

16 FROM BAPAUME TO PASSCHENDAELE

surrounded by dead bodies. Our guns were firing from many batteries, and flights of shells rushed through the air from the heavies a long way back and from the field-guns forward. It was the field-guns which hurt one's ears most with their sharp hammer-strokes. Now and again a little procession passed to which all other men gave way. It was a stretcher-party carrying a wounded man shoulder high. There is something noble and stately about these bearers, and when I see them I always think of Greek heroes carried back on their shields. There was a vapour of poison gas about these fields, not strong enough to kill, but making one's eyes and skin smart. The Australians did not seem to notice it. Perhaps the stench of dead horses overwhelmed their nostrils. It was strong and foul. The carcasses of these poor beasts lay about as they had been hit by shrapnel or shell splinters, and down one track came a living horse less lucky than these, bleeding badly from its wounds and anibling slowly with drooping head and glazed eyes. Worse smells than of dead horse crept up from the battered trenches and dug-outs, where Glencorse Wood goes down to Inverness Copse. It was the dreadful odour of dead men. It rose in gusts and waves and eddies over all this ground, for the battlefield was strewn with dead. I saw many German bodies in the fields of the Somme, and on the way out from Arras, and on the Vimy Ridge, but never in such groups as lay about the pill-boxes and the shell-craters of the salient. Everywhere they lay half buried in the turmoil of earth, or stark above ground without any cover to hide them. They lay with their heads flung back into water-filled craters or with their legs dangling in deep pools. They were blown into shapeless masses of raw flesh by our artillery. Heads and legs and arms all coated in clay lay without bodies far from where the men of whom they had been part were killed. God knows what agonies were suffered before death by men shut up in those German blockhouses, like Fitzclarence Farm, and Herenthage Château, and Clapham Junction, which I passed on the way up. Some of the garrisons had not stayed in the blockhouses until our troops had reached them. Perhaps the concussion of our drum-fire was worse inside those concrete walls than outside. Perhaps the men had rushed out hoping to surrender before our troops were on them, or with despairing courage had brought their machine-guns into the open to kill