

24 FROM BAPAUME TO PASSCHENDAELE

of sullen salvo the first day of the last year of war. The last year, if we have luck. It is raining now, a soft rain swept gustily across the fields by a wind so mild after all our wild weather that it seems to have the breath of spring in it. For a little while yesterday this mildness, and the sunlight lying over the battlefields, and a strange, rare inactivity of artillery, gave one just for one second of a day-dream a sense that Peace had already come and that the victory had been won. It was queer. I stood looking upon Neuville-St.-Vaast and the Vimy Ridge. Our trenches and the enemy's wound along the slopes in wavy lines of white chalk. There to my right was the Labyrinth and in a hollow the ruins of Souchez. When I had first come to these battlefields they were strewn with dead—French dead—after fighting frightful and ferocious in intensity. Unexploded shells lay everywhere, and the litter of great ruin, and storms of shells were bursting upon the Vimy Ridge.

The last time I went to these battlefields the high ridge of Vimy was still aflame, and British troops were attacking the mine-craters there. Yesterday all the scene was quiet, and bright sunlight gleamed upon the broken roofs of Neuville, and the white trenches seemed abandoned. The wet earth and leaves about me in a ruined farmyard had the moist scent of early spring. A man was wandering up a road where six months ago he would have been killed before he had gone a hundred yards. Lord! It looked like peace again! . . . It was only a false mirage. There was no peace. Presently a battery began to fire. I saw the shells bursting over the enemy's position. Now and again there was the sullen crump of a German "heavy." And though the trenches seemed deserted on either side they were held as usual by men waiting and watching with machine-guns and hand-grenades and trench-mortars. There is no peace!

* * * *

It was enormously quiet at times in Arras. The footsteps of my companion were startling as they clumped over the broken pavement of the square, and voices—women's voices—coming up from some hole in the earth sounded high and clear, carrying far, in an unearthly way, in this great awful loneliness of empty houses, broken churches, ruined banks and shops and restaurants, and mansions cloistered once in flower gardens behind high white walls. I went towards the women's voices as men in