

of those mud- and blood-stained men to the London gunners ring out in an heroic way above the noise and tragedy of battle.

XXV

THE CAPTURE OF PASSCHENDAELE

NOVEMBER 6

It is with thankfulness that one can record to-day the capture of Passchendaele, the crown and crest of the ridge which made a great barrier round the salient of Ypres and hemmed us in the flats and swamps. After an heroic attack by the Canadians this morning they fought their way over the ruins of Passchendaele and into ground beyond it. If their gains be held the seal is set upon the most terrific achievement of war ever attempted and carried through by British arms.

Only we out here who have known the full and intimate details of that fighting, the valour and the sacrifice which have carried our waves of men up those slopes, starting at Messines and Wysehaete at the lower end of the range in June last, crossing the Pilkem Ridge in the north, and then storming the central heights from Westhoek to Polygon Wood through Inverness Copse and Glencorse Wood, from Zonnebeke to Broodseinde, from the Gavenstafel to Abraham Heights, from Langemarck to Poelcappelle, can understand the meaning of to-day's battle and the thrill at the heart which has come to all of us to-day because of the victory. For at and around Passchendaele is the highest ground on the ridge, looking down across the sweep of the plains into which the enemy has been thrust, where he has his camps and his dumps, where from this time hence, if we are able to keep the place, we shall see all his roads winding like tapes below us and his men marching up them like ants, and the flash and fire of his guns and all the secrets of his life, as for three years he looked down on us and gave us hell.

What is Passchendaele? As I saw it this morning through the smoke of gun-fire and a wet mist it was less than I had seen before, a week or two ago, with just one ruin there—the ruin of its church—a black mass of slaughtered masonry and nothing else, not a house left standing, not a huddle of brick on that shell-swept height. But because of its position as the crown of the ridge that crest has seemed to many men like a prize for