

artillery, because we have absolute observation of their movements from the higher ground won by great fighting in the Somme battles. To-day there was much gunning in all the neighbourhood of the fight, and the roar of guns rolled over the desolate fields of snow, the wide lonely waste which makes one's soul shiver to look at it as I stared at the scene of war, to-day and yesterday, in the teeth of the wind.

III

THE ABANDONMENT OF GRANDCOURT

FEBRUARY 8

THAT the troops of our Naval Division (the 68rd) should have been able to walk into Grandcourt yesterday and take the place after its abandonment by the enemy (except for a few men left behind to keep up appearances as long as possible, poor wretches) is a proof that the German High Command prefers, at this point of the struggle, to save casualties rather than to hold bad ground at any cost. It is a new phase, worthy of notice. A year ago he would not let his pride do this. Less than a year ago, when we took ground from him by a sudden assault, he would come back with a frightful counter-blow, and there would be a long and bloody struggle, as at the Bluff and St.-Eloi, over trenches taken and retaken. Combles was the first place from which he crept away without a fight. Grandcourt is the second place, abandoned for the same reason—because it was caught in the pincers of our forward movements. It lies low on the south side of the Ancre, below Miraumont, and it became a place of misery to German troops after the capture of Beaucourt and Beaumont-Hamel, on the other side of the river—still worse when on Sunday last our men advanced north of Beaucourt, capturing a couple of hundred prisoners and consolidating on a line of ground dominating Grandcourt, on the north-west. It was probably then that the enemy decided to withdraw to a stronger and higher position south of Miraumont and Pys, which he has been digging and defending with rapid industry in spite of the hard frost, which double the labour of the spade. Fear, which is a great General makes