

which all these battles of Flanders have been fought, and to get to this place and the slopes and ridges on the way to it, not only for its own sake but for what it would bring with it, great numbers of our most gallant men have given their blood, and thousands—scores of thousands—of British soldiers of our own home stock and from overseas have gone through fire and water, the fire of frightful bombardments, the water of the swamps, of the beeks and shell-holes, in which they have plunged and waded and stuck and sometimes drowned. To defend this ridge and Passchendaele, the crest of it, the enemy has massed great numbers of guns and incredible numbers of machine-guns and many of his finest divisions. To check our progress he devised new systems of defence and built his concrete blockhouses in echelon formation, and at every cross-road, and in every bit of village or farmstead, and our men had to attack that chain of forts through its girdles of machine-gun fire, and, after a great price of life, mastered it. The weather fought for the enemy again and again on the days of our attacks, and the horrors of the mud and bogs in this great desolation of crater-land miles deep—eight miles deep—over a wide sweep of country, belongs to the grimmest remembrances of every soldier who has fought in this battle of Flanders. The enemy may brush aside our capture of Passchendaele as the taking of a mud-patch, but to resist it he has at one time or another put nearly a hundred divisions into the arena of blood, and the defence has cost him a vast sum of loss in dead and wounded. I saw his dead in Inverness Copse and Glencorse Wood, and over all this ground where the young manhood of Germany lies black and in corruption. It was not for worthless ground that so many of them died and suffered great agonies, and fought desperately and came back again and again in massed counter-attacks, swept to pieces by our guns and our rifle-fire. Passchendaele is but a pinprick on a fair-sized map, but so that we should not take it the enemy had spent much of his man-power and his gun-power without result, and he had flowed up to his guns tides of shells almost as great as the tides that flowed up to our guns, and throughout these months he has never ceased, by day or night, to pour out hurricanes of fire over all these fields, in the hope of smashing up our progress. A few days ago orders were issued to his troops. They were given in the name of Hindenburg. Passchendaele must be held at all costs, and, if lost, must be recaptured at all costs.