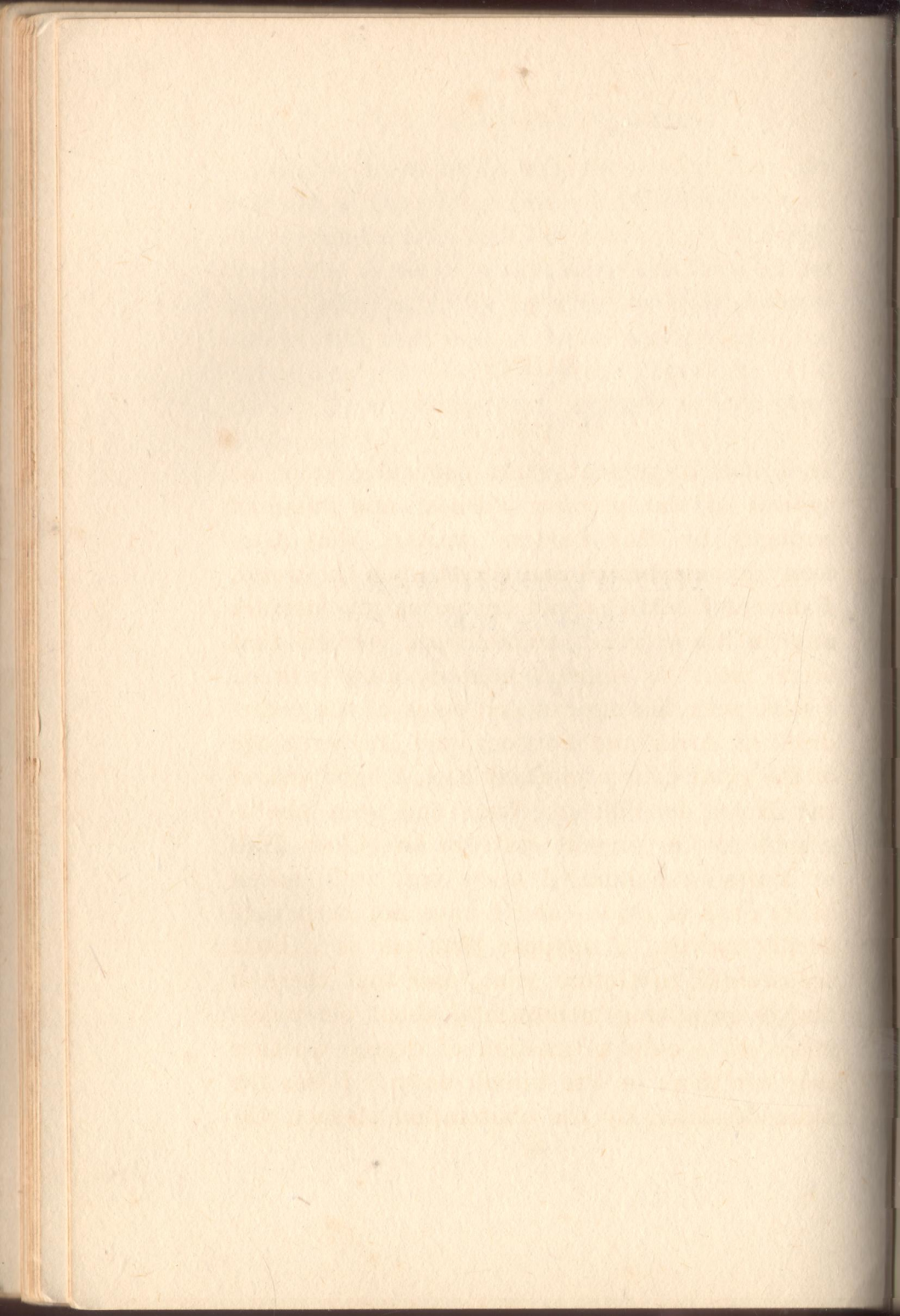


THE WESTERN WAR

(September, 1916)



I

RUINS

§ 1

If I had to present some particular scene as typical of the peculiar vileness and mischief wrought by this modern warfare that Germany has elaborated and thrust upon the world, I do not think I should choose as my instance any of those great architectural wrecks that seem most to impress contemporary writers. I have seen the injuries and ruins of the cathedrals at Arras and Soissons and the wreckage of the great church of Saint Eloi, I have visited the Hotel de Ville at Arras and seen photographs of the present state of the Cloth Hall at Ypres—a building I knew very well indeed in its days of pride—and I have not been very deeply moved. I suppose that one is a little accustomed to Gothic ruins, and that there is always something monumental about old buildings; it is only a question of degree whether they are more or less tumble-down. I was far more desolated by the obliteration of such vil-

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lages as Fricourt and Dompierre, and by the horrible state of the fields and gardens round about them, and my visit to Arras railway station gave me all the sensations of coming suddenly on a newly murdered body.

Before I visited the recaptured villages in the zone of the actual fighting, I had an idea that their evacuation was only temporary, that as soon as the war line moved towards Germany the people of the devastated villages would return to build their houses and till their fields again. But I see now that not only are homes and villages destroyed almost beyond recognition, but the very fields are destroyed. They are wildernesses of shell craters; the old worked soil is buried and great slabs of crude earth have been flung up over it. No ordinary plough will travel over this frozen sea, let alone that everywhere chunks of timber, horrible tangles of rusting wire, jagged fragments of big shells, and a great number of unexploded shells are entangled in the mess. Often this chaos is stained yellow by high explosives, and across it run the twisting trenches and communication trenches eight, ten, or twelve feet deep. These will become water pits and mud pits into which beasts will fall. It is incredible that there should be crops from any of this region of the push for many years to come. There is

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no shade left; the roadside trees are splintered stumps with scarcely the spirit to put forth a leaf; a few stunted thistles and weeds are the sole proofs that life may still go on.

The villages of this wide battle region are not ruined; they are obliterated. It is just possible to trace the roads in them, because the roads have been cleared and repaired for the passing of the guns and ammunition. Fricourt is a tangle of German dug-outs. One dug-out in particular there promises to become a show place. It must be the masterpiece of some genius for dug-outs; it is made as if its makers enjoyed the job; it is like the work of some horrible badger among the vestiges of what were pleasant human homes. You are taken down a timbered staircase into its warren of rooms and passages; you are shown the places under the craters of the great British shells, where the wood splintered but did not come in. (But the arrival of those shells must have been a stunning moment.) There are a series of ingenious bolting shafts set with iron climbing bars. In this place German officers and soldiers have lived continually for nearly two years. This war is, indeed, a troglodytic propaganda. You come up at last at the far end into what was once the cellar of a decent Frenchman's home.

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But there are stranger subterranean refuges than that at Fricourt. At Dompierre the German trenches skirted the cemetery, and they turned the dead out of their vaults and made lurking places of the tombs. I walked with M. Joseph Reinach about this place, picking our way carefully amidst the mud holes and the wire, and watched the shells bursting away over the receding battle line to the west. The wreckage of the graves was Dureresque. And here would be a fragment of marble angel and here a split stone with an inscription. Splinters of coffins, rusty iron crosses and the petals of tin flowers were trampled into the mud, amidst the universal barbed wire. A little distance down the slope is a brand new cemetery, with new metal wreaths and even a few flowers; it is a disciplined array of uniform wooden crosses, each with its list of soldiers' names. Unless I am wholly mistaken in France no Germans will ever get a chance for ever more to desecrate that second cemetery as they have done its predecessor.

We walked over the mud heaps and litter that had once been houses towards the centre of Dompierre village, and tried to picture to ourselves what the place had been. Many things are recognisable in Dompierre that have altogether vanished at Fricourt; for instance, there

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are quite large triangular pieces of the church wall upstanding at Dompierre. And a mile away perhaps down the hill on the road towards Amiens, the ruins of the sugar refinery are very distinct. A sugar refinery is an affair of big iron receptacles and great flues and pipes and so forth, and iron does not go down under gun fire as stone or brick does. The whole fabric was rusty, bent and twisted, gaping with shell holes, the raggedest display of old iron, but it still kept its general shape, as a smashed, battered, and sunken ironclad might do at the bottom of the sea.

There wasn't a dog left of the former life of Dompierre. There was not even much war traffic that morning on the worn and muddy road. The guns muttered some miles away to the west, and a lark sang. But a little way farther on was an intermediate dressing station, rigged up with wood and tarpaulins, and orderlies were packing two wounded men into an ambulance. The men on the stretchers were grey faced, they had come out of mud and they looked as though they had been trodden on by some gigantic dirty boot.

As we came back towards where our car waited by the cemetery I heard the jingle of a horseman coming across the space behind us. I turned and beheld one of the odd con-

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trasts that seem always to be happening in this incredible war. This man was, I suppose, a native officer of some cavalry force from French north Africa. He was a handsome dark brown Arab, wearing a long yellow-white robe and a tall cap about which ran a band of sheepskin. He was riding one of those little fine lean horses with long tails that I think are Barbary horses, his archaic saddle rose fore and aft of him, and the turned-up toes of his soft leather boots were stuck into great silver stirrups. He might have ridden straight out of the Arabian nights. He passed thoughtfully, picking his way delicately among the wire and the shell craters, and coming into the road, broke into a canter and vanished in the direction of the smashed-up refinery.

§ 2

About such towns as Rheims or Arras or Soissons there is an effect of waiting stillness like nothing else I have ever experienced. At Arras the situation is almost incredible to the civilian mind. The British hold the town, the Germans hold a northern suburb; at one point near the river the trenches are just four metres apart. This state of tension has lasted for long months.

Unless a very big attack is contemplated,

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I suppose there is no advantage in an assault ; across that narrow interval we should only get into trenches that might be costly or impossible to hold, and so it would be for the Germans on our side. But there is a kind of etiquette observed ; loud vulgar talking on either side of the four-metre gap leads at once to bomb throwing. And meanwhile on both sides guns of various calibre keep up an intermittent fire, the German guns register—I think that is the right term—on the cross of Arras cathedral, the British guns search lovingly for the German batteries. As one walks about the silent streets one hears, “*Bang—Pheeee—woooo*” and then far away, “*dump.*” One of ours. Then presently back comes, “*Pheeee—woooo—Bang!*” One of theirs.

Amidst these pleasantries, the life of the town goes on. *Le Lion d'Arras*, an excellent illustrated paper, produces its valiant sheets, and has done so since the siege began.

The current number of *Le Lion d'Arras* had to report a local German success. Overnight they had killed a gendarme. There is to be a public funeral and much ceremony. It is rare for anyone now to get killed ; everything is so systematised.

You may buy postcards with views of the destruction at different stages, and send them

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off with the Arras postmark. The town is not without a certain business activity. There is, I am told, a considerable influx of visitors of a special sort; they wear khaki and lead the troglodytic life. They play cards and gossip and sleep in the shadows, and may not walk the streets. I had one glimpse of a dark crowded cellar. Now and then one sees a British soldier on some special errand; he keeps to the pavement, mindful of the spying German sausage balloon in the air. The streets are strangely quiet and grass grows between the stones.

The Hotel de Ville and the cathedral are now mostly heaps of litter, but many streets of the town have suffered very little. Here and there a house has been crushed and one or two have been bisected, the front reduced to a heap of splinters and the back halves of the rooms left so that one sees the bed, the hanging end of the carpet, the clothes cupboard yawning open, the pictures still on the wall. In one place a lamp stands on a chest of drawers, on a shelf of floor cut off completely from the world below. . . . Pheeee—woooo—*Bang!* One would be irresistibly reminded of a Sunday afternoon in the city of London, if it were not for those unmeaning explosions.

I went to the station, a dead railway station.

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A notice-board requested us to walk round the silent square on the outside pavement and not across it. The German sausage balloon had not been up for days ; it had probably gone off to the Somme ; the Somme was a terrible vortex just then which was sucking away the resources of the whole German line ; but still discipline is discipline. The sausage might come peeping up at any moment over the station roof, and so we skirted the square. Arras was fought for in the early stage of the war ; two lines of sand-bagged breastworks still run obliquely through the station ; one is where the porters used to put luggage upon cabs and one runs down the length of the platform. The station was a fine one of the modern type, with a glass roof whose framework still remains, though the glass powders the floor and is like a fine angular gravel underfoot. The rails are rails of rust, and cornflowers and mustard and tall grasses grow amidst the ballast. The waiting-rooms have suffered from a shell or so, but there are still the sofas of green plush, askew, a little pulled from their places. A framed shipping advertisement hung from the wall, the glass smashed. The ticket bureau is as if a giant had leant against it ; on a table and the floor are scattered a great number of tickets, mostly still done up in bundles, to Douai, to Valen-

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ciennes, to Lens and so on. These tickets are souvenirs too portable to resist. I gave way to that common weakness.

I went out and looked up and down the line; two deserted goods trucks stood as if they sheltered under a footbridge. The grass poked out through their wheels. The railway signals seemed uncertain in their intimations; some were up and some were down. And it was as still and empty as a summer afternoon in Pompeii. No train has come into Arras for two long years now.

We lunched in a sunny garden with various men who love Arras but are weary of it, and we disputed about Irish politics. We discussed the political future of Sir F. E. Smith. We also disputed whether there was an equivalent in English for *embusqué*. Every now and then a shell came over—an aimless shell.

A certain liveliness marked our departure from the town. Possibly the Germans also listen for the rare infrequent automobile. At any rate, as we were just starting on our way back—it is improper to mention the exact point from which we started—came “Pheeeeeee—woooo.” Quite close. But there was no *Bang!* One’s mind hung expectant and disappointed. It was a dud shell.

And then suddenly I became acutely aware

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of the personality of our chauffeur. It was not his business to talk to us, but he turned his head, showed a sharp profile, wry lips and a bright excited eye, and remarked, "*That was a near one—anyhow.*" He then cut a corner over the pavement and very nearly cut it through a house. He bumped us over a shell hole and began to toot his horn. At every gateway, alley, and cross road in those silent and empty streets of Arras and frequently in between, he tooted punctiliously. (It is not proper to sound motor horns in Arras.) I cannot imagine what the listening Germans made of it. We passed the old gates of that city of fear, still tooting vehemently, and then with shoulders eloquent of his feelings, our chauffeur abandoned the horn altogether and put his whole soul into the accelerator. . . .

§ 3

Boissons was in very much the same case as Arras. There was the same pregnant silence in her streets, the same effect of waiting for the moment which draws nearer and nearer, when the brooding German lines away there will be full of the covert activities of retreat, when the streets of the old town will stir with the joyous excitements of the conclusive advance.

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The organisation of Soissons for defence is perfect. I may not describe it, but think of whatever would stop and destroy an attacking party or foil the hostile shell. It is there. Men have had nothing else to do and nothing else to think of for two years. I crossed the bridge the English made in the pursuit after the Marne, and went into the first line trenches and peeped towards the invisible enemy. To show me exactly where to look a seventy-five obliged with a shell. In the crypt of the Abbey of St. Medard near by—it must provoke the Germans bitterly to think that all the rest of the building vanished ages ago—the French boys sleep beside the bones of King Childebert the Second. They shelter safely in the prison of Louis the Pious. An ineffective shell from a German seventy-seven burst in the walled garden close at hand as I came out from those thousand-year-old memories again.

The cathedral at Soissons had not been nearly so completely smashed up as the one at Arras; I doubt if it has been very greatly fired into. There is a peculiar beauty in the one long vertical strip of blue sky between the broken arches in the chief gap where the wall has tumbled in. And the people are holding on in many cases exactly as they are doing in Arras; I do not know whether it is habit or

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courage that is most apparent in this persistence. About the chief place of the town there are ruined houses, but some invisible hand still keeps the grass of the little garden within bounds and has put out a bed of begonias. In Paris I met a charming American writer, the wife of a French artist, the lady who wrote *My House on the Field of Honour*. She gave me a queer little anecdote. On account of some hospital work she had been allowed to visit Soissons—a rare privilege for a woman—and she stayed the night in a lodging. The room into which she was shown was like any other French provincial bedroom, and after her Anglo-Saxon habit she walked straight to the windows to open them.

They looked exactly like any other French bedroom windows, with neat, clean white lace curtains across them. The curtains had been put there, because they were the proper things to go there.

"Madame," said the hostess, "need not trouble to open the glass. There is no more glass in Soissons."

But there were the curtains nevertheless. There was all the precise delicacy of the neatly curtained home life of France.

And she told me too of the people at dinner, and how as the little serving-maid passed about

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a proud erection of cake and conserve and cream, came the familiar "Pheeee—wooooo—*Bang!*"

"That must have been the Séminaire," said someone.

As one speaks of the weather or a passing cart.

"It was in the Rue de la Buerie, M'sieur," the little maid asserted with quiet conviction, poising the trophy of confectionery for Madame Huard with an unshaking hand.

So stoutly do the roots of French life hold beneath the tramlings of war.

II

THE GRADES OF WAR

§ 1

NOISSONS and Arras when I visited them were samples of the deadlock war; they were like Bloch come true. The living fact about war so far is that Bloch has not come true—*yet*. I think in the end he will come true, but not so far as this war is concerned, and to make that clear it is necessary to trouble the reader with a little disquisition upon war—omitting as far as is humanly possible all mention of Napoleon's campaigns.

The development of war has depended largely upon two factors. One of these is invention. New weapons and new methods have become available, and have modified tactics, strategy, the relative advantage of offensive and defensive. The other chief factor in the evolution of the war has been social organisation. As Machiavelli points out in his *Art of War*, there was insufficient social stability in Europe to keep a properly trained and disciplined in-

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fantry in the field from the passing of the Roman legions to the appearance of the Swiss footmen. He makes it very clear that he considers the fighting of the Middle Ages, though frequent and bloody, to be a confused, mobbing sort of affair, and politically and technically unsatisfactory. The knight was an egotist in armour. Machiavelli does small justice to the English bowmen. It is interesting to note that Switzerland, that present island of peace, was regarded by him as the mother of modern war. Swiss aggression was the curse of the Milanese. That is a remark by the way; our interest here is to note that modern war emerges upon history as the sixteenth century unfolds, as an affair in which the essential factor is the drilled and trained infantryman. The artillery is developing as a means of breaking the infantry; cavalry for charging them when broken, for pursuit and for scouting. To this day this triple division of forces dominates soldiers' minds. The mechanical development of warfare has consisted largely in the development of facilities for enabling or hindering the infantry to get to close quarters. As that has been made easy or difficult the offensive or the defensive has predominated.

A history of military method for the last few centuries would be a record of successive

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alternate steps in which offensive and defensive contrivances pull ahead, first one and then the other. Their relative fluctuations are marked by the varying length of campaigns. From the very outset we have the ditch and the wall; the fortified place upon a pass or main road, as a check to the advance. Artillery improves, then fortification improves. The defensive holds its own for a long period, wars are mainly siege wars, and for a century before the advent of Napoleon there are no big successful sweeping invasions, no marches upon the enemy capital and so on. There were wars of reduction, wars of annoyance. Napoleon developed the offensive by seizing upon the enthusiastic infantry of the republic, improving transport and mobile artillery, using road-making as an aggressive method. In spite of the successful experiment of Torres Vedras and the warning of Plevna the offensive remained dominant throughout the nineteenth century.

But three things were working quietly towards the rehabilitation of the defensive; firstly the increased range, accuracy and rapidity of rifle fire, with which we may include the development of the machine gun; secondly the increasing use of the spade, and thirdly the invention of barbed wire. By the end of the century these things had come so far into

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military theory as to produce the great essay of Bloch, and to surprise the British military people, who are not accustomed to read books or talk shop, in the Boer war. In the thinly populated war region of South Africa the difficulties of forcing entrenched positions were largely met by outflanking, the Boers had only a limited amount of barbed wire and could be held down in their trenches by shrapnel, and even at the beginning of the present war there can be little doubt that we and our Allies were still largely unprepared for the full possibilities of trench warfare, we attempted a war of manœuvres, war at about the grade to which war had been brought in 1898, and it was the Germans who first brought the war up to date by entrenching upon the Aisne. We had, of course, a few aeroplanes at that time, but they were used chiefly as a sort of accessory cavalry for scouting; our artillery was light and our shell almost wholly shrapnel.

Now the grades of warfare that have been developed since the present war began, may be regarded as a series of elaborations and counter elaborations of the problem which begins as a line of trenches behind wire, containing infantry with rifles and machine guns. Against this an infantry attack with the bayonet, after shrapnel fails. This we will call Grade A. To this the

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offensive replies with improved artillery, and particularly with high explosive shell instead of shrapnel. By this the wire is blown away, the trench wrecked and the defender held down as the attack charges up. This is Grade B. But now appear the dug-out elaborating the trench and the defensive battery behind the trench. The defenders, under the preliminary bombardment, get into the dug-outs with their rifles and machine guns, and emerge as fresh as paint as the attack comes up. Obviously there is much scope for invention and contrivance in the dug-out as the reservoir of counter attacks. Its possibilities have been very ably exploited by the Germans. Also the defensive batteries behind, which have of course the exact range of the captured trench, concentrate on it and destroy the attack at the moment of victory. The trench falls back to its former holders under this fire and a counter attack. Check again for the offensive. Even if it can take, it cannot hold a position under these conditions. This we will call Grade A2; a revised and improved A. What is the retort from the opposite side? Obviously to enhance and extend the range of the preliminary bombardment behind the actual trench line, to destroy or block, if it can, the dug-outs and destroy or silence the counter offensive artillery.

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If it can do that, it can go on; otherwise Bloch wins.

If fighting went on only at the ground level Bloch would win at this stage, but here it is that the aeroplane comes in. From the ground it would be practically impossible to locate the enemies' dug-outs, secondary defences, and batteries. But the aeroplane takes us immediately to a new grade of warfare, in which the location of the defender's secondary trenches, guns, and even machine-gun positions becomes a matter of extreme precision—provided only that the offensive has secured command of the air and can send his aeroplanes freely over the defender lines. Then the preliminary bombardment becomes of a much more extensive character; the defender's batteries are tackled by the overpowering fire of guns they are unable to locate and answer; the secondary dug-outs and strong places are plastered down, a barrage fire shuts off support from the doomed trenches, the men in these trenches are held down by a concentrated artillery fire and the attack goes up at last to hunt them out of the dug-outs and collect the survivors. Until the attack is comfortably established in the captured trench, the fire upon the old counter attack position goes on. This is the grade, Grade B2, to which modern warfare has attained upon the Somme

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front. The appearance of the Tank has only increased the offensive advantage. There at present warfare rests.

There is, I believe, only one grade higher possible. The success of B2 depends upon the completeness of the aerial observation. The invention of an anti-aircraft gun which would be practically sure of hitting and bringing down an aeroplane at any height whatever up to 20,000 feet, would restore the defensive and establish what I should think must be the final grade of war, A3. But at present nothing of the sort exists and nothing of the sort is likely to exist for a very long time; at present hitting an aeroplane by any sort of gun at all is a rare and uncertain achievement. Such a gun is not impossible and therefore we must suppose such a gun will some day be constructed, but it will be of a novel type and character, unlike anything at present in existence. The grade of fighting that I was privileged to witness on the Somme, the grade at which a steady successful offensive is possible, is therefore, I conclude, the grade at which the present war will end.

§ 2

But now having thus spread out the broad theory of the business, let me go on to tell

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some of the actualities of the Somme offensive. The key fact upon both British and French fronts was the complete ascendancy of the Allied aeroplanes. It is the necessary preliminary condition for the method upon which the great generals of the French army rely in this sanitary task of shoving the German Thing off the soil of Belgium and France back into its own land.

A man who is frequently throwing out prophecies is bound to score a few successes, and one that I may legitimately claim is my early insistence upon the fact that the quality of the German aviator was likely to be inferior to that of his French or British rival. The ordinary German has neither the flexible quality of body, the quickness of nerve, the temperament, nor the mental habits that make a successful aviator. This idea was first put into my head by considering the way in which Germans walk and carry themselves, and by noting the difference in nimbleness between the cyclists in the streets of German and French towns. It was confirmed by a conversation I had with a German aviator who was also a dramatist, and who came to see me upon some copyright matter in 1912. He broached the view that aviation would destroy democracy, because he said only aristocrats would make aviators. (He was a man

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of good family.) With a duke or so in my mind I asked him why. Because, he explained, a man without aristocratic quality in tradition, cannot possibly endure the "high loneliness" of the air. That sounded rather like nonsense at the time, and then I reflected that for a Prussian that might be true. There may be something in the German composition that does demand association and the support of pride and training before dangers can be faced. The Germans are social and methodical, the French and English by comparison chaotic and inattentive; perhaps the very readiness for a conscious orderliness that makes the German so formidable upon the ground, so thorough and so fore-seeing, makes him slow and unsure in the air. At any rate the experiences of this war have seemed to carry out this hypothesis. The German aviators will not as a class stand up to those of the Allies. They are not nimble in the air. Such champions as they have produced have been men of one trick; one of their great men, Immelmann—he was put down by an English boy a month or so ago—had a sort of hawk's swoop. He would go very high and then come down at his utmost pace at his antagonist, firing his machine gun at him as he came. If he missed in this hysterical lunge, he went on down. . . . This does not

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strike the Allied aviator as very brilliant. A gentleman of that sort can sooner or later be caught on the rise by going for him over the German lines.

The first phase, then, of the highest grade offensive, the ultimate development of war regardless of expense, is the clearance of the air. Such German machines as are up are put down by fighting aviators. These last fly high; in the clear blue of the early morning they look exactly like gnats; some trail a little smoke in the sunshine; they take their machine guns in pursuit over the German lines, and the German anti-aircraft guns, the Archibalds, begin to pattern the sky about them with little balls of black smoke. From below one does not see men nor feel that men are there; it is as if it were an affair of midges. Close after the fighting machines come the photographic aeroplanes, with cameras as long as a man is high, flying low—at four or five thousand feet that is—over the enemy trenches. The Archibald leaves these latter alone; it cannot fire a shell to explode safely so soon after firing; but they are shot at with rifles and machine guns. They do not mind being shot at; only the petrol tank and the head and thorax of the pilot are to be considered vital. They will come back with forty or fifty bullet holes in the

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fabric. They will go under this fire along the length of the German positions exposing plate after plate; one machine will get a continuous panorama of many miles and then come back straight to the aerodrome to develop its plates.

There is no waste of time about the business, the photographs are developed as rapidly as possible. Within an hour and a half after the photographs were taken the first prints are going through into the bureau for the examination of the photographs. Both British and French air photographs are thoroughly scrutinised and marked.

An air photograph to an inexperienced eye is not a very illuminating thing; one makes out roads, blurs of wood, and rather vague buildings. But the examiner has an eye that has been in training; he is a picked man; he has at hand yesterday's photographs and last week's photographs, marked maps and all sorts of aids and records. If he is a Frenchman he is only too happy to explain his ideas and methods. Here, he will point out, is a little difference between the German trench beyond the wood since yesterday. For a number of reasons he thinks that will be a new machine gun emplacement; here at the corner of the farm wall they have been making another. This battery here— isn't it plain? Well, it's

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a dummy. The grass in front of it hasn't scorched, and there's been no serious wear on the road here for a week. Presently the Germans will send one or two waggons up and down that road and instruct them to make figures of eight to imitate scorching on the grass in front of the gun. We know all about that. The real wear on the road, compare this and this and this, ends here at this spot. It turns off into the wood. There's a sort of track in the trees. Now look where the trees are just a little displaced! (This lens is rather better for that.) *That's* one gun. You see? Here, I will show you another. . . .

That process goes on two or three miles behind the front line. Very clean young men in white overalls do it as if it were a labour of love. And the Germans in the trenches, the German gunners, *know it is going on*. They know that in the quickest possible way these observations of the aeroplane that was over them just now will go to the gunners. The careful gunner, firing by the map and marking by aeroplane, kite balloon or direct observation, will be getting on to the located guns and machine guns in another couple of hours. The French claim that they have located new batteries, got their *tir de démolition* upon them and destroyed them within five hours. The

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British I told of that found it incredible. Every day the French print special maps showing the guns, sham guns, trenches, everything of significance behind the German lines, showing everything that has happened in the last four-and-twenty hours. It is pitiless. It is indecent. The map-making and printing goes on in the room next and most convenient to the examination of the photographs. And, as I say, the German army knows of this, and knows that it cannot prevent it because of its aerial weakness. That knowledge is not the least among the forces that is crumpling up the German resistance upon the Somme.

I visited some French guns during the *tir de démolition* phase. I counted nine aeroplanes and twenty-six kite balloons in the air at the same time. There was nothing German visible in the air at all.

It is a case of eyes and no eyes.

The French attack resolves itself into a triple system of gun-fire. First for a day or so, or two or three days, there is demolition fire to smash up all the exactly located batteries, organisations, supports, behind the front line enemy trenches; then comes barrage fire to cut off supplies and reinforcements; then, before the advance, the hammering down fire, "heads down," upon the trenches. When at last this stops and the in-

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fantry goes forward to rout out the trenches and the dug-outs, they go forward with a minimum of inconvenience. The first wave of attack fights, destroys, or disarms the surviving Germans and sends them back across the open to the French trenches. They run as fast as they can, hands up, and are shepherded farther back. The French set to work to turn over the captured trenches and organise themselves against any counter attack that may face the barrage fire.

That is the formula of the present fighting, which the French have developed. After an advance there is a pause, while the guns move up nearer the Germans and fresh aeroplane reconnaissance goes on. Nowhere on this present offensive has a German counter attack had more than the most incidental success; and commonly they have had frightful losses. Then after a few days of refreshment and accumulation, the Allied attack resumes.

That is the perfected method of the French offensive. I had the pleasure of learning its broad outlines in good company, in the company of M. Joseph Reinach and Colonel Carence, the military writer. Their talk together and with me and in the various messes at which we lunched was for the most part a keen discussion of every detail and every possibility of the offensive machine; every French officer's

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ness seems a little council upon the one supreme question in France, *how to do it best*. M. Heinach has made certain suggestions about the co-operation of French and British that I will discuss elsewhere, but one great theme was the constitution of "the ideal battery." For years French military thought has been acutely attentive to the best number of guns for effective common action, and has tended rather to the small battery theory. My two companies were playing with the idea that the ideal battery was a battery of one big gun, with its own aeroplane and kite balloon marking for it.

The British seem to be associated with the adventurous self-reliance needed in the air. The British aeroplanes do not simply fight the Germans out of the sky; they also make themselves an abominable nuisance by bombing the enemy trenches. For every German bomb that is dropped by aeroplane upon or behind the British lines, about twenty go down on the heads of the Germans. British air bombs upon guns, stores and communications do some of the work that the French effect by their systematic demolition fire.

And the British aviator has discovered and is rapidly developing an altogether fresh branch of air activity in the machine-gun attack at

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a very low altitude. Originally I believe this was tried in western Egypt, but now it is being increasingly used upon the British front in France. An aeroplane which comes down suddenly, travelling very rapidly, to a few hundred feet, is quite hard enough to hit, even if it is not squirting bullets from a machine gun as it advances. Against infantry in the open this sort of thing is extremely demoralising. It is a method of attack still in its infancy, but there are great possibilities for it in the future, when the bending and cracking German line gives, as ultimately it must give if this offensive does not relax. If the Allies persist in their pressure upon the western front, if there is no relaxation in the supply of munitions from Britain and no lapse into tactical stupidity, a German retreat eastward is inevitable.

Now a cavalry pursuit alone may easily come upon disaster, cavalry can be so easily held up by wire and a few machine guns. I think the Germans have reckoned on that and on automobiles, probably only the decay of their *morale* prevents their opening their lines now on the chance of the British attempting some such folly as a big cavalry advance, but I do not think the Germans have reckoned on the use of machine guns in aeroplanes, supported by and supporting cavalry or auto-

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mobiles. At the present time I should imagine there is no more perplexing consideration amidst the many perplexities of the German military intelligence than the new complexion put upon pursuit by these low level air developments. It may mean that in all sorts of positions where they had counted confidently on getting away, they may not be able to get away—from the face of a scientific advance properly commanding and using modern material in a dexterous and intelligent manner.

III

THE WAR LANDSCAPE

§ 1

I SAW rather more of the British than of the French aviators because of the vileness of the weather when I visited the latter. It is quite impossible for me to institute comparisons between these two services. I should think that the British organisation I saw would be hard to beat, and that none but the French could hope to beat it. On the Western front the aviation has been screwed up to a very much higher level than on the Italian line. In Italy it has not become, as it has in France, the decisive factor. The war on the Carso front in Italy—I say nothing of the mountain warfare, which is a thing in itself—is in fact still in the stage that I have called B. It is good warfare well waged, but not such an intensity of warfare. It has not, as one says of pianos and voices, the same compass.

This is true in spite of the fact that the Italians alone of all the western powers have

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adopted a type of aeroplane larger and much more powerful than anything except the big Russian machines. They are not at all suitable for any present purpose upon the Italian front, but at a later stage, when the German is retiring and Archibald no longer searches the air, they would be invaluable on the western front because of their enormous bomb or machine gun carrying capacity. "But sufficient for the day is the swat thereof," as the British public schoolboy says, and no doubt we shall get them when we have sufficiently felt the need for them. The big Caproni machines which the Italians possess are of 300 h.p. and will presently be of 500 h.p. One gets up a gangway into them as one gets into a yacht; they have a main deck, a forward machine gun deck and an aft machine gun; one may walk about in them; in addition to guns and men they carry a very considerable weight of bombs beneath. They cannot of course get up with the speed nor soar to the height of our smaller aeroplanes; it is as carriers in raids behind a force of fighting machines that they should find their use.

The British establishment I visited was a very refreshing and reassuring piece of practical organisation. The air force of Great Britain has had the good fortune to develop with con-

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siderable freedom from the old army tradition ; many of its officers are ex-civil engineers and so forth ; Headquarters is a little shy of technical direction ; and all this in a service that is still necessarily experimental and plastic is to the good. There is little doubt that, given a release from prejudice, bad associations and the equestrian tradition, British technical intelligence and energy can do just as well as the French. Our problem with our army is not to create intelligence, there is an abundance of it, but to release it from a dreary social and official pressure. The air service ransacks the army for men with technical training and sees that it gets them, there is a real keenness upon the work, and the men in these great mobile hangars talk shop readily and clearly.

I have already mentioned and the newspapers have told abundantly of the pluck, daring, and admirable work of our aviators ; what is still untellable in any detail is the energy and ability of the constructive and repairing branch upon whose efficiency their feats depend. Perhaps the most interesting thing I saw in connection with the air work was the hospital for damaged machines and the dump to which those hopelessly injured are taken, in order that they may be disarticulated and all that is sound in them used for reconstruction. How

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excellently this work is being done may be judged from the fact that our offensive in July started with a certain number of aeroplanes, a number that would have seemed fantastic in a story a year before the war began. These aeroplanes were in constant action ; they fought, they were shot down, they had their share of accidents. Not only did the repair department make good every loss, but after three weeks of the offensive the army was fighting with fifty more machines than at the outset. One goes through a vast Rembrandtesque shed opening upon a great sunny field, in whose cool shadows rest a number of interesting patients ; captured and slightly damaged German machines, machines of our own with the scars of battle upon them, one or two cases of bad landing. The star case came from over Peronne. It had come in two days ago.

I examined this machine and I will tell the state it was in, but I perceive that what I have to tell will read not like a sober statement of truth but like strained and silly lying. The machine had had a direct hit from an Archibald shell. The propeller had been clean blown away ; so had the machine gun and all its fittings. The engines had been stripped naked and a good deal bent about. The timber stay over the aviator had been broken, so that it

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is marvellous the wings of the machine did not shut up at once like the wings of a butterfly. The solitary aviator had been wounded in the face. He had then come down in a long glide into the British lines, and made a tolerable landing. . . .

§ 2

One consequence of the growing importance of the aeroplane in warfare is the development of a new military art, the art of camouflage. Camouflage is humbugging disguise, it is making things—and especially in this connection, military things—seem not what they are, but something peaceful and rural, something harmless and quite uninteresting to aeroplane observers. It is the art of making big guns look like haystacks and tents like level patches of field.

Also it includes the art of making attractive models of guns, camps, trenches and the like that are not bona-fide guns, camps, or trenches at all, so that the aeroplane bomb-dropper and the aeroplane observer may waste his time and energies and the enemy gunfire be misdirected. In Italy I saw dummy guns so made as to deceive the very elect at a distance of a few thousand feet. The camouflage of concealment aims either at invisibility or imitation; I have seen a supply train look

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like a row of cottages, its smoke-stack a chimney, with the tops of sham palings running along the back line of the engine and creepers painted up its sides. But that was a flight of the imagination; the commonest camouflage is merely to conceal. Trees are brought up and planted near the object to be hidden, it is painted in the same tones as its background, it is covered with an awning painted to look like grass or earth. I suppose it is only a matter of development before a dummy cow or so is put up to chew the cud on the awning.

But camouflage or no camouflage, the bulk of both the French and British forces in the new won ground of the great offensive lay necessarily in the open. Only the big guns and the advanced Red Cross stations had got into pits and subterranean hiding places. The advance had been too rapid and continuous for the armies to make much of a toilette as they halted, and the destruction and the desolation of the country won afforded few facilities for easy concealment. Tents, transport, munitions, these all indicated an army on the march—at the rate of half a mile in a week or so, to Germany. If the wet and mud of November and December have for a time delayed that advance, the force behind has but accumulated for the resumption of the thrust.

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§ 3

A journey up from the base to the front trenches shows an interesting series of phases. One leaves Amiens, in which the normal life threads its way through crowds of resting men in khaki and horizon blue, in which staff officers in automobiles whisk hither and thither, in which there are nurses and even a few inexplicable ladies in worldly costume, in which restaurants and cafés are congested and busy, through which there is a perpetual coming and going of processions of heavy vans to the railway sidings. One dodges past a monstrous blue-black gun going up to the British front behind two resolute traction engines—the three sun-blistered young men in the cart that trails behind lounge in attitudes of haughty pride that would shame the ceiling gods of Hampton Court. One passes through arcades of waiting motor vans, through suburbs still more intensely khaki or horizon blue, and so out upon the great straight poplar-edged road—to the front. Sometimes one laces through spates of heavy traffic, sometimes the dusty road is clear ahead, now we pass a vast aviation camp, now a park of waiting field guns, now an encampment of cavalry. One turns aside, and abruptly one is in France—France as one knew

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it before the war, on a shady secondary road, past a delightful chateau behind its iron gates, past a beautiful church, and then suddenly we are in a village street full of stately Indian soldiers.

It betrays no military secret to say that commonly the rare tourist to the British offensive passes through Albert, with its great modern red cathedral smashed to pieces and the great gilt Madonna and Child that once surmounted the tower now, as everyone knows, hanging out horizontally over the road in an attitude that irresistibly suggests an imminent dive upon the passing traveller. One looks right up under it.

Presently we begin to see German prisoners. The whole lot look entirely contented, and are guarded by perhaps a couple of men in khaki. These German prisoners do not attempt to escape, they have not the slightest desire for any more fighting, they have done their bit, they say, honour is satisfied; they give remarkably little trouble. A little way further on perhaps we pass their cage, a double barbed-wire enclosure with a few tents and huts within.

A string of covered waggons passes by. I turn and see a number of men sitting inside and looking almost as cheerful as a beanfeast

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in Epping Forest. They make facetious gestures. They have a subdued sing-song going on. But one of them looks a little sick, and then I notice not very obtrusive bandages. "Sitting-up cases," my guide explains.

These are part of the casualties of last night's fight.

The fields on either side are now more evidently in the war zone. The array of carts, the patches of tents, the coming and going of men increases. But here are three women harvesting, and presently in a cornfield are German prisoners working under one old Frenchman. Then the fields become trampled again. Here is a village, not so very much knocked about, and passing through it we go slowly beside a long column of men going up to the front. We scan their collars for signs of some familiar regiment. These are new men going up for the first time; there is a sort of solemn elation in many of their faces.

The men coming down are usually smothered in mud or dust, and unless there has been a fight they look pretty well done up. They stoop under their equipment, and some of the youngsters drag. One pleasant thing about this coming down is the welcome of the regimental band, which is usually at work as soon as the men turn off from the high road. I hear several

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bands on the British front; they do much to enhance the general cheerfulness. On one of these days of my tour I had the pleasure of seeing the —th Blankshires coming down after a fight. As we drew near I saw that they combined an extreme muddiness with an unusual elasticity. They all seemed to be looking us in the face instead of being too fagged to bother. Then I noticed a nice grey helmet dangling from one youngster's bayonet, in fact his eye directed me to it. A man behind him had a black German helmet of the type best known in English illustrations; then two more grey appeared. The catch of helmets had indeed been quite considerable. Then I perceived on the road bank above and marching parallel with this column, a double file of still muddier Germans. Either they wore caps or went bare-headed. There were no helmets among them. We do not rob our prisoners but—a helmet is a weapon. Anyhow, it is an irresistible souvenir.

Now and then one sees afar off an ammunition dump, many hundreds of stacks of shells—without their detonators as yet—being unloaded from railway trucks, transferred from the broad gauge to the narrow gauge line, or loaded into motor trolleys. Now and then one crosses a railway line. The railway lines run

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everywhere now behind the British front, the construction follows the advance day by day. They go up as fast as the guns. One's guide remarks as the car bumps over the level crossing, "That is one of Haig's railways." It is an aspect of the Commander-in-Chief that has much impressed and pleased the men. And at last we begin to enter the region of the former Allied trenches, we pass the old German front line, we pass ruined houses, ruined fields, and thick patches of clustering wooden crosses and boards where the dead of the opening assaults lie. There are no more reapers now, there is no more green upon the fields, there is no green anywhere, scarcely a tree survives by the roadside, but only overthrown trunks and splintered stumps; the fields are wildernesses of shell craters and coarse weeds, the very woods are collections of blasted stems and stripped branches. This absolutely ravaged and ruined battlefield country extends now along the front of the Somme offensive for a depth of many miles; across it the French and British camps and batteries creep forward, the stores, the dumps, the railways creep forward, in their untiring, victorious thrust against the German lines. Overhead hum and roar the aeroplanes, away towards the enemy the humped, blue sausage-shaped kite balloons brood thoughtfully, and from this point

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and that, guns, curiously invisible until they speak, flash suddenly and strike their one short hammer-blow of sound.

Then one sees an enemy shell drop among the little patch of trees on the crest to the right, and kick up a great red-black mass of smoke and dust. We see it, and then we hear the whine of its arrival and at last the bang. The Germans are blind now, they have lost the air, they are firing by guesswork and their knowledge of the abandoned territory.

"They think they have got divisional headquarters there," someone remarks. . . . "They haven't. But they keep on."

In this zone where shells burst the wise automobile stops and tucks itself away as inconspicuously as possible close up to a heap of ruins. There is very little traffic on the road now except for a van or so that hurries up, unloads, and gets back as soon as possible. Mules and men are taking the stuff the rest of the journey. We are in a flattened village, all undermined by dug-outs that were in the original German second line. We report ourselves to a young troglodyte in one of these, and are given a guide, and so set out on the last part of the journey to the ultimate point, across the land of shell craters and barbed wire litter and old and new trenches. We have all

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put on British steel helmets, hard but heavy and inelegant head coverings. I can write little that is printable about these aesthetic crimes. The French and German helmets are noble and beautiful things. These lumpish *pans* . . .

They ought to be called by the name of the man who designed them.

Presently we are advised to get into a communication trench. It is not a very attractive communication trench, and we stick to our track across the open. Three or four shells shiver overhead, but we decide they are British shells, going out. We reach a supporting trench in which men are waiting in a state of nearly insupportable boredom for the midday stew, the one event of interest in a day-long vigil. Here we are told imperatively to come right in at once, and we do.

All communication trenches are tortuous and practically endless. On an offensive front they have vertical sides of unsupported earth and occasional soakaways for rain, covered by wooden gratings, and they go on and on and on. At rare intervals they branch, and a notice board says "To Regent Street," or "To Oxford Street," or some such lie. It is all just trench. For a time you talk, but talking in single file soon palls. You cease to talk, and trudge. A great number of telephone wires come into the

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trench and cross and recross it. You cannot keep clear of them. Your helmet pings against them and they try to remove it. Sometimes you have to stop and crawl under wires. Then you wonder what the trench is like in really wet weather. You hear a shell burst at no great distance. You pass two pages of *The Strand Magazine*. Perhaps thirty yards on you pass a cigarette end. After these sensational incidents the trench quiets down again and continues to wind endlessly—just a sandy, extremely narrow vertical walled trench. A giant crack.

At last you reach the front line trench. On an offensive sector it has none of the architectural interest of first line trenches at such places as Soissons or Arras. It was made a week or so ago by joining up shell craters, and if all goes well we move into the German trench along by the line of scraggy trees, at which we peep discreetly, to-morrow night. We can peep discreetly because just at present our guns are putting shrapnel over the enemy at the rate of about three shells a minute, the puffs follow each other up and down the line, and no Germans are staring about to see us.

The Germans "strafed" this trench overnight, and the men are tired and sleepy. Our guns away behind us are doing their best now

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to give them a rest by strafing the Germans. One or two men are in each forward sap keeping a look out; the rest sleep, a motionless sleep, in the earthy shelter pits that have been scooped out. One officer sits by a telephone under an earth-covered tarpaulin, and a weary man is doing the toilet of a machine gun. We go on to a shallow trench in which we must stoop, and which has been badly knocked about. . . . Here we have to stop. The road to Berlin is not opened up beyond this point.

My companion on this excursion is a man I have admired for years and never met until I came out to see the war, a fellow writer. He is a journalist let loose. Two-thirds of the junior British officers I met on this journey were really not "army men" at all. One finds that the apparent subaltern is really a musician, or a musical critic, or an Egyptologist, or a solicitor, or a cloth manufacturer, or a writer. At the outbreak of the war my guide dyed his hair to conceal its tell-tale silver, and having been laughed to scorn by the ordinary recruiting people, enlisted in the sportsmen's battalion. He was wounded, and then the authorities discovered that he was likely to be of more use with a commission and drew him, in spite of considerable resistance, out of the firing line. To which he always

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returns whenever he can get a visitor to take with him as an excuse. He now stood up, fairly high and clear, explaining casually that the Germans were no longer firing, and showed me the points of interest.

I had come right up to No Man's Land at last. It was under my chin. The skyline, the last skyline before the British could look down on Bapaume, showed a mangy wood and a ruined village, crouching under repeated gobbings of British shrapnel. "They've got a battery just there, and we're making it uncomfortable." No Man's Land itself is a weedy space broken up by shell craters, with very little barbed wire in front of us and very little in front of the Germans. "They've got snipers in most of the craters, and you see them at twilight hopping about from one to the other." We have very little wire because we don't mean to stay for very long in this trench, and the Germans have very little wire because they have not been able to get it up yet. They never will get it up now. . . .

I had been led to believe that No Man's Land was littered with the unburied dead, but I saw nothing of the sort at this place. There had been no German counter attack since our men came up here. But at one point as we went along the trench there was a dull stench.

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"Germans, I think," said my guide, though I do not see how he could tell.

He looked at his watch and remarked reluctantly, "If you start at once, you may just do it."

I wanted to catch the Boulogne boat. It was then just past one in the afternoon. We met the stew as we returned along the communication trench, and it smelt very good indeed. . . . We hurried across the great spaces of rusty desolation upon which every now and again a German shell was bursting. . . .

That night I was in my flat in London. I had finished reading the accumulated letters of some weeks, and I was just going comfortably to bed.