

THE WESTERN FRONT. PART II

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649732357

The Western Front. Part II by Muirhead Bone

Except for use in any review, the reproduction or utilisation of this work in whole or in part in any form by any electronic, mechanical or other means, now known or hereafter invented, including xerography, photocopying and recording, or in any information storage or retrieval system, is forbidden without the permission of the publisher, Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd, PO Box 1576 Collingwood, Victoria 3066 Australia.

All rights reserved.

Edited by Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd.
Cover @ 2017

This book is sold subject to the condition that it shall not, by way of trade or otherwise, be lent, re-sold, hired out, or otherwise circulated without the publisher's prior consent in any form or binding or cover other than that in which it is published and without a similar condition including this condition being imposed on the subsequent purchaser.

www.triestepublishing.com

MUIRHEAD BONE

**THE WESTERN
FRONT. PART II**



THE SOMME BATTLEFIELD.

THE main Anglo-German battlefield of 1916 is a little range of chalk down 'or blunt hill. It is ten miles long and seven miles wide, and its watershed runs from north-west to south-east—from near Thiepval, above the small river Ancre, to Combles, four miles to the north of the canalised Somme. This summit ridge is not quite 500 feet high—about as high as the Hog's Back in Surrey. The south-western slope of the range is rather steeper and more broken up into terraces and lateral ridges and defiles than the north-eastern slope. There is no real escarpment, but enough difference to make the south-western slope the harder to attack.

Small as this ridge is, it is the highest ground, in these parts, between the Belgian plain and the main plain of Northern France. It is crossed at right angles by one great road, the famous French Route Nationale that runs nearly dead straight from Rouen, through Amiens, to Valenciennes, and so leads on to Brussels by Mons. On the battlefield, between Albert and Bapaume, it reaches the highest point above the sea in all its long course, at a spot where a heap of powdered brick and masonry, forty yards off to the north, marks the site of the Windmill of

Pozières, one of those solitary buildings to which, like Falfemont Farm and the Abbey at Eaucourt, the war has brought death and immortality.

From this road, at one point or another, you can see most of the places that were made famous in 1916. A mile and a half from Albert, as you go out north-eastward, you spy in a hollow below you a whitish sprinkling of mixed mud, brick-dust and lime, the remains of La Boisselle, on the right of the road. On its left a second grey patch is the site of Ovillers. Beyond La Boisselle Contalmaison is just out of sight behind a shoulder of hill. Nearly all the most hard-fought woods are in sight—High Wood on the sky-line, and Delville Wood larger on its right, and then in succession, with sharp intervals of bareness between them, the woods of Bazentin, Mametz and Fricourt. Above them and more distant are the dense trees that have Maricourt and the French troops at their feet, and, high on their right, the thin file of trees shading the road that runs from Albert, past Carnoy and Cléry, to Peronne. You walk on for three miles and may not observe that you have passed through Pozières, so similar are raw chalk and builder's lime, raw clay and powdered brick, when weeds grow thick over both. But the great road—strangely declined into a rough field track—begins to fall away before you, and new prospects to open—Courcellette and Martinpuich almost at your feet, and straight beyond them the church and town hall of Bapaume at the end of the long avenue of roadside trees. Looking left you see, two miles away, the western end of the summit ridge, the last point upon it from which the Germans were driven; so that, even after the fall of Thiepval, a shell would sometimes come from the Schwaben Redoubt to remind unwary walkers at Pozières Windmill that enemy eyes still watched the lost ground.

Among the wreckage of the countryside you can detect the traces of old standing comfort and rustic wealth. The many wayside windmills show you how much corn was grown. In size and plan they are curiously like the mighty stone dovecotes of Fifeshire. Almost as frequent as ruined windmills are ruined sugar refineries, standing a little detached in the fields, like the one at Courcellette, for which armies fought as they fought for the neighbouring windmill. Beet was the next crop to grain. There were little industries, too, like the making of buttons for shirts at Fricourt, where you see by the road small refuse

heaps of old oyster shells with many round holes where the little discs have been cut cleanly out of the mother-of-pearl, though all other trace of the factories has vanished. Each village commune had its wood, with certain rights for the members of the commune to take timber; Fricourt Wood at the doors of Fricourt, Mametz Wood rather far from Mametz, as there was no good wood nearer. All these woods were well fenced and kept up, like patches of hedged cover dotted over a park. It was a good country to live in, and good men came from it. The French Army Corps that drew on these villages for recruits has won honour beyond all other French Corps in the battle of the Somme.

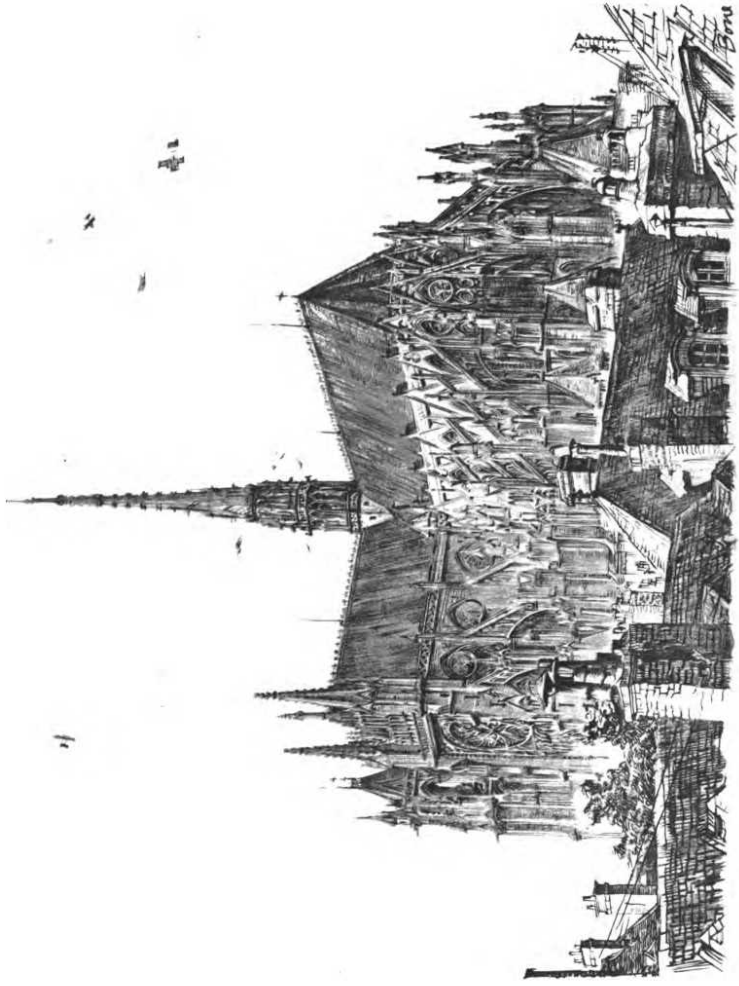
Many skilled writers have tried to describe the aghast look of these fields where the battle had passed over them. But every new visitor says the same thing—that they had not succeeded; no eloquence has yet conveyed the disquieting strangeness of the portent. You can enumerate many ugly and queer freaks of the destroying powers—the villages not only planed off the face of the earth but rooted out of it, house by house, like bits of old teeth; the thin brakes of black stumps that used to be woods, the old graveyards wrecked like kicked ant-heaps, the tilth so disembowelled by shells that most of the good upper mould created by centuries of the work of worms and men is buried out of sight and the unwrought primeval subsoil lies on the top; the sowing of the whole ground with a new kind of dragon's teeth—unexploded shells that the plough may yet detonate, and bombs that may let themselves off if their safety pins rust away sooner than the springs within. But no piling up of sinister detail can express the sombre and malign quality of the battlefield landscape as a whole. "It makes a goblin of the sun"—or it might if it were not peopled in every part with beings so reassuringly and engagingly human, sane and reconstructive as British soldiers.

G. H. Q., France.

January, 1917.

AMIENS CATHEDRAL

The "Parthenon of Gothic Architecture" is seen in this exquisitely delicate and sensitive drawing from the south-east, with the lovely rose window of the south transept partly in view on the left. The wooden spire, which Ruskin called "the pretty caprice of a village carpenter," looks finer in the drawing than in the original, the relative flimsiness of the material being less apparent. Nothing is lost by the intervention of the foreground houses, as the façade of the south transept, like the famous west front and the choir stalls, is sheathed with sandbags to a height of thirty or forty feet for protection against German bombs. Patrolling French aeroplanes are seen in the sky.



THE VIRGIN OF MONTAUBAN

An image which strangely escaped destruction during the time when the village of Montauban, now utterly erased, was being shelled successively by British and German guns. By a similar caprice of fate the Virgin of Carency, now enshrined in a little chapel in the French military cemetery at Villers-aux-Bois, received only some shot wounds when the village was destroyed during the French advance towards Lens in 1915.

