

THE SOMME: JANUARY 1919.

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DESCRIPTIONS and photographs of the battle area convey only a slight impression of the terrible devastation which war has wreaked on a country once so fair and still.

I have just returned from a tour of the Somme battle-fields. Nothing can ever remove the picture of utter hopelessness which the scene imprinted on my mind. Towns bordering the fighting zone such as Abbeville and Amiens are scarred, but those within the zone are blasted beyond recognition. The villages of Villers Bretonieux, Abancourt, and Lamotte are sufficiently near to Amiens to allow groups of villagers to visit the places of their birth and childhood. In the majority of cases they do not appear to be able to recognise the house they once inhabited. The streets are one continuous heap of broken brick without mark or character. The tragedy of war could not be more poignantly revealed than in the picture of a little family group dressed in black sitting on a pile of debris sobbing bitterly like broken-hearted children.

Climbing over rafters and masonry in the little church of Wiencourt, I saw under the beams what appeared to be a human hand stained with blood, but a clearance of the dust and stone revealed, not a human body, but a life-size figure of the crucified Lord, wrenched from its Cross by the bursting of the high explosive.

Strong points, sunken roads, and registered targets need no other indication than the groups of crosses and mounds, for hundreds of men lie buried where they fought and fell.

The city of Cambrai is, to all appearances, a German town. During the four years' occupation, apparently no street direction or order was permitted except in the German language. The attempt to burn the town was foiled by the arrival of the victorious armies, but sufficient damage was done in the centre to reveal the intention of the ghouls. The main arteries from town to town are fringed with little wooden crosses, singly and in

groups, adorned with belts of machine-gun cartridges, steel helmets, and bayonets. Sometimes only a bottle containing an identity disc marks the resting-place of a hero, but this matter is speedily being dealt with by the Graves Registration Committee, whose work is worthy of the highest praise.

The whole scene is a maze of barbed-wire, trench and dugout, and overhanging the thousand miles of blasted soil is, like a funeral pall, that peculiar odour suggestive of death.

In Peronne, Bapaume, and Albert, towns once so flourishing and happy, there reigns a ghastly silence, for nothing lives except rats, which are indeed plentiful. No sign of a dog, or sound of a bird. Along the roads, the only signs of a chateau or "residence in its own grounds" are the twisted iron palings and a mound of rubble. Of trees there are none. Splintered stumps mark the lines of pre-war stately avenues, while on either side of what was once a road the hollows of shell craters suggest small-pox in its most virulent form.

In trenches and dugouts there are still the bullet-pierced helmets, cartridge-belts, and shells lying just as they were left, and the mine-craters and blown-up bridges reveal the methodical way in which the Hun tried to stay that historical advance which, if the armistice had not intervened, would have ended in the complete annihilation of his armies. At various intervals during day and night the sound of explosions on the battlefield serve as gruesome reminders that unexploded mines and shells still remain to deal out death to the unwary and venturesome.

This valley of the Somme will remain an imperishable memorial of the valour and endurance of gallant men. To see is to revere and rejoice. All who can should visit this undulating altar of sacrifice. Memorials and flowers, trees and birds, will some day appear, and the gratitude of a redeemed mankind will be directed towards, and form an invisible halo above the sod where heroes rest. But—the Somme will always be the Somme!

TUBERCULOSIS TOPICS.

A Central Sanatorium.

At the last meeting of the Herts Insurance Committee the tuberculosis officer reported that the existing plan of sending sanatorium patients to three or four different institutions in the county, was not a success, such patients frequently refusing to work, or even refusing to enter the institution at all. The vacant beds had to be paid for just the same, however. It was resolved, with unanimity, and almost with enthusiasm, to found a county sanatorium to accommodate all suitable cases of pulmonary tuberculosis, and a resolution was passed that representations in the above sense be made to the Hertfordshire County Council.

Hull Tuberculosis Colony.

At the third annual meeting of the Hull Tuberculosis After-Care Committee, it was reported that at the tuberculosis colony at Walkington there were twelve colonists as inmates and one on the staff. The honorary secretary expressed the opinion that they were only at the commencement of their work at Walkington. Many new experiments would have to be undertaken in the near future, such as model workshops and houses, and the result might be a model village. All present were invited

to visit the colony and see for themselves what they had every reason to believe would ultimately prove to be second to none in the Kingdom.

A Disclaimer.

THE Local Government Board has recently sent a communication to the Leeds National Health Insurance Committee taking notice of a statement appearing in the *Yorkshire Post* for August 17 last, and attributed to Dr. Woodcock, to the effect that the plan for the provision of extra beds had been fruitlessly submitted to a Government department; that the department had neglected to help in the matter, with the result of the plans not being passed. The Local Government Board denied, however, receiving the plans in question. It, moreover, stated that it would be glad to receive the Leeds City Council's observations on the matter, and to be informed when the plans and estimates, for which it originally asked as far back as last April, might be expected. As far as can be gathered from the ensuing discussion, this statement of the Local Government Board was justified, the Leeds Town Clerk stating that the City Engineer expected to get the plans finished in about a fortnight's time, he having been unable to proceed more quickly because of the lack of staff.