

## The Menin Gate Memorial

Two St. Dunstaners, viz. H. G. Gransby and F. G. Richardson, have had the memorable experience of being present at the unveiling in July of the great Memorial Gate at Ypres. From both we have received most interesting reports giving their impressions. It is to be regretted that exceptional pressure on our pages prevents the publication of these articles in full, but we are sure our readers will be interested in the extracts we give below.—ED.

"If ye break faith with us who die, we shall not sleep, though poppies grow in Flanders fields."

"Yes, indeed, poppies were growing all around on that Sunday morning in July, and evidences of a great and abiding faith were sensed by me as I stood in my allotted place at this most wonderful ceremony.

"Although there were signs of some sorrow, there were yet more sighs of pride—a great and glorious pride. There were mothers, wives, sisters and sweethearts come to do homage to their loved and remembered ones, and although a muffled sob came to my ears now and again, I was impressed by the extraordinary courage of these women. I had a taste of what to expect the day before the ceremony, when I can safely say I had to speak to hundreds of people. I could not tell you who they were although a crowd of them took us to dinner in the evening. I was not there to represent St. Dunstan's—I went there with my wife who had three brothers killed in the Ypres Salient. Still, my wife and I felt proud when person after person asked us if we were there to represent our beloved Organisation. We had already been stopped by a lady who put her car at our disposal, and she drove us herself to such places as Hill 60, and Passchendaele. Only the Press were allowed near the Gate on the Saturday, but my wife took me right inside the ropes and let me feel the names inscribed.

"Next day a glorious sunshiny morning—a town teeming with people—friends on all sides—every now and again a 'Hallo St. Dunstan's'—people of every nationality shaking my hand. That was my first impression of 24th July 1927. Above all this the knowledge that here I had seen indeed the last of many old comrades and

the last of my wife's brothers. But to come to the ceremony itself. Of course, I could not see it, so I will leave it to Mrs. Richardson to describe."

Mrs. Richardson writes:—

"From 1917 till 1927 I have waited for this reunion. It was indeed a reunion to me as to many more women present at this ceremony, and although I have been present at other ceremonies relating to the war, none have left such an impression on my heart as the opening of the Menin Gate. I, as the sister of three boys killed in the Salient, the youngest 15½, the eldest 24, have watched the growth of the Menin Gate for the past four years, and at last I have seen it unveiled to the world. I was filled with great pride to think that I was personally represented on that memorial and I was also filled with a great sorrow—'My brothers.' But I remembered that there was a greater sacrifice paid yet by some of our lads and looking to where my husband sat I tried to put away some of my sad thoughts. Then a touch on my shoulder—'The British blinded soldier is wanted, let him pass.' We walked through the Menin Gate, and silently saluted the dead. Just then two ladies of King Albert's Court came along and took my husband and myself to His Majesty."

From this point Richardson continues and describes how he had to sign King Albert's Visitors' Book. The two ladies responsible for the presentation did not give their names, but sent their best wishes to St. Dunstan's, and said that no doubt they had tended many St. Dunstaners, as they were nursing sisters in hospital at Ypres during the war."

Richardson concludes with a graphic description of their experiences for the rest of the day, which only limitations of space prevent printing.

### Menin Gate Memorial—continued.

Nine o'clock Saturday night saw my brother and myself at St. Pancras Station. Crowds were lining up to make the journey to Ypres. We had settled down to follow the crowd when suddenly one of Messrs. Cooks' officials asked the people to make way for us, and we were allowed on the platform before anyone else, excepting a disabled ex-soldier in an invalid chair. I have mentioned this as it was typical of the kindness shown to us by British and Belgians alike right through our journey. Arriving at Tilbury about eleven o'clock we went on board and started to explore. Very soon we found a splendid collection of bunks waiting to be claimed. Promptly dumping our kits on a couple we waited events. Very soon down came a priceless crowd of old "sweats" and needless to say it wasn't long before every bunk was claimed. We had a glorious time, for we felt that the boys had got together again. True, we didn't know them, but they were once our comrades and no introductions were necessary. On the whole we had a fairly decent night. We arrived at Dunkirk about six o'clock Sunday morning and were marched into the Customs building. I must tell you about our adventures here, they were real funny. After having been marched in, the gendarmes locked all the doors. As time went on the old "sweats" began to get fed up, especially as some had their womenfolk with them. So door after door was attacked and a tug-of-war commenced—a couple of gendarmes on the handles outside the doors and a couple of "our side" likewise trying to beat their late allies. After a bit the Frenchmen got so fed up that they would not let even their own Customs staff out to go off duty; this proved our salvation, as the staff joined in the attack from our side, cheered on by our supports and reserves. A deadlock however, was reached, so our staff friends altered their tactics and led the party out through a small door in the rear. It took time, but at last all were outside in the open air. You should have seen the gendarmes' faces when the parade marched past, leaving them still guarding the front doors. Still they were good sports and soon

saw the funny side of things. Having boarded the train we were suddenly brought up with a jerk when three faint whistles came from the Du Nord engine. How we all cheered! old days—happy days. As the train went on we found ourselves getting into the old familiar areas. But what a change. New buildings everywhere; nature having also assisted by covering ugly gaps with grass and poppies. Next we rattled into "Pop." How old "Pop" had altered; the ruins had been removed and smart houses and shops built up. Going on again the railway for a time followed the old "Pop—Ypres" road. How quiet the boys in our carriage are now—nobody speaking. But the long white road speaks to us—the clatter of limbers—the rumbling of guns—the march of countless feet and the chums that are always here. At last we arrived at Ypres, but what a Ypres! Gone the place as we knew it—splendid shops and hotels everywhere. Now we must push on, already the crowds are making towards Menin Gate. Getting a good position, we were much impressed with the unveiling ceremony. Others more able have described it. All that we know is that the very depths of sadness must have been reached—the mothers bravely keeping back their tears, the fathers marching stiffly but with trembling lips, and the kiddies making it a picture too real to ever forget. After the unveiling we went exploring round Ypres, and only those who revisit it can tell the sensation that this gives. We met the Rev. Gibbs and Mrs. Gibbs and had a pleasant little chat. The time went all too quickly, and about half-past nine at night we went back to the Menin Gate. Very few were there then. In the distance an estaminet piano was playing. Looking across the ridge, the dusk was already hiding the farthest hills from view. It was a solemn few minutes for us. The crowds had departed and we had to hurry. Brother quoted Kipling's "Captain and the Kings depart, still stands thine ancient sacrifice." Then we turned and leaving the sacred spot commenced our long journey back, to remember for all time the unveiling of the Menin Gate Memorial.

G. GRANSBY.