never brought them into the convent till they were so frightfully ill that all hope of recovery was out of the question. She was helped in her nursing by an Irish private, who acted as a sort of sanitary orderly. I asked her the name and regiment of this Irishman and, the Mother Superior being present, she searched through her pocket-book in vain, but later on, when the Mother Superior was in the kitchen, the address turned up in that portion of the pocket-book reserved for things never to be forgotten. Nature is not only stronger than nationality, it is stronger than anything. One cannot help being struck by the fine spirit of the French rescapés, especially the religious ones; their attitude is Christian in so far as it resembles Christ chasing the money-lenders out of the Temple.

There have been several touching scenes and ceremonies in the liberated towns; perhaps the most picturesque episode was at Denain. Denain is a small mining town with narrow squalid streets, and at the time of this peace celebration the Germans were only a few kilometres away; this did not prevent the population from decorating every street with flags which must have been kept hidden throughout the war; strings were stretched across from

window to window and the flags hung down like stalactites. The Mayor presented a special flag to the Canadian General (General Watson) for the Province of Quebec; there was a procession of 1870 veterans, who marched to the church wearing all their war medals, and the girls of the town presented bouquets of flowers to the Prince of Wales. Then followed High Mass; our most Protestant Prince sat at the steps of the altar, and, at the end of the service, a British military band played the Marseillaise—probably the first time this revolutionary tune had ever been played in a Catholic church. The priests were dressed in superb copes of dull gold, and the aisle was lined with warriors standing to attention with fixed bayonets; they were not the spick-and-span soldiers one sees in the Guards chapel at home in London, but fierce, tired men with the look of death in their eyes. They presented arms at the elevation of the Host, and the goose skin quivered up and down my spine. The curé pronounced a most eloquent discourse in the manner of Bossuet. Standing on the steps of the altar, he suddenly began without any text—'Merci,' with his hands stretched out towards the congregation; then, turning suddenly to the altar, he stretched out his hands again, saying, 'Thank you, Almighty God, to whom we turned in our distress; we thought that you did not hear our prayers, but we now realise that, though you wished to prove our constancy, you did not leave our sufferings unheeded, and that if you withheld your judgment it was in order that the punishment of the tyrant and oppressor might be more terrible.' Then he turned to the little Prince, 'Merci, mon seigneur, noble prince d'un noble pays. Nos ancêtres se sont battus jadis dans l'histoire. C'était alors des guerres chevalresques entre de loyaux combattants, mais quand il s'agissait de la

liberté du monde nous ne pouvions être que des alliés. L'Angleterre a entendu le cri de detresse de la Belgique, et jamais la tenacité et la vaillance de vos hommes n'ont paru plus éclatantes que pendant cette guerre.' Then he turned to the Canadian General. 'Thank you, mon General; your men from Canada have travelled thousands of miles to come and help us. We are not only brothers in arms, but we have ties of blood. We have seen the magnificent courage of your men as they chased our enemies along the streets of Denain. May these sentiments of gratitude and affection endure for ever. Ainsi soit il.'

Like a true Frenchman, this priest had seen that this dramatic event was a fitting theme for his eloquence, but that his sermon would be in vain unless he added a sense of composition to his inspiration. It is the combination of these two great qualities that makes a masterpiece.

The young ladies of the town had prepared some beautiful canticles, but their voices were not steady on account of the lumps in their throats; while the band was playing 'O Canada,' 'La Marseillaise,' and 'God save the King,' most of us broke down. I suppose writing an account of it like this in cold blood must make it appear like a cinema show, but all the awkwardness of unrehearsed performance centred round events of the highest historical importance are not easy to describe.

After Mass we talked to the General of the Brigade which had fought in the town and delivered it; the Germans had a machine-gun post outside the church and, as they enfiladed the High Street, they managed to kill several civilians. When driven from here they hung on to the railway embankment, and the General had to bring up his light trench mortars and put a proper

barrage over him; the Boche then surrendered and some hundred of them were escorted back through the town by little half-starved boys carrying tricoloured flags, singing the Marseillaise at the tops of their voices.

One of my French correspondents who entered Valenciennes came upon three dead Germans lying just beyond the Canal; a few yards farther on was a group of small children playing. The next thing he saw was a despatch rider carrying an important message from division to brigade, wearing a top hat and a false nose. 'Après tous ces contrastes, il nous manquera quelque chose après la guerre!'

There was another celebration in the town of Tournai; Tournai Cathedral is one of the most beautiful buildings in Belgium. Here also the priests were dressed in magnificent clothes; those who served the Mass wore vestments of a rare verdigris colour which contrasted admirably with the stone of the building, which was of two shades of gray. The solemn Te Deum after the Mass was intensely beautiful, and, as the service ended, the organ struck up the Brabançonne and the officiating priest headed a procession, preceded by a man carrying the most colossal flag that I have ever seen; as they left the church they were lit up by the faint sad rays of the late autumn sun. On reaching the open place, they came up against the troops of one of our Scottish divisions passing through the town; the men were marching splendidly and the pipes were having a great effect on the half-starved population.

On getting back to our headquarters in Lille that afternoon we heard that the enemy had asked for a cease-fire between certain hours, in order to allow his envoys plenipotentiary to cross the lines on the way to Maréchal Foch's headquarters. Later in the evening we heard that

the cars bearing the German envoys had got hung up in their own traffic, which was in a shocking state of disorder, and that, being exceedingly late, they were terrified lest they should be fired on, and were sending out wireless messages in all directions. Finally we heard that the cars had got safely across 'no-man's-land' and that their white flag was large enough to be seen from the Channel to the Swiss mountains. Of course, I was nowhere near Foch's headquarters and was not a witness of what took place on this great occasion, but I have been given an account of what happened from two different sources. The delegates arrived at their château in the neighbourhood of Foch's train late in the evening; at seven o'clock the following morning they sent round to know what hour the Marshal would see them, and they were told nine o'clock. At a few minutes before nine, they came pattering along the duckboards outside the train; they looked not a little sheepish, and, like Agag, they walked delicately. They were shown into the saloon and precisely at nine o'clock Foch stepped from his study: 'Well, gentlemen, to what am I indebted for this visit?' was his opening remark, which somewhat staggered the Germans. 'We have come to find out your terms for an armistice,' they replied. 'I don't want an armistice, I am extremely satisfied with the military situation.' 'Oh! but we thought . . . we understood . . . President Wilson's notes had led us to suppose that you would be willing to state your terms for an armistice,' they said haltingly. 'Ah! I understand,' replied Foch, 'it is you who want an armistice and you have come to beg me for my terms.' Having thus put them, as it were, in the position of beggars for mercy, Foch asked for their credentials and took their papers into his study to examine them at leisure. After he had satisfied himself

that all was in order, he returned and was formerly introduced to each of the envoys. He then presented them with the Allies terms, which, as all the world knows, were of such a nature that, if the Germans agreed to them, the war was over and finished. They did sign and the war was over. One of the envoys before leaving had a conversation with one of Foch's staff officers; he pleaded for mercy on the ground that the condition of Germany was hopeless, to which the French officer replied 'We *hate* you.' 'Oh!' said the German, 'I am sorry—I was speaking to you as a human being, not as a German.' 'I was speaking to you as a Frenchman.' This conversation is typical of the attitude of France. The German soldiers deliberately went on destroying towns and factories after they were hopelessly beaten, and it will take centuries before Frenchmen forget it.

Since returning to England after the war I have met countless people who have said, 'What a pity it is we did not go on and smash them, and destroy German towns and kill every male German.' The idea is absurd; the German army was smashed in the fullest sense of the word; it is, however, impossible to round up the remnants of two hundred divisions as neatly as when armies were composed of four or five divisions. As it is, Germany finds it impossible to pay her indemnities and her exhaustion is too great for the financial health of Europe, but there are some bloodless politicians who are shocked at the fervid hatred of the French towards the Germans. This hatred, in my opinion, has been earned by innumerable acts of unnecessary cruelty and wanton destruction, and we must not forget that France, besides having vast tracts of rich country destroyed, has left a million more dead than ourselves on the battlefields.

The news of the signing of the armistice terms reached

me through my French liaison officer and I immediately posted it outside my office in Lille. During the early hours of the morning of November 11th, the Canadians had captured the town of Mons after a stiff fight, and so we ended up where we started after four and a half years of bitter fighting and suffering such as has never been heard of before. All that is best in the youth of the country has been slaughtered; homes that were peaceful and happy before the war are wrecked for ever; the war completely divides present from past and nothing can ever be quite the same again, and the question is whether it has been worth while. Personally, I think it has; the prestige of great nations depends on their power to face torture and death for great principles, and this ordeal has revealed depths of nobility in human character that were hitherto unsuspected, to me at any rate. I consider that courage is one of the noblest of human qualities, and that patriotism is the highest virtue, for it carries with it no reward. In time of peace we are continually reading in the Press of this or that athletic champion, this or that artist of super-dynamic power, or this or that politician of prodigious low cunning, but this war has brought out the uncommon virtues of the common man; it is owing to his heroism that we are able to hold up our heads to-day.

Extract of letter :—

'11.11.18.—This series of letters will soon be brought to a close. At breakfast this morning I heard that the armistice was signed and orders were being issued to cease fire at eleven o'clock. So we have finished where we started, and in the meantime have completely defeated our enemies: one of the most absolute and thorough victories has been obtained for which there is no parallel

in history. It has certainly been achieved by prodigious hard fighting, and surely Britain has risen if possible in the world's estimation. It is curious to look back at my own experiences; I remember the day when I saw Nelly Hozier just after she had escaped from the Germans, and she described to me the appearance of the German army coming into Belgium, every road crawling alive with gray humanity. "You will never beat them," she said, "their organisation is marvellous, their numbers unbelievable." Then I remember my first fateful day at Fleurbaix, where so many of our poor chaps were killed without so much as seeing a German trench, and my extraordinary escape, and the horrible night in the C.C.S. next to an officer who had had his stomach shot away with machine-gun bullets. Then the long dreary stretches of trench warfare, where every attack seemed hopeless and where the battalion frittered away without apparently achieving anything—the removal of my dear friend Grisewood and the death of nearly all the young officers. That was the bad time, and the fighting on the Ancre and Beaumont Hamel was certainly equal to the other great horrors of the war. Then came my change of job with the foreign Press. I was able to prove to the French nation how magnificent our men were under fire and how splendidly they met death. Those who saw it have never forgotten it, and from the 13th of November, 1916, I have had some ten French correspondents all of them willing to die in order to uphold the name of Great Britain. Their absolute devotion through the dreadful year of 1917, and the terrific German onslaught of this year certainly did much to hold the alliance together. This last period has been a great strain, because the whole press organisation has become a vast concern. Since August 8th we have swept the front

from end to end, constantly changing our headquarters, and getting accurate news of the army's achievements into practically every country in the world day by day. The transport and the cabling and the ration difficulties, the relations between Press, staffs, and troops, and all these and many other things have been overcome, and to-day my correspondents of all countries met in the market square of Mons and saw the commander of the Third Canadian division hand over the town to the mayor, calling for three cheers for King Albert. The enthusiasm was indescribable. The fight for the town was very hard as the Boche no doubt wanted to hang on to it for sentimental reasons. Many German dead were found in the town. Little children watched the fight from the windows of the houses and gave most excellent descriptions to the correspondents. The civilians are very short of food, and already the Canadian corps alone is feeding over 500,000. As the first British troops arrived the town church played "Tipperary" on the few bells that had been left by the Germans. In this part of Belgium they think that "Tipperary" is the national anthem, and they all stand to attention when it is played. The town bellringers had been practising this tune secretly for four years, but the Boche pinched some of the bells, which hampered the accidentals; nevertheless, the tune was recognised. "God save the King" is considered to be a German tune and regarded with suspicion. I hope in England there will be some sort of real tribute to Sir Douglas and the army; I don't think any one realises what they have accomplished this year. The French did the thing splendidly by their vote in the Senate, passing a resolution to the effect that "Les armées, le citoyen Georges Clemenceau et le Maréchal Foch ont bien merité de la patrie." Could anything

be more simple or more perfect? Clemenceau has indeed been a wonder; he is one of the few men who have *led*, against the current too. I saw him with our Chief at the worst moments and his impartiality and loyalty to us were magnificent. Also he went down every day to the unhealthy parts of the line and really encouraged his soldiers, having some very narrow escapes. I have never met Foch, but his achievement is extraordinary; he flung his divisions about with prodigious elasticity, but his principles were those of the traditional French "maître d'armes," letting his enemy attack him while using only a small proportion of his strength in defence, and then falling upon him with incredible violence when the right moment came, and never easing up till the result was obtained. In order to keep intact the necessary reserves he had to call upon superhuman powers of endurance from the divisions already engaged; only perfectly disciplined troops could have carried out his programme. The entire credit of the 8th of August victory and subsequent victories is due to Haig and the British Army. We accomplished *the* surprise of the war by concentrating three infantry corps and a cavalry corps in a very small triangle of ground right under the nose of the enemy. Then the same troops went on fighting, fighting, sustained only by victory. They went over the Ancre, over the Somme, over the Canal du Nord, over the Canal de St Quentin, over the Scheldt, buffeting the enemy like a tired boxer till they gave him the knock out at Mons; and so it seems to me that Sir Douglas Haig and the British Armies "ont bien merité de la patrie." I hope in a few days to go to the Rhine and describe to you the fruits of victory, and then I hope to be no longer "the major," and, "every inch a soldier," but to become a civilian.'

The effect of the signing of the armistice on the troops was most curious; hardly a man would believe it, and those that did could not realise it. They seemed almost disappointed—not because they liked being killed or did not want to get home, but because habit becomes ten times nature. To me the most dramatic effect was when I went out on the night of the 11th of November and there were no gun flashes in the sky. The first thing that had struck me with horror, when I arrived in France at the beginning of 1916, was the thought that these flashes had been going on incessantly every night since August 1914; they had gone on ever since, and now suddenly this frightful madness was over, and this outward and visible sign of incessant slaughter was at an end. It was uncanny.

The next day the road to Brussels was crammed with prisoners of all nationalities: the Germans had just opened the doors of the prison cages, leaving the prisoners to find their way as best they could. There was every nationality and every type of uniform on this road—Italians, Russians, Servians, Rumanians, etc. There must have been the same sort of scene on this same road after the Battle of Waterloo one hundred years before. Our own men were mostly dressed in German uniforms and they were in a disgusting state; they had not had a wash of any description since they had been captured in March; they were covered with lice and boils, and were in a half-starved condition. They all bore most glowing testimony to the generosity of the Belgian civilians who were very short of food themselves and yet insisted on giving everything to these poor wretched prisoners. My photographers were very difficult to control at this time and I had to remind them forcibly that the terms of the armistice laid down that there should be a space

between oursleves and the Germans: one of them, in an excess of copy-hunting zeal, photographed a German brigade commander at the head of his troops carrying out the initial stage of 'the day's march nearer home'; luckily the Germans were delighted to be photographed, but I took steps to ensure that this sort of incident should not occur again.

I saw the triumphal entry of King Albert into Ghent; I was mixing with the crowd outside the Hôtel de Ville when I saw two Belgian officers making signs to me. At first I thought they must have recognised a friend behind me, but they soon made it clear that they wished me to come up and share their window. I was so much touched at this act of spontaneous generosity that I prepared an extra polite speech, 'Gentlemen,' I said 'on such a day you must be proud to be Belgian officers.' 'We should be still more proud to be English officers' they replied. That evening I went out to see the sights of the town with Phillip Gibbs: Belgian soldiers were dealing out summary punishment to those citizens who had, during the war, shown 'Flamagan' tendencies; their windows were broken and a bonfire made of their furniture. All those women who had kept company with German officers were having their hair shaved off in the open streets. (Many of our women war-workers who have adopted the fashion of short hair during the war, and who have visited the Belgian battle-fields since, were quite surprised at the peculiarly interested glances occasioned by their short hair in Belgium). Gibbs and I finally fetched up at a hall where a soldiers' ball was in progress; here again we had an example of how national characteristics never change. The Belgian Tommies and their ladies were dancing a sort of Kermesse exactly like the picture by Rubens in the Louvre. The

women were glorying in their ample charms, and the men had their heads thrown back and their heels well forward in the traditional Flemish attitude; the alcoves that surrounded the main hall were crowded with amorous couples who were rapidly attaining the final objectives of lovemaking.

This Ghent festivity was a sort of rehearsal for the big Brussels show that came off a few days later. Never have I seen a town so beautifully decorated as Brussels; the Belgian flags and banners seem to be larger than those of any other nation; they hung, literally, from the top story windows to the street. It seems to me also that the Belgians have a finer sense of pageantry than any other race, no doubt a relic of the great Spanish period. The city looked magnificent on this frosty autumn morning. Just before the cortège started from its assembly point, all the little school children were marched down the streets and were posted in the front rank of the spectators. The authorities evidently thought this was a sight to be impressed upon young minds, and they knew that they were too small to hide the view from the grown-ups. Unfortunately, the British contingent wore caps instead of helmets, and so they lost a little of that splendidly war-like appearance they had on the battlefields. I managed to get a place in the Hôtel de Ville for the reception of the King by Monsieur Max, the burgomaster: there was a long wait as the King was very late, but his reception was stupendous. As he was coming up the stairs there was dead silence and the usher announced 'le Roi'; still not a sound was heard till the King reached the middle of the room where all could see him, and then there was such a shout of 'Vive le Roi,' as was never heard before. We all sang the Belgian national anthem, and the King looked overcome, his face being as white as

a sheet. He delivered his speech with great simplicity and then went round the room and shook hands with his subjects.

After Brussels there was but one great event—namely, the arrival of our troops in Cologne. It was curious to cross the frontier by motor and come abruptly upon the cessation of triumphal arches and bunting, and pass through villages where there were no signs of rejoicing. It is curious also to notice how that, as you approach the German frontier, the physical type of the inhabitants becomes less attractive, and, in exact inverse ratio to their ugliness, their talent for music becomes more apparent. It is the law of compensation, if the eyes are tortured, the ears must be flattered. I got to Cologne by lunch time on the day that our troops made their first entry. To my mind the inhabitants behaved in a perfectly natural manner: they were all of them curious and interested, a few of them arrogant, a few of them obsequious, and a great many of them intent on the business of the day and comparatively indifferent to our presence. Our administration of the town during the first few days was shockingly bad; contradictory proclamations were posted, and then were amended and altered. There was an unhappy compromise between weakness and severity, and a general impression of vacillation that created the worst possible effect on the German mind. What was even more regrettable was the behaviour of some of our officers: several of them went about openly with German women, and were seen at cafés and other public places where were also private and non-commissioned officers. The average German knows that he is more industrious and a more thorough organiser than we are, but he does believe or did believe that we had more style and were gentlemen; I am

afraid that on this occasion we must have shattered his last ideal about us. Many Canadian officers of senior rank got dead drunk and were seen in street brawls; it was a pity that we lost this opportunity of setting a good example. As for Thomas Atkins, he behaved as always, in a creditable manner, but it was obvious at once that between our men and the Germans there is considerable natural sympathy; our soldiers found the German housemaid no uglier and ten times as willing as those at home in London, and in many points there is racial affinity. With the French it is quite otherwise; there are no points of similarity between them and ourselves. All through they are a complete contrast; but it is in my opinion better to choose one's companions through life for reasons of contrast rather than for reasons of sympathy and similarity. From the Germans we have not much to learn, from the French everything: hence I hope that our alliance with them may last for generations.

It now became time for me to wind up my various Press units and save the Government from unnecessary expense, but I had long cherished a wish that the Chief should say good-bye to all my correspondents, assembled *en masse*, on the Hohenzollern bridge across the Rhine. In his original interview with French correspondents, he told them that he was confident that the war would end in complete victory, and that we should get into Germany, and now this result had been achieved, very largely owing to the superlative excellence of Sir Douglas Haig's army and to his skilful handling of it. On all occasions he hated interviews, but he was well aware of the splendid service that had been rendered by the correspondents and he was anxious to thank them for their work, and so he consented. He arrived one morning

by train at Cologne and I saw him in his saloon; he told me that it was his intention to give all the correspondents a small Union Jack to keep as a souvenir of the British Army, and he asked me if I thought that they would appreciate it, and I said that I thought that they would. As a matter of fact all the foreign correspondents expected that the Chief would pin the Order of the Bath on their chests, and they thought that this was too much like a cracker off a Christmas Tree. In the innocence of my heart I was so certain that our Government would confer upon them some suitable decoration within the next few days (instead of waiting nearly two years), that I appeased them with the promise of some such honour.

Haig made an excellent little speech; he called the attention of the correspondents to the German citizens all round, who were defeated and disgraced, and yet, after their victory of 1870, it seemed as if they should prosper for ever. He remarked that 'swelled head' often followed great victories, and that pride came before a fall. The setting for such a farewell meeting was indeed admirable; we were only a few steps away from the statue of the Emperor, who had just deserted his countrymen in their hour of sore need. Through the arches of the recess where we were collected we had a magnificent view of the broad stately Rhine; it was like the background in an early German altar-piece. As the German waiter in the hotel put it, we had at last wound up the 'Watch of the Rhine.' After his speech, the Chief said good-bye to each correspondent, individually, and then drove off in his car with General Plumer and General Lawrence. During their stay in Cologne, the foreign correspondents interviewed the Bishop of Cologne, and the Rector of the University of Bonn. Neither of them expressed the slightest regret at Germany's share of the war in general,

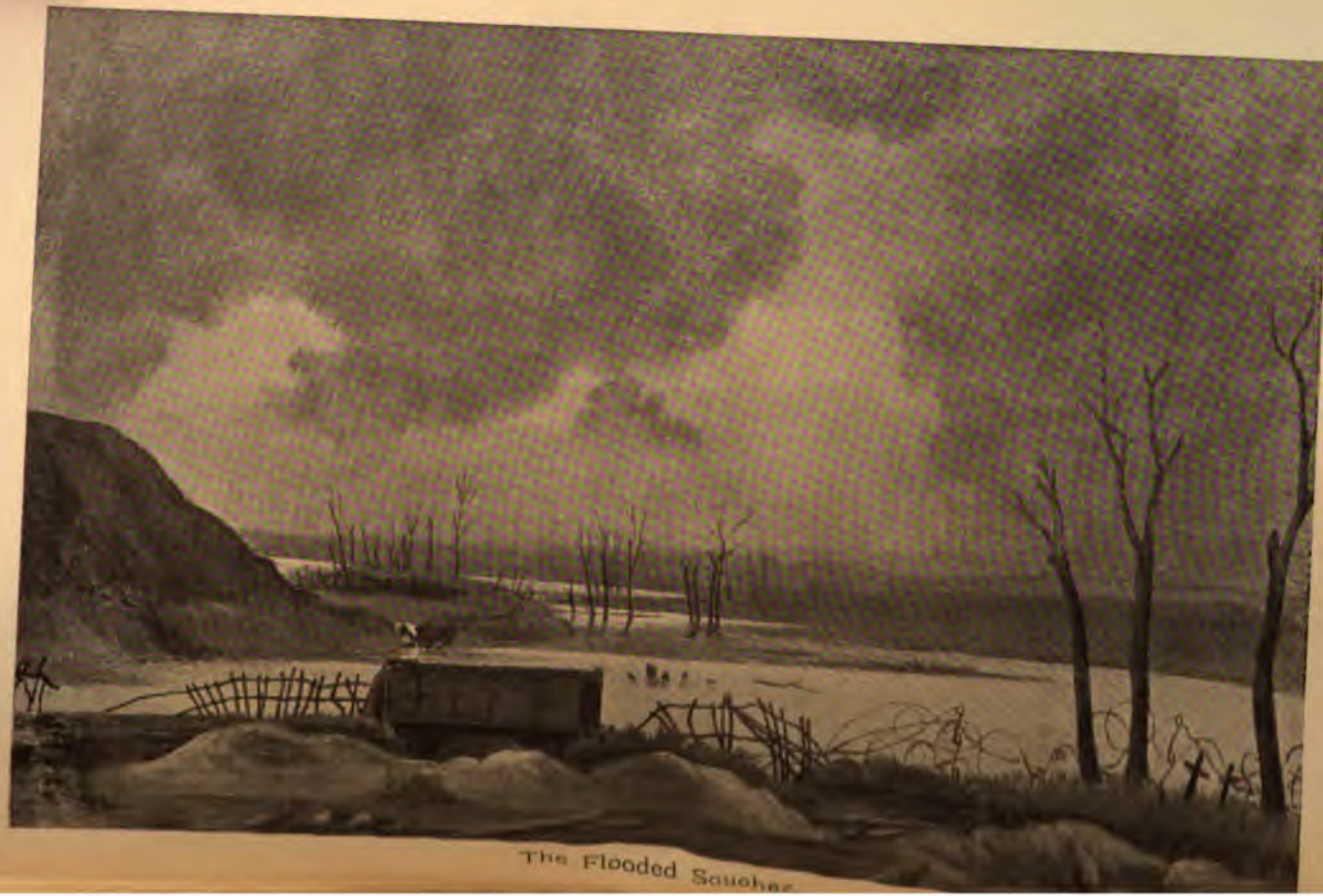
or at any other particular incident of the war. The Belgian correspondents were specially anxious to find out what attitude the Bishop would take up as to the violation of the neutrality of Belgium, but the Bishop only repeated what the German soldiers have said—namely, that it was a matter of military necessity and that they had proofs that France intended to do the same—an assertion which is absolutely untrue.

My job was now over, and I returned as soon as possible to G.H.Q. at Montreuil; on my way back I stopped at Louvain and had a long conversation with a learned priest. I asked him to furnish me with some sort of explanation of the sacking of the town by the Germans in 1914, for this act was not typical of German policy in Belgium, and this is what he told me. The German troops who were holding the line in the neighbourhood of the town got scared, as it was rumoured that the Allies had attacked with some success farther north. The local German regimental commander therefore sent north a few companies as reinforcements, but they found that the rumour was unfounded and so returned to Louvain. They did not arrive back till late when it was almost dark, and their comrades, who were in a particularly nervous state, mistook them for the enemy and fired on them, killing a considerable number. The colonel did not dare to report the truth and so he accused the Belgian *francs-tireurs* of being the cause of these casualties; when the news reached the ears of the German Army commander, he was furious and ordered the principal buildings to be set on fire. This seems to be a very probable explanation of what happened.

For several months past, I had been living principally with the British Press, but I constantly stayed with each different Press unit in turn, and I had become accustomed

Near Bellegarde Lake.

Page 221.



The Flooded Sawhes

to the company of these gentlemen, who were all of them well read and widely travelled. Their profession had kept them in touch with all classes and all nationalities, and I found their company most stimulating; but on returning to G.H.Q. I was once more in a purely military mess, and I was struck all of a heap with the narrow outlook and lack of versatility that is the result of exclusive attention to the daily round and the common task of military routine. Fortunately, the dull work of collecting the various records of each Press unit, the winding up of accounts, etc., did not take so very long, and early in 1919 I returned to England to be demobilised.

I had a great desire to sketch the battlefields before the spring growth should be too far advanced, and fortunately I found no difficulty in getting the Imperial War Museum to send me out for a three weeks' trip. I was lucky in the weather, for every day there were threatening skies and the heavy Flanders clouds so typical of this war, but very little rain. It was bitterly cold and I got chilled to the marrow, but it was intensely interesting. I took the Ypres area and the Lens-La Bassée area, and I was accompanied by a young French soldier who was the clerk of my former liaison officer (Captain Titeux); this young man was an expert in bombs and he scoured the battlefields in search of derelict grenades; the pins were rusty and rotten, but he had a sublime contempt of his own personal safety, and I suppose he wanted me to get the true war spirit into my drawings for violent explosions went on all round me while I was sketching. On one occasion a bursting bomb covered my sketch book with mud and brick-dust; needless to say, that particular drawing has since been sold at a very high price. Many of these drawings have since been purchased by the French government.

The Press and the General Staff

I started my work at the Cuinchy brickstacks, where I found the old 'no-man's-land' full of dead men's bones. I then went on to Reservoir Hill to see the exact place where poor Serge Basset had been killed; from here there was a magnificent view of the Bois des Hirondelles and the Bois de Riaumont, and in the extreme distance the crest of Notre Dame-de-Lorette. I finished up in the Menin road area, and as I sat hour ofter hour and day after day contemplating these horrible slopes with their grim relics, I came to the conclusion that no one but a madman could ever wish for war; the highly polished boots, the bright buttons, the glittering medals and the clicking of spurred heels must never again deceive humanity into thinking that war is anything but the blackest tragedy from start to finish.

INDEX

Abbeville, 21, 168.
Agence Havas. *See* Ruffin, M.
Aisne, Ludendorff's offensive, 169-77, 183.
Albert, King, 137, 189; at Ypres, 195, 198; in Mons, 212; in Ghent, 215-16; in Brussels, 216-17.
Aldershot, 17, 174.
America, public opinion on some incidents, 103, 115; tour of M. Joffre, 135-36.
American Press Unit, the, xi., 115; method of sending despatches, 123-25.
Americans, the, in Paris, 171-72; with the Australians at Hamel, 177; attack at Mézières, 189; on the Scheldt canal, 194-5.
Allied Press, the, xi.; Headquarters at Amiens, 56-58, 63-64, 74-75, 77-79, 124-25, 150-51; and Sir Douglas Haig, 65-67.
Amiens, 56-58, 74-75, 79, 124-25, 150-51, 162-64, 167; Restaurant de la Cathédrale, 96; Haig's decision regarding, 178, 197.
Ancre, the, fighting on, 45, 51, 104; cost of General Gough's victory, 87-88; battle of August, 1918, 184.
Ancre valley, 46, 48, 58, 82, 132; the 'Valley of Death,' 61-62.
Anderson-Morshead, Lieut.-Col. R. H., 170.
Antoine, General, 101.
Armentières, 64, 73, 196.
Armistice, the, 208-14.
Arras, 72, 167, 110, 187; General Nivelle's plans, 82, 88-91; extracts of letters describing the battle, 92-95; Ludendorff's attack in March, 1918, 153-54, 169, 183; the Germans held at, 167.
Arras-Albert Railway, 184.
Ashburnham Park, 15.
Asquith, Mr, 71.
Associated Press, the, 113.
Australians, the, physique, 47; at Bapaume, 77-78; Mr Bean and, 82, 119-20; at Bullecourt, 90-91; photographic section, 119; at Hazebrouck, 159; recapture of Villers-Bretonneux, 162-64; fall of Richtofen claimed by, 166-67; successes and discipline of, 175-77, 180; Mont St Quentin taken, 186-87; capture of Monchy-le-Preux, 187; on the Scheldt canal, 194-95.
Aveluy Wood, 184.
Aviation camps, 73.

Babin, M., of *L'Illustration*, 63.
Bailleul, 159.
Balfour, Arthur, 70-71.
Ball, the airman, 94-95.
Bapaume, 96, 186, 197; the Australians at, 77-78.
Bapaume-Peronne-St Leger line, 185-86.
Barisis, 143.
Bartholomew, Lieut., 117-18, 160-61.

Barzini, Signor, of the *Corriere della Sera*, 64.
Bases, immensity of, 73-74.
Bassée, La, 64, 168, 200.
Basset, M. Serge, of the *Petit Parisien*, 107-10, 222.
Bean, Mr, x., 82, 119-20.
Beaucourt-sur-Ancre, 59-61.
Beaumont Hamel, 51, 58, 59, 82.
Beauregard Dovecote, 82.
Beauvais Cathedral, 67.
Beaux Arts, Ecole de, 110.
Beaverbrook, Lord, xiii., 117-18.
Bedolo, Signor, of the *Giornale d'Italia*, 64, 107-8.
Belaustegregoitia, M., 115.
Belgian Correspondents and the Bishop of Cologne, 220.
Belgian front, 74.
Belgians, reason for non-attack by, 137; at Kemmel, 165; at the Ypres-Staden Railway, 167; attack towards Ghent, 189, 198; goodness to the British in Brussels, 214.
Bellenglise, 194.
Bellicourt, 193.
Berthelot, General, an order of, *quoted*, 169-70.
Bethune, 45, 168.
'Betty,' 31.
Bidou, M. Henri, of the *Débats*, x., 63, 102.
Birdwood, General, 199.
Bismarck, 162.
'Black Day,' Ludendorff's, 179.
Blunt, Mr, 143.
'Boar's Head' raid, the, 40-41.
Bolin, M., 115-16.
Bon, M. le, 111.
Bonn University, interview with the Rector, 219-20.
Booby traps, 197.
Boraston, Major, 122.
Boulogne, 37-38.
Bourlon Wood, 132; taking of, 190-93.
Brade, Sir Reginald, 117-18.
Brantnig, M., 116.
British Armies, M. Joffre on the, 137; victories directly due to, 213
British Contingent in Brussels, 216.
British military funerals, 108-10; Richtofen's, 166.
British methods compared with the French, 161.
British Press Censors at the French Press bureau, 169.
British Press Unit, xi, 56-58, 64, 103-4, 113-14, 220; the correspondents and Colonel Fawnthorpe, 113; work of the, 113-15, 151-52; method of sending despatches, 123-25; financing the, 125-26.
British Prisoners, German treatment of, 87, 204.
Brooke, Lieut. J. W., 116-18, 160.
Brookes, Lieut., 116, 118.
Brussels, the prisoners, 214; King Albert in, 216-17.
Bullecourt, General Gough at, 90-91, 130, 143.
Byng, Sir Julian, and the Foreign Correspondents, 73; attack on Cambrai, 101, 129-30; command of the Third army, 149, 167, 184.

Cadge, Captain, xii.
'Cæsar's Camp,' 183.
Calais, food store, 74.
Calvet, M., 115.
Cambrai, 82, 96, 99-100; Sir Julian Byng at, 101, 129-30; the

German counter-attack, 130-34; German evacuation, 197-98.
Cambrai-St Quentin front, 83; the German offensive, 143-44; successes on the, 193-95.
Cambronne, General, 112.
Camouflage, French art of, 54.
Campbell, General, 12, 168, 194.
Canadians, the, at Lens, 72-73, 102, 104, 107; at Vimy Ridge, 93-94, 154-55, 157-58; Haig and the, 101; photographic section, 119; their war correspondent, 119-20; capture of Passchendaele, 129; their motor machine-gun section, 149, 155, 188; at Kemmel, 179; success in August, 1918, 180; at Bourlon Wood, 192; at Cambrai, 197; in Denain, 205-6; capture of Mons, 210, 212; in Cologne, 218.
'Carey's force,' 150.
Casaubon, Mme., 110-11.
Cassel, 73.
Castell, M., 116.
Cateau, Le, German retirement, 196-97.
Cats, Mont des, 159.
Cavalry, use of, 89, 149, 180-81, 196; German, 192, 198.
Cederschiöld, M., 116.
'Censorship and Press,' 142.
Champagne, 144.
Charteris, General, 'Major Lytton to report to,' 55-56; arranges the interview with Sir Douglas Haig, 65, 68; on unity of intention, 84; and the Press, 97, 103, 112; personality, 126-27; removal, 138, 141.
Château-Thierry-Soissons line, 173.
Chemin des Dames, 88, 91.
Chinese labour companies, 164-65.
Churchill, Mr Winston, 95-96.
Cinematographic Section, the, 116, 117, 119, 160-61.
Clemenceau, Sir Douglas Haig and, 139; hostile meeting in the Chamber, 171; at the front, 172; the vote in the senate, 212-13.
Cléry, 168, 186.
Cobbold, Captain, 26, 29.
Cologne, our troops in, 217-18; Bishop of, interview, 219-20.
Colonial Correspondents, 119.
Colonial units, mention of, 113.
'Commandant et sa flute (Le),' 112.
Concentric attacks, Sir D. Haig's method, 183-84, 189-92.
Console, Lieut., 160-61.
Cooden Beach, 4, 5, 16.
Corriere della Sera. *See* Barzini, Signor.
Court Lodge Farm, 10.
Cox, General, and the Press, 126 *note*, 140-41; and the Photographic Section, 118-19.
Croisilles, 96.
Crooksbury Hill, Surrey, 93.
Croze, Lieut., xiii.
Cuinchy, 38, 200, 222.
Currie, Lieut.-Gen. Sir A. W., his order of 27th March, 1918, 155-57.
Curzon, Lord, the War Cabinet, 70-71.

Daily Chronicle. *See* Gibbs, Mr Philip.
Daily Express. *See* Philips, Mr Percival.
Daily Mail. *See* Beach, Mr Thomas.
Daily Mirror, the, 62.
Dawnay, Gen., 142.

Debeney, Gen., 180.
Delville Wood, 185.
Denain, liberation of, 204-5.
Derby, Lord, 70; offer to Mr Neville Lytton, 202.
Despatch riders, 125.
Despatches, method of sending, 123-24.
Detling, 16-17.
Devonshires, the, 170.
Domart, 178.
Donkeys, Moroccan, use of, 74.
Dorsets, the 5th, 87.
Douglas, Capt., Johnstone, 151.
Doullens, 46, 47, 55, 153.
Dreyfus, M., 111.
Drocourt-Queant line, 188-89, 192.
Dupuy, M. Paul, of the *Petit Parisien*, 197.

Echo de Paris. *See* Tardieu, M.
Englebelmer, 47, 49.
Epéhy, 189.
Escaut, Canal de l', 132.
Estaires, 22.
Etaples, 30.
Eton, 110.

Fawnthorpe, Col., and the British correspondents, 113; and the Photographic Section, 119.
Fels, Count de, 62.
Fère, La, 74, 148.
Festubert, 44, 45, 73.
Feuillieres, 186.
Feuquieres, M. de, 58, 63.
Fisher, Colonel, 117.
Flanders, hills of, 168; bad roads of, 196.
Flanders offensive, difficulties of the, 82, 114-15, 126, 179; the pill-boxes, 90; some letters dealing with the, 104-6.
Flemish, fighting qualities, 165.
Flesquières, 130, 191.
Fleurbaix, 22-24, 211.
Foch, Maréchal, skill of, 83, 88; conference with Haig, 153; supreme command, 168; and the attack on the Aisne front, 169-71, 173; arrangements for the offensive, 177; use of the Americans, 189; reception of the German envoys, 207-8; the vote in the senate, 212-13.
Folie, Bois de la, 96.
Foreign Press and the Ludendorff offensive, 151-52.
Forty-sixth Division, on the Scheldt canal, 194-95.
Foucaucourt, 188.
Foureaux, Bois des, 77.
Fourth Army headquarters, correspondents summoned to, 193.
France, military methods compared with British, 161; hatred of Germany, 209; the vote in the senate, 212-13.
French correspondents, the, 63-65, 85, 104, 111-12, 151-52; method of sending despatches, 123.
French missions, 62, 104.
French Press Bureau, 169.
French system of photography, 117.
French vingtième corps, the, 65.
Freybourg, 59.
Funeral, a British military, 108-10.
Fyfe, Mr Hamilton, viii.

Gallipoli, Mr John Masefield's book, 80-81; Mr Churchill and, 95-96.
Generalissimo, need for a, 83-84, 134.
George, Mr Lloyd, opposition to Sir Douglas Haig, 70-71, 139, 143; and Mr Churchill, 95-96.

German Alpine Corps, 161.
German, Press, tribute to the British soldier, 148.
German prisoners, British treatment of, 85-87; their anxiety to surrender, 184-85, 187-88.
Geyl, Dr, 116.
Ghent, 189; entry of King Albert, 215-16.
Gibbs, Mr Philip, of the *Daily Chronicle*, x., 113, 182, 190; at Bapaume, 78; in Ghent, 215.
Giornale d'Italia. *See* Bedolo, Signor.
Givenchy, 33, 37-39, 44, 73, 128, 154, 158, 167-68, 185.
Gore Château, 33.
Goudet, Major, 116.
Gough, General, character, 52; the Ancre, 87-88; Bullecourt, 90-92, 130, 143; Gen. Plumer and, compared, 101; misery of his men, 126; commanding the 5th Army, 143, 145, 149-50, 153, 166-67.
Gouraud, General, 50, 173; personality, 67.
Gouzeaucourt, 133.
Grandcourt, 59, 62.
Greenland Hill, 96.
Grisewood, Colonel, 8-9, 12, 16, 31-32, 34, 37-41, 211; command of the Manchesters, 42-43, 45-46; sister of, 174.
Guards' Chapel, London, 205.
Guynemer, death, 102.

Haig, Sir Douglas, personality, 50, 66-67; interview with the Correspondents, 64-66, 68-69; Lloyd George and, 70-71, 139, 143-45; Lord Northcliffe's support, 71-72; Vimy Ridge, 88-90; General Pétain and, 91; and Winston Churchill, 95; plan at Messines, 100; and Foch, 153, 177; praise given by, 159; decision regarding the Amiens front, 171, 178; method of concentric attacks, 183-84, 189-92; on the enemy's August defeat, 195; use of his name, 200; victories due to, 212-13; last interview with the Correspondents, 218-19.
Haking, General, 199.
Hale, Captain, 107, 108.
Hamel, village of, 51; the Australians at, 176-77.
Hand-to-hand fighting, 60.
Hants, the 14th, 52-53.
Harlebeke, 198.
Harrington, General, and the Press, x.-xi., 97-98.
Havrincourt, 189.
Hazebrouck, 21, 159.
Henderson, Mr, 70.
Henriksson, Mr, 116.
Hesdin, 116, 124, 125.
High Wood (le Bois des Foureaux), 77.
Highland division, the, 58, 173-74.
Hill 60, 97.
Hindenburg, and the tanks, 130.
Hindenburg line, the German retreat to, 75-77, 82, 144; the attack on, August, 1918, 189-92.
Hinges canal, 168.
Hirondelles, Bois des, 107, 222.
Hohenzollern Bridge, 218.
Hohenzollern element in the German war councils, 173.
Hohenzollern redoubt, 73.
Holland, Captain, 117.
Holt, Major, 117.
Horne, General, 73, 187.

Horse-gunners, bravery, 149.
Houten, Mr Van, 116.
Houthoulst Forest, 101-2.
Howard, Colonel, 4-5.
Hozier, Nelly, 211.
Hythe, 106.

Ia work, 140.
Id branch of G.H.Q., 57.
Imperial War Museum, 116, 221.
Indian cavalry, 47.
Information, Ministry of, xiii.-xiv.; the Press units financed by, 126.
Italian correspondents, 63-64; method of sending despatches, 123.
Italian front, 131, 134; General Plumer in Italy, 196.

'Jacob's Ladder,' communication trench, 48.
Joffre, Maréchal, 88; in the States, 135-36; Mr Neville Lytton and, 136-37; personality, 137-38.
Journal, The. *See* Tudesq, M. André.

Kaiser, stories of the, 95; 'luck' of the, 162.
Kemmel Range, 98, 154, 161-62, 165, 167, 179.
Kennington, Mr Eric, xv.
Khaki, first arrival of, 15-16.
Kiggell, General, 138-39.
King Edward's Horse, 117.
King's messenger, use by Press units, 123, 125-26.
Kipling, saying of, *quoted*, 79.
Kitchener, Lord, and the Press, viii; Lord Northcliffe and, 71; Joffre's admiration for, 137; appearance, 195.

Labour companies, Chinese, 164-65.
Law, Mr Bonar, 70.
Lawrence, General, 139-40; in Cologne, 219.
Lens, 64, 89, 196; containing attacks by the Canadians near, 72, 102, 104, 107.
Lens-Lieven district, 96.
Lille, 72; liberation of, 198–202; Press headquarters, 207, 210.
Lillers, 73.
Lille-Valenciennes area, 173.
'Lily Elsie,' 31.
Limited objective, drawbacks, 99.
Locon, 32.
London Rifle Brigade, 154.
Longeau, 178.
Longueval, 185.
Loos, battle of, 174.
Louvain, sack of, 220.
Louvre, the Rubens, 215.
Lowther, Colonel Claude, recruiting methods, 3-4, 7-12.
Ludendorff, *Mémoirs*, 100; and the tanks, 130, 147; offensive, March, 1918, 146-77, 199; and the Canadians, 158; his lost opportunities, 183; on our propaganda, 188.
Lys, the fighting at, 115, 158-60, 167; General Campbell at, 168-69; Ludendorff's attack, 183; German withdrawal, 187, 198.

Macdowell, Lieutenant, 119.
Machine-gun nests, defensive system, 89-90.
Machine-gunners, German, 75-76, 149.
MacIntosh, Lieutenant, 193.
McKenzie, Mr, 113.
Maeztu, M., 115-16.
Mailly-Mailly Wood, 184.

Maratray, M. Raymond, of the *Petit Journal*, 63, 107; a letter from, 69-71; at Bapaume, 77-78; his illness, 79.
Marne, the, a remark of M. Joffre, 138; German recrossing, 172.
'Marseillaise' in Lille, 200; in Denain, 205.
'Martha,' 31.
Masefield, John, x., xiv.; visit to France, 80-82.
Masnières, 132.
Mass in Denain, 205-6; in Tournai, 207.
Matagne, M., of *La Nation Belge*, 64, 106-7.
Matin. *See* Olivier, M.
Maubeuge, 189.
Max, M., 216.
Meaux, 137.
Ménabréa, Lieutenant, 121.
Menin, 162, 222.
Merville, 28, 29, 32.
Mesnil, 48.
Messines, 82, 92, 104.
Messines offensive, General Harrington on the, 97-98; plan of, 99-100.
Messines-Wytschaete Ridge, 92, 98, 162.
Mézières, 189.
Mille, M. Pierre, of the *Temps*, 63, 79.
Miraumont, 82, 185.
Mjelde, M., 116.
Mœuvres, 191.
Mokhattam hills, 128.
Monash, General, 176; taking of Mont St. Quentin, 186-87.
Monchy Breton, 45, 47, 52.
Monchy-le-Preux, 89, 93; captured by the Australians, 187.
Mons, Canadian capture of, 210, 212.
Montagne, M., of the *Nation Belge*, 193.
Montague, Captain, xii.
Montauban village, 63.
Montdidier, 153, 167, 183.
Montgomery, General, 193-94.
Montreuil, 123, 125, 220.
Morbecque, 21-22.
Mormal, forest of, 202.
Motte, La, village of, 150.

Naval division at Beaucourt-sur-Ancre, 58-60.
Negréros, Signor, 63.
Neutral Press Unit, xi, 115-16, 124-25.
Neuville St Vaast, 94.
Nevinson, Mr, x., 182-83.
New Zealanders, war correspondents of the, 119-20; at Bapaume, August, 1918, 186; capture of Le Quesnoy, 202-3.
Newspaper Proprietors' Association, viii, 125.
Nieppe Forest, 167.
Nivelle, General, success at Verdun, 87-88; dismissed, 91.
Nœux-les-Mines, 109.
Noir, Mont, 162, 167.
Nord, Canal du, 191, 197.
Nordstrôm, M., 116.
Northcliffe, Lord, x.; supports Sir D. Haig, 71-72; propaganda work, 162.
Northcote, Lieutenant, 53.
Notre Dame de Lorette, 72, 222.

'Officiers Informateurs,' xiii., xiv., 120-21, 124.
Oise, 155.
Olivier, M., of the *Matin*, 58.
Orival, Bois de l', 191.

Paget, Capt. Otho, 13, 17, 20-22.

Painlevé, M., 103-4.
Palmer, Mr Frederick, 115.
Paris, threatened, 171, 175; march of the Americans through, 171-72; 'La Grosse Bertha,' 172; intention of Foch concerning, 178.
Passchendaele, 92, 100, 101, 128, 129, 179, 196.
Pemberton-Billing case, 175.
Peronne, 74, 79-80, 83, 178, 186-87.
Pétain, General, 50; Haig and, 91; the counter-offensive, 173-74.
Petit Journal. *See* Maratray, M. Raymond.
Petit Parisien. *See* Vignaud, M. Jean.
Philips, Mr Percival, of the *Daily Express*, x., 113.
Photographic Section, the, 116-19, 160-61; headquarters of, 125; an incident, 214-15.
Pilkem Ridge, 126.
Pill-box, the, evolution, 90; use after Messines, 100.
Ploegstreet Wood, dug-outs, 73.
Plumer, General, x., 50; at Messines, 92, 97; plans of, 101; position of the 2nd Army, 195-96; in Cologne, 219.
Pooling of information, system of, xi., 123.
Poperinghe, 101.
Portuguese correspondents, 63, 151;
Portuguese, the, at Lys, 154, 158, 167, 187.
Pozières Ridge, 78, 184; the Australians on, 90.
Press, the, all units taken over by Mr N. Lytton, 112, 121; disposition of, 124-25; reorganisation, 141-42; in Lille, 202; interview with Sir Douglas Haig, 218-19.
Press-censorship, learning the business, 57.
Pritchard, Hespeth, 54.
Punch, reference to, 128.

Queant, 188.
Quebec, Province of, flag for, 205.
Quesnoy, Le, capture, 202-3.

Rain, our ill luck, 100-101.
Rancourt, 74.
Rawlinson, General, 184, 193; opinion regarding Mont St Quentin, 186.
Reservoir Hill, 108, 222.
Rheims, 168-69, 173.
Riaumont, Bois de, 222.
Richebourg St Vaast, 40, 73.
Richtofen, funeral of, 166.
Riddell, Sir George, 117.
Robertson, Sir William, at the War Cabinet, 69-71.
Robinson, Mr Perry, of the *Times*, 113.
Rœux, 89.
Rouge, Mont, 162, 167.
Roulers, 199.
Royal Sussex, the 12th, 174.
Roye, 178, 182, 183.
Ruffin, M., of the *Agence Havas*, 58, 59, 107, 108, 151.
Rumilly, 132.
Runners, French system, 75.
Rupprecht, Prince, armies of, 172; offensive abandoned, 175.
Ruskin, *Modern Painters*, 98.
Russia, 83, 92, 134; divisions from, 143-45.
Rymaa, Dr. 32.

Sage, M. le, 111.

St Catherine's Mount, Guildford, 93.
St Eloi, Church of, Arras, 93.
St Jean, Sœur, of Le Quesnoy, 204.
St Omer, 125, 202.
St Pol, 21, 46-47, 124, 154, 167, 179.
St Quentin, Mont, 119, 169; taken by the Australians, 186-87.
Sambre, battle of the, 202.
Scarpe, the, 129, 155; British advance, 89-91; view of the valley, 96.
Scheldt Canal, 193-95.
Scherpenberg, the, 162, 167.
Schwaben redoubt, 51, 59.
'Scoops,' forbidden, 102.
Scotch Uniforms, remark of M. Joffre, 135.
Second Argyll and Sutherlands, 34.
Selle, the, 202.
'Sem,' the French caricaturist, 3.
Sensée, the, 129.
Sharp, Mr, 80.
Short hair, punishment of, 215.
Shrive, M. Van, 116.
Simms, Mr, 113.
Sniperscope rifle, the, 44.
Soissons, 173.
Somme offensive, 40, 41, 42, 45-46, 64, 65, 81-84, 88, 104, 184, 186.
Spanish despatches, method of sending, 123.
Spurrell, Colonel, 30, 39.
Staff duties, the Press and, 142.
Submarine campaign, 92.
Sussex, the 11th, 52-53.
Swinton, General, viii.

Tanks, near Beaumont Hamel, 59-60; at Bullecourt, 90-91; at Cambrai, 130; not developed by Germany, 147; engagement between British and German, 163; the new, 177; the French Renaud, 183; German fear of, 188.
Tardieu, M., *Echo de Paris*, 56, 63.
Tear shells, 59.
Telegramme de Boulogne, 103.
Tessar, Lieut. François de, 135, 137-38.
Thermite shells, 48.
Thiepval, 184-85.
Thiepval-Beaumont-Hamel line, 45.
Thilloy, Le, village of, 78.
Thomas, Mr Beach, of the *Daily Mail*, 113, 138, 190.
Times, The. *See* Robinson, Mr Perry.
'Tipperary' in Mons, 212.
Titeux, Captain, 221.
Tong, M. de, 116.
Touquet, Le, Duchess of Westminster's hospital at, 29-32.
Tournai Cathedral, 207.
Trafford, Captain Rudolf de, xii., 57-58.
Transloy, Le., 77.
Tredennick, Lieut., 174-75.
Trenches, German, draining of, 25; Hindenburg's line, 75; anti-tank, 130, 132-33; set lines abandoned, 146.
Trônes Wood, 45, 62-63.
Tudesq, M. André, of the *Journal*, 58-59.

United Press of America, 113.
Units, non-mention of, 113.

Valenciennes, 207.
Vauban fortifications, 77.
Vendhuile, 193.
Verdun, 104; desolateness of, 62; German impressions, 83; General Nivelle's success, 87-88.
Verrau, General, 62.

Vignaud, M. Jean, 197.
Villers Plouich, 132.
Villers-Bretonneux, 150, 153, 162-64, 178, 183.
Vimy Ridge, 89, 93-94, 96, 104, 155, 157-58, 167.
Viper, transport, 20.
Vitermont, 49.
Viviani, M., 135-36.

Wales, Prince of, in Denain, 205-6.
Walloons, fighting qualities, 165.
War Museum, the, 116, 221.
War Office conferences, 69-70, 117.
Warlencourt, Butte de, 77.
Waterloo, 214.
Watson, General, in Denain, 205-6.
Welsh Division, the 38th, 185.
Westhoek Ridge, 126-28.
Wilkinson, Capt., 119.
Wilson, Colonel Hutton, 57, 64, 68, 81, 113.
Wilson, President, *quoted*, 208.
Wilts, the, 49.
Wiring, German system, 76.
Witley, 19.
Woolcombe, General, 11.
Worcesters, the, 49.
Wytschaete-Messines Ridge, 92, 98, 162.

Ypres, 33, 64, 73-4, 98-9, 128, 131. King Albert at, 195; General Plumer's offensive, 196; evacuation of the Germans, 198-99.
Ypres-Staden Railway, 165, 167.

Z., Bois de, 182.
Zimmerman, M., 116.
Zonnebeke, 128.

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