

CHAPTER I

STORMING THE MESSINES RIDGE

CAREFUL WORK OF PREPARATION—WONDERFUL
WORK OF THE BRITISH GUNS AND AIRMEN—THE
GREAT EARTHQUAKE—GERMAN DEFENDERS ANNI-
HILATED—BRINGING UP THE GUNS—HEAVY GERMAN
LOSSES.

AFTER THE British and French had consolidated the territory won from the Germans in the Battle of Arras there was a lull in the fighting and the world waited with eager expectation for the next offensive on the Western front. Two months were to elapse before the Allies were ready for another mighty blow. For over two years and a half the Germans had suffered a checkmate in the Ypres salient. But they held the Wytschaete-Messines Ridge which gave them complete observation of Ypres and of the British entrenched forces in their front. During this long period they had harrassed their enemies with continuous gunfire and had constructed a system of trenches, dugouts, and wire-entanglements which they thought impregnable. What they had, they felt confident of being able to hold until the end of the war. But General Haig had made preparations on a huge scale and early in June was ready to launch an offensive that was to capture the German position and straighten out his line from Hill 60—made famous