

CHAPTER IV

THE BATTLE OPENS

SO at last all is ready. The story goes that the Corps Commander was asked how soon could he deliver the Corps in fighting trim at the appointed place. "By the tenth," he had said. "Too long; do it by the eighth." And he did it; an epic feat.

It meant hardship. Some units only reached the ground to go straight into action. But everything was there. Every field battery in place, with ammunition to burn; all the imperial "heavies"; the tanks, great and small; cavalry, supply columns, signallers, ambulances—everything.

And it was all done secretly and by night. For an entire week the men of Canada were passing south from their old front, taking circuitous and puzzling routes. None knew where they went. They moved by night, sleeping by day, without gossip or undue curiosity. That was essential to the greatest surprise attack the war had produced. They were going into a fight, and they were ready. They sang as they marched—a thing they had not done for two years.

Foremost that night of nights was one's sense of wonder at how it had been done; how, by many tangled threads of railway and lorry and march, all that great and intricate machine—more complex far than Wellington had gathered on the field of Waterloo—had been assembled in perfect order to the minute.

From Canadian Corps Headquarters at Dury a cross-road runs through St. Fuscien and thence downhill into Boves, where we pass over the Avre. Except for a scurrying despatch-rider, all traffic is going the one way—miles on miles of lorries and dark masses of marching men. The night presents a sky clear and starry, with light just sufficient to illumine