

troops for once, and the sun rose in a clear sky. There was a great beauty in the sky at daybreak, and I thought of the sun of Austerlitz and hoped it might presage victory for our men to-day. Beneath the banks of clouds, all dove-grey, like the wings of birds, the sun rose in a lake of gold, and all the edges of the clouds were wonderfully gleaming. The woods in their russet foliage were touched with ruddy fires, so that every crinkled leaf was a little flame. The leaves were being caught up by the wind and torn from their twigs and scattered across the fields, and the wet ditches were deep with leaves that had fallen and reddened in last week's rain. But it was the light of the dawn that gave a strange spiritual value to every scene on the way to the battlefield, putting a glamour upon the walls of broken houses and shining mistily in the pools of the Yser Canal and upon its mud-banks, and the strange little earth dwellings which our men once used to inhabit along its line of dead trees, with their trunks wet and bright. When I went up over the old battle-fields this glory gradually faded out of the sky, and the clouds gathered and darkened in heavy grey masses and there was a wet smell in the wind which told one that the prophets were not wrong about the coming of rain. But the duck-boards were still dry and it made walking easier, though any false step would drop one into a shell-crater filled to the brim with water of vivid metallic colours, or into broad stretching bogs churned up by recent shell-fire and churned again by shells that came over now, bursting with a loud roar after their long high scream, and flinging up waterspouts after their pitch into the mud. The German long-range guns were scattering shells about with blind eyes, doing guesswork as to the whereabouts of our batteries, or firing from aeroplane photographs to tape out the windings of our duck-board tracks and the long straight roads of our railway lines. For miles along and around the same track where I walked, single files of men were plodding along, their grey figures silhouetted where they tramped on the skyline, with capes blowing and steel hats shining. Every minute a big shell burst near one of these files, and it seemed as if some men must have been wiped out, but always when the smoke cleared the line was closed up and did not halt on its way. The wind was blowing, but all this grey sky overhead was threaded through with aeroplanes—our birds going out to the battle. They flew high, in flights of six, or singly at a swift