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**Four Years After**

BY Canon F. G. Scott, C. M. G., D. S. O.

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CHAPTER I

It was a strange feeling to wake in the morning and realize that one was again in Belgium. During the early summer of 1915, it had been the only city to which we could resort in a quiet way and meet our friends. It was then the conflict of life. Shop and Estaminets were in full swing, and troops were continually passing through it on their way to other localities. After an English breakfast at the Hotel we made our way to the garage where the light lorry had had a good rest and extra provisions in the way of gasoline.

We drove to the Grande Place, and there we saw the horrible destruction that had been wrought by German shells in that most interesting part of the old town. The church had absolutely disappeared, not a wall was standing, and the stones with which it had been built were piled nearly on the site. It was distressing to the sight of all the beauty and romance that had gone forever. Within the church the blind organist had poured forth his stinging at the organ one day, had been killed by the bursting of a shell. The very much damaged. The clock on the old Spanish Tower is still standing and has stopped and its poor lifeless hands give the structure almost the appearance of human death.

Around the square the shops had been completely demolished but the cellars remain and over them new buildings are being erected. It is interesting to see what wonderful cellars they were, so deep, so extensive, and arched in brick and stone. The Captain had been hit by a shell while doing a gallant deed of rescue at Bethune, so we took a photograph of the scene of his exploit, and then turning our back upon the Grande Place, we went down the street, making our way into the country in the direction of Nouer-les-Mines. We missed the huts and camps that used to decorate the sides of the road. In their places, we saw only green fields, and instead of lorries and motors, we passed countrymen returning from town, or going higher with their vegetables to market. When we reached Nouer-les-Mines we stopped to have a look around the place. To the left, we saw the pyramid-like heap and the tall chimney of a mine sending out black smoke, which showed that work was going on as in the old days. Passing by the building where once our field ambulances looked after the wounded, we came to a little cemetery. Here were many graves of Canadians who had been killed while we were at the front. The place had been several times hit by shells, but now it is peaceful and nearly laid out. The men who work on it have a little office in a hut nearby.

We went on through Nouer-les-Mines passing the bronze statue of the old burgher which stands where several roads meet. At this place a sentry used to be on duty and it was a dangerous post for shells from a big German gun used to fall at that point with great frequency. The German gun had been put out of action by means of a newly invented instrument called a sound ranger binder which indicated the locality of a piece of artillery by measuring the time of explosion.

The houses in the town have been repaired and the people were no doubt very happy to be back in their ordinary life, but the place seemed lonely to us. We missed the activity of old days when men were passing up and down that street, and lorries, motors and motorcycles made it noisy, bright and gay. It was delightful, however, to be once again in the old place. There back from the road was a little house where "C" mess had held its festive gatherings. There was the building which we had fitted up as an officer's club. Further on was the square where our artillery horse lines had been, and there, opposite the mines, was the comfortable home of Monsieur Delaporte where I had had a room during our various visits to the Loos front. Of course we did not pass it for I had many pleasant memories of the kind hospitality of my host and hostess.

We entered the gate leading into the garden. At that gate I used to be the Dandy, while little Albert, my bull terrier, mounted guard over him, and would not allow any one to approach him. The garden, when we entered, looked very delightful. The old shell-hole in the front which was large enough to be a duck pond, has now been filled up, and the flower beds were blooming in great profusion. The house had evidently been thoroughly repaired, and wore an air of

comfort. We rang the bell and a maid came to the door. I told her we had come to call upon Madam and we were shown into a luxurious drawing room. I was anxious to see if my change of costume would be a complete disguise. It was not-for when Madam arrived, she gave an exclamation of surprise and welcomed us heartily to the old home. She said that she was not at all surprised to make each other understand our French and English. Luckily, one of the young ladies had lived for several years in England, and she became the liaison-officer between us and the family. Nothing would do but we should stop and have lunch. I was shown my old bedroom which was now incorporated as part of the drawing room and wears a sumptuous aspect. The mirror over the mantelpiece still stands in the old place and the iron shutters still show the holes made by shrapnel. "Vive chambre" said Madam, as she threw open the door. Lucheson was served in real French style and was a charming meal. I had the honor of sitting between two ladies who had been decorated with the Croix de Guerre for military service during the war, my hostess and her sister-in-law.

It was with many regrets that we had to leave to our kind hostesses at luncheon. They accompanied us to the garden gate to see the light lorry with its ballast of chalk. If there could be more meetings between British people and those who were kind to us during the war, the meeting between the two nations would be a more real and living thing. On the opposite side of the street, the mine building looked as if it had never heard of war, and relays of miners were passing in and out of the gates showing that business was as usual. We passed the various houses which had been the headquarters of the Division and the Divisional Artillery. There was the old bandstand where occasionally in the afternoon our land used to enliven us with its music. There was the school which had been used as an hospital. Very few houses had been changed by the war, for it was there that only very severe cases were received. The patients were sheltered house by the mine and the Chaplain once told me of the strain it was to be on duty night and day and see nothing but hideous wounds and men whose condition was beyond human aid.

Our objective now was our old front line on Hill 70. We crossed the railway track and sped up the new road to Sains-en-Gohelle. On both sides the landscape was green and peaceful, and distant mine chimneys and slag heaps were now but a faded memory. We turned by a corner estaminet and went eastward to the Le Bois road where we found ourselves actually on the

country road leading to Loos. We could see the Double Grassier and Loos Grassier, at the foot of which our batteries had been stationed when we took Hill 70 on August 17th, 1917. Loos itself was quite unrecognizable, for out of the ruins was springing a new red brick village. Still, the roads were there and many a time in the darkness we had trodden them when shells and gas made the place a precarious home.

Our first visit was to the old Crucifix which stands on a mound to the east of the town. Neatly our engineer kept a store of material in the shape of barbed wire, spades, and other necessary articles for the carrying on of military operations. It was known as Crucifix Dump, and many Canadians have gruesome memories of working parties which used to meet there for supplies on black nights in wind and rain. Falling gas-shells often made it a particularly unhealthy spot. We took a photograph of the Crucifix. It always struck me that the figure was peculiarly pathetic, pierced and battered by shrapnel and with nesting birds making it their refuge. At the top of the mound, in front of the cross, was the grave of a German officer. All traces of this have now gone. I suppose the body has been removed to Germany. The tunnel which the Australians dug to connect Loos with our trenches on Hill 70 still remains, but we did not visit it. It used to be a curious sensation to walk through that passage in the White Chalk lit up only by the candle stuck on the top of one's steel helmet.

We had no need of "safety first" precautions now, so the lorry carried us openly up the road to the famous Hill. Here were many signs that we were in the war-zone. White mounds of chalk showed where the trenches ran, and rusty barbed wire, bits of corrugated iron were piled up here and there.

We turned to the right up the Loos road and soon came to a large chalk quarry where men were at work. There were old French soldiers and were very much interested when they heard we were Canadians. They took a particular interest in a bridge of army command. The quarry must have been the famous one where the side headquarters were, there it had been changed by recent excavations that I could not identify the place accurately. There were many openings to dug-outs, which have now fallen in, and the men told us that they still occasionally find human remains. Only last year when the debris of a shell house by the mine was cleared away, the bodies of seventeen British officers and men had been found in the cellar. They had been entombed there when the building was hit.

The view from the road was intensely interesting. To the west, lay the village of Loos and in the distance the mine heads of Maroe and Bracquemont. To the east, beyond the wheat fields, lay the ruins of Lens. The famous iron towers of Wingles had disappeared.

We were now on the site of our ancient battle ground, and we determined to go forward across the wheat fields, and look for the famous Chalk Pit which had been a great pit in our front line. Making our way through the tall wheat where there was a slight evidence of a narrow path, we came to a chalk quarry up which now runs a railway. The quarry has been much enlarged by excavations, but was evidently the old place where the rabbit-warren of dugouts used to house a whole company of men in the line. We met two British soldiers there who were at work on the Graves Commission. The body of a man had just been discovered in the Chalk Pit and was now being dug out. By some remnants of uniform, it was found to be that of a German soldier and was to be removed for burial.

How strangely changed was that place. We looked towards Lens in which we could see new buildings going up, and we thought of the old days when raiding parties set out at night from the Chalk Pit to attack the German lines, or when Jack Johnson's "Pineapples" "Black Pigs" and other kinds of shells enveloped the neighborhood with unexpected crashes. Now the summer wind fanned the innocent wheat-fields as softly as a child breathes in sleep. We longed to wander into the trenches on the Loos side of the road, but time was pressing, so, re-entering the lorry, and declining the invitation offered by the sign in front of an estaminet to visit the tunnel, we made our way onwards to the town of Lens.

It was well for us, perhaps that our ramble on the Hill, then cut short, for the numerous dug-outs were veritable death traps. The wood supports in them had been removed for fire-wood, and the deep openings were concealed in the long grass. A long line of chalk, on which the wheat would not grow, crossed many of the fields, and, no doubt, was the site of "Hugo Trench," "Hurrah Alley," and "Humburg Alley."

By this time it was late in the afternoon, so, skirting the new brick houses of the city of St. Etienne, we made our way to Lens in time for dinner. The town is a strange jumble of dirt and ruins and new houses. The roads are bad and the place is crowded with scumblers, inhabitants, working men, and commercial travellers. The favorite restaurant is an old army bar which at one end is a dining room, and at the other a sitting room. A rough kitchen makes an extension at the dining room end. The lady who runs the establishment is a middle-aged woman of very wholesome proportions. As it was set the regular hour for dinner, she had to cook one specially for us. The Captain as usual went out by the back door, leaving the Gunner with him, while Maurice and I enjoyed a smoke until the meal was ready. A number of commercial travellers were talking robbily in the sitting-room, and I could almost fancy

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