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BATTLEFIELDS TOUR.

ON HOLY GROUND.

("Times" Correspondent).

High up on the Somme battlefield there stands a simple monument to the officers and men of the 18th Division, who fell in the desperate fighting, 18 times renewed, for the possession of Trones Wood. There is a message for the battlefield tourist on this plain white stone, marching, as it seems, at the head of a ghostly column of bare tree-trunks. From the roadside one line of the inscription, printed in bolder lettering than the rest, can alone be read, but memory can recall no more illuminating moment than that in which these words were imprinted on the mind: "The greatest thing in the world."

This sublime affirmation is the key to the wonder of the great belt of devastation which stretches league upon league from the North Sea to Verdun and the Swiss frontier.

HOLY GROUND.

Who can remain unmoved as he drives into Ypres by the Menin Gate and reads the notice which the Burgomaster, M. Colaert, has set up in three languages here as at other prominent points in the ruined city:—

"The Burgomaster and the City Council of Ypres urge you to remember that the ground you walk on is hallowed by the sacrifice of 250,000 British officers and men who were killed or wounded in four terrible years of battle endured in the Salient of Ypres, and whose heroism Belgium can never forget."

And when at last the traveller stands in silent awe before the majestic notice put up by order of the Town Major of Ypres:—

"This is holy ground. No stone of this fabric may be taken. It is a heritage for all civilised peoples."

This is holy ground, not Ypres alone, but Armentieres, Lens, Arras, Albert, Peronne, and the broadlands which stretch in front and on either side of the once fair cities whose names will be linked for all time with the valour of the British race. There is happily little need to impress this truth upon the parties of British visitors who are now passing over the country in motor cars, char-a-banc, or converted army lorry. In a Whitsun tour of the battlefields I never heard a jarring word or saw a ghoulis action.

It is a question whether the decisive part played by the troops of the homeland in the campaigns in Belgium and Northern France are being fitly commemorated on the spot. Monuments, which will endure for centuries, are now rising on commanding positions on the old British front. The Canadians have commemorated their victories at Vimy Ridge and on the high ground by Passchendaele by noble memorials which can be seen for miles around.

AUSTRALIA'S MONUMENTS.

Australia has set up a wonderfully fine series of monuments to the valour of its sons. Go where you will in any part of the vast expanse of the Somme battlefield and you will never be long out of sight of an obelisk to remind you of the contribution which the Commonwealth made to the common cause. The Australians have three monuments, each of extreme simplicity, in the Somme area, and they are so placed as to command wide views of three different sectors of the battlefield. The finest site of all is Mont St. Quentin, above Peronne. When the monument now building on the hill is complete it will be seen for miles down the wide valley of the Somme, which was finally opened to the Allies when the Australians, in one of the most gallant feats of the war, stormed this key position. The other monuments are at Pozieres, towering above an Australian cemetery, in which the foremost graves were a glory of paeonies on Whit Monday, and on the Bray-Corbic road, with a downland outlook towards Morlan-court. They will serve to keep green the memory of brave men from overseas when every village for which they fought has been rebuilt and the last scar of war has disappeared from every field which they trod in the battle array.

One looks in vain for any national monument to the millions who crossed the narrow seas from Great Britain to uphold the honour of their native land. Here and there the story of a brilliant feat of arms or a superb act of self-sacrifice is told by a divisional or regimental memorial. But few of these are of a permanent character.

THE HOLIEST SHRINE.

The British race has no holier shrine than the long line of cemeteries which stretches from the Belgian plain to the uplands of Picardy. These burial-grounds of the flower of our manhood are the most moving spectacle of any to be seen in the wide sweep of the Western battle front. Still, although nothing can dwarf them or lessen their poignant appeal, the English visitor cannot resist the thought that something more might have been done to remind future generations of Belgians and Frenchmen, no less than of Britons and Americans, of the 4 years' battle which was fought out at Ypres and on the Somme, chiefly by the troops of Great Britain.

It is very difficult to avoid the feeling that the authorities have little appreciation of the meaning of simple symbols to the mass of mankind. Amiens Cathedral supplies an extraordinary illustration of British detachment from the realm of sentiment. English troops fought as stoutly and as successfully as any to save this glorious church from the fate of the Cloth Hall of Ypres and the Cathedral of Rheims. Yet, what does the Englishman find on renewing acquaintance with it? He sees tablets on the walls to Canadian Dragoons and the American Engineers who fell in defence of the city. He stands before a side-chapel, unlifted by the spectacle of Australian, New Zealand, and United States flags, presented to the cathedral as a token of remembrance of the association of the troops of those three nations with the citizens of Amiens in their time of trial. The French flag, too, is there, and a vacant place has been left. But, when I was there ten days ago, there was no Union Jack to complete the symbolism of the Great Alliance. How an Englishman's heart would have leapt up at the sight of the Flag in a spot of such historic and hallowed memories!

CAPTAIN FRYATT'S MEMORY.

It is the same in Belgium. It is impossible to feel that the achievements of the troops of the homeland are forgotten amid the friendly peasantry of these regions. But the feeling of neglect at home persists. By the side of the road between Furnes and Nieupoort, where the battles of the Yser raged in fire and flood, there is nearly ready for unveiling a superb national monument to the Belgians who fell victims of the German invasion. Not many miles away rises the grand old city of Bruges. It was to Bruges that Fryatt was taken for trial, and it was in the yard of the Lancers' Barracks that he was shot. It was one of the most infamous of the crimes committed by the Germans during the war, and Captain Fryatt's example will be an inspiration to the youth of England when many tender memories of the war have begun to fade. On inquiring at the gate of the barracks the English visitor is very courteously escorted by a Belgian soldier to the place of Captain Fryatt's execution. Incredible as it may seem, there is nothing of any kind to show what happened there.

A REAWAKENED LAND.

THE WILL TO WORK.

In the whole stupendous record of these last few years, few things stand out so impressively as the transformation of the battlefields since the Armistice. Nature and man have wrought such changes in the appearance of the devastated areas as to assure their redemption within a period of time which would have seemed incredible to the soldiers who sowed these fields with shells and sprayed them with poison gas, with never a chance of rotation as season followed season. Many landmarks of the war have already disappeared and the battle areas are being cleared with such speed that the day is not far distant when it will be impossible to trace the fighting line except by the staves of a ruined building and the stumps of a blasted wood.

It was only to be expected that the French and the Belgians would strain every nerve to restore such famous cities as Ypres, Armentieres, Lens, and Arras, to something like their old state. What is so remarkable is the revival of scores of village communities, which only a few months ago were no more than names. Lasting fame had been brought to many of them, but at the price of their utter effacement. Nowhere was there such a complete crushing out of the habitations of man as in the foreground of the Ypres Salient. At the time of the Armistice,

the only building which appeared above ground between Kemmel and Houthoulst, except the mother-city herself, were the chain of concrete pill-boxes which showed up like white growths of fungus on the blackened landscape. How different is the scene to-day! The German strong points still stand out in the fields, forlorn and mostly forgotten, while there are springing up all over the countryside wooden houses and converted army huts of tin, humming with new activity of that greater fight for existence which has the plough for its most formidable weapon.

LIFE IN THE SALIENT.

The transformation is proceeding at such an amazing speed that even those whose business takes them constantly to these areas find it difficult to keep pace with it. The battlefield guidebook of most recent date contains a picture of 'all that is left of Hooze—the signboard'. The description is technically correct, so far as it relates to the Hooze for which the British and German armies strove in turn at the crisis of more than one of the battles of Ypres. But a new Hooze is already rising on the ruins of the old, and there are friendly sounds now to break the uncanny stillness which once brooded over the great British cemetery by the side of the Menin Road. Farther down the road towards Ypres, before you cross the moat and pass the still picturesque ramparts of an older avenue of one-storey houses, each with its strip of freshly-dug garden—within sight of Heli Fire Corner.

Or take the opposite direction, and plunge into the heart of the great battlefield. No position was more hotly disputed year in, year out, than the village of Ghelvelt, on the crest of the Menin Road. It meant everything to us in the First Battle of Ypres, and everything to the Germans in the Third. The authority already quoted refers to the site on which "Ghelvelt used to stand," and makes the considerable claim for these parts that there are "still a few broken walls standing." That was, no doubt, all that could have been said of the place a few months ago, but to-day Ghelvelt is throbbing with new life.

These, of course, are no more than oases in the gaunt desert of the Ypres Salient. But they are the beginning of a new life, the cadres as it were, of the social organisation which is to be. It is, however, the Somme battlefield which affords the crowning example of this wonderful rebirth. A score of villages, whose names were household words in every part of the Empire less than four years ago, are rising again from their ashes. Slowly and painfully, it is true. But there are faint beams of light now in that great tract on which eternal darkness seemed to have fallen between Albert and Bapaume and Bray and Peronne.

The fear has been expressed on this side of the Channel that Ypres may be desecrated by the brand of new buildings of a rough and ready pattern which are appearing among the ruins. This is surely the wrong angle from which to approach even the monumental spectacle of Ypres. The central square, admittedly, is a case apart. The Cloth Hall and the other classic relics around it remain exactly as they were at the time of the armistice. Sentiment has been respected in that place of supreme sacrifice, but away from it there seems no more reason why Ypres should not be rebuilt than Passchendaele.

THE FARMER AND RETURNED MEN.

There are many farmers who are earnestly trying to help the returned man who is on the land, but among the many there is one who deserves particularly well of the country. This is the type of farmer who sold at a very moderate price for the settlement of the men who fought for us. He has not sold all his land and gone to the city. He is staying here, as the friend and adviser of the soldier-settler. He has made his home their home, he gives them every assistance, and his farm plant is for them for haulage and cultivation. The twenty-four returned men who have secured land at Te Awamutu, on the Puahe block of the Tanehukua property, of W. G. Park, are fortunate of all the men who have gone on the land. They describe themselves as flourishing, and they are determined to make Puahe the best soldier settlement in the Dominion.

MISSING.

23/2108 TURNBULL G. P.

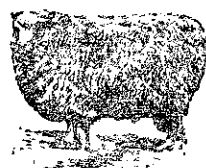
The above-named left New Zealand with "E." Company, 10th Reinforcements, and returned to New Zealand by "Remuera," October 1919.

Any information regarding present whereabouts of the above-named will be gratefully received by his relatives. Reply to: General Secretary, N.Z.B.S.A., Wellington.

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