

**FIELDS AND
BATTLEFIELDS,
NO. 31540**

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Fields and Battlefields, No. 31540 by Hope Bagenal

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HOPE BAGENAL

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by

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Francis R. Stoddard

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FIELDS AND BATTLEFIELDS

CHAPTER I

THE TOWN

"My eyes I lend to you, but not my heart."
Old Play.

THE town of Bailleul stands upon a hill and may be seen over your shoulder for a two days' march, but the town of Steenwerk lies below on the plain of Flanders and peers above the orchards and willow trees surrounding it. Bailleul is a center of gaiety. Bands play of a Sunday afternoon in the market place, Charlie Chaplin is seen every night by crowded audiences in the Y.M.C.A. Cinema, and the correct incidental music is provided. There are, or were, concerts every evening at the Caisse d'Epargne. All the important journals—*La Vie Parisienne*, *The Cambridge Magazine*, *The Listening Post*, *John Bull*, *The Feathered World*—can be borrowed or bought; and English beer can be found in limited quantities. Also an English soldier once chose a wife among the daughters of Bailleul and married her: yet it is not of Bailleul but of Steenwerk that I wish to write.

¹Written before the German offensive of 1918. It is feared that these towns are now in ruins.

FIELDS AND BATTLEFIELDS

There was a time when Steenwerk set herself to rival in gaiety her sister on the hill. It was during the tenancy of the market place by some Motor Transport men of great originality and enterprise. There was no regular brigade band on Sundays, but these talented ones could render the opening bars of The Rosary on the horns of their motor-lorries. They set up a cinema of their own and worked it themselves, they assembled an orchestra of one man and two or three instruments, but the instruments did not long survive. Concerts were given at which R.A.M.C. men sang, and if marriages were not made in Steenwerk that was nobody's fault.

For in our own phrase there were "beaucoup Mamselles" in Steenwerk. I recall as sweet a vision as any of its kind. Once on entering the town I passed a young person wearing a red dress and apron. She carried water pails slung over her firm shoulders and walked in spite of them with the grace of perfect simplicity, or of perfect art. She did not raise her eyes. Her face was pale—a maid pale in the spring. Doubtless she thought of no khaki soldier but of one in cornflower blue, with perhaps a coffee-mill of hers in his pack, a red sash round his waist, and eyes more eloquent than ours.

Yet Steenwerk, little city of the plain, thou art ever remembered not for youth, or pleasure, but because from thy precincts we first looked back to England from a land at war.