

14 FROM BAPAUME TO PASSCHENDAELE

what once was the splendour of Ypres. A military policeman standing outside the city gave an order to all going in: "Gas-masks and steel hats to be worn," and at that moment when one fumbled at the string of one's gas-bag and fastened the strap of a steel hat beneath one's chin, the menace of war crept close and the evil of it touched one's senses. It was very evil beyond the Lille gate and the Menin gate, where new shell-holes mingled with old ones, and men walked along the way of death. The spirit of that evil lurked about the banks of the Yser Canal with its long fringe of blasted trees, white and livid, with a leprous look when the sunlight touched their stumps. The water of the canal was but a foul slime stained with gobs of colour. The wreckage of bridges and barges lay in it. In its banks were unexploded shells and deep gashes where the bursts had torn the earth down, and innumerable craters. The Yser Canal holds in a ghostly way the horror of this war. Yet it is worse beyond. Out through the Menin gate the view of the salient widens, and every yard of the way is bleeding with the memory of British soldiers who walked and fought and died here since the autumn of '14. How many of them we can hardly guess or know. The white crosses of their graves are scattered about the shell-churned fields and the rubbish-heaps of brick, though many were never buried, and many were taken back by stretcher-bearers who risked their lives to bring in these bodies. There is no house where the White Château used to be. There is no grange by the Moated Grange where men crept out at night, crawling on their stomachs when the flares went up. Hundreds of thousands of men have gone up to Hell-fire Corner, some of them with a cold sweat in the palms of their hands and a shudder and an act of sacrifice in their hearts. It was the way to Hooge. It was a corner of the hell that was here always under German guns and German eyes from the ridge beyond. They had high ground all around us, as the country goes up from Observatory Ridge and Sanctuary Wood and Bellewaerde to the Westhoek Ridge and the high plateau of Polygon Wood. No men of ours could move in the daylight without being seen. The Menin road was always under fire. Every bit of broken barn, every dug-out and trench, was a mark for the enemy's artillery. During the Flanders fighting all this ground was till in the danger zone, though the enemy lost much of his