

The Kipling Motoring Diaries

August 1924



(Kipling and Carrie spent some twelve days in August/September 1924 “looking at cemeteries along our old line” (PINNEY, Letters, Vol. 5, pp. 170-1): he visited 33 in all, and the first pages of this tour’s diary consist of the notes he made on the state of the cemeteries he visited. Much of them is repeated in narrative form in the more usual diary which follows the notes but the whole is a muddle, with much repetition. However, we have transcribed the notes as Kipling presented them.

Each cemetery complied with certain standards laid down by the IWGC. There were always a ‘Cross of Sacrifice’ which was a tall crucifix, with a bronze sword inlaid in the stone; and an ‘Altar of Remembrance’ and a Refuge (a shelter for visitors which usually contained the ‘Book of Remembrance’ in a supposedly waterproof case.

The book listed all the graves in that cemetery). The whole plot was defined as a rule by a stone kerb, sometimes raised slightly on a brick base. Frequently there were trees (poplars or cypresses) planted round the perimeter. The approach was supposed to be paved and well-defined, and the name of the gardener was displayed near the entrance, or in the Refuge.)

Esmeralda: Fourth Duchess of Tours

The Flight of the Duchess

The Dead: and the relatives who come after them.

Things happen to Gardeners who take tips.

Betting and taking tips “The Curse of the English”.

The slow work of supplying gravestones.

It was (in an interregnum) when Esm. was away on a refit that a sister took her place for a certain journey. Evidently a car well loved and cared for, but naturally could not tell us what her experiences had been nor what sorrows and joys she had been privy to. We called her the Nursing Sister: “Paris?” said she. “Every gradient from Calais to the Porte Maillot. There’s very little I don’t know from the Yser to the Var.”

Left Beauvais: 9.50 No.1 N.R. for Paris via Beaumont. Weather closed in and had to halt in the lee of a tall wood of acacias till a drifting rainstorm blew by. Came on St. Denis from the N. and hit the Porte La Chapelle: having to circle half Paris to get to the Porte Maillot, the last 23 Kms took 45 min.

Taylor had the wind up about driving, but got us in at 12.15. Déj. at once and found our old rooms, 311. Wet as soon as we set foot in Paris and every promise of a wet afternoon.

This page, although undated, was, evidently, 27 August 1924. It was the first page of a series of notes of visits to cemeteries in northern France. We are unsure of the significance of the four first notes, other than the last, rather obvious, comment.

They evidently had a Rolls Royce on loan while Esmeralda was undergoing maintenance. It would also seem that their regular car was named both ‘The Duchess’ and ‘Esmeralda’. “The Flight of the Duchess” is a poem by Browning, one of Kipling’s favourite poets, which starts with an account of a journey through the countryside.

“From the Yser to the Var” means from north to south, the river Yser flowing from French Flanders into Belgium, reaching the sea near Nieuport: while the Var is a river in south-east France, which rises in the Alpes-Maritimes and reaches the sea on the west side of Nice airport.

We wonder if “The Nursing Sister” was an open car with no more than a canvas hood – rain did not usually bother them when riding in the regular ‘Esmeralda’/’Duchess’ which had a closed landaulet body.

The following page contains merely notes of each of the cemeteries visited – they also have symbols alongside them, but with no ‘de-code’, so that their meanings are unknown, though the letter ‘H’, we assume indicates something to do with ‘Headstones’. The content of these notes is repeated at least once in later notes in the same diary. Since Kipling’s visits the cemeteries have been much tidied up and tended, and provided with headstones etc.

- 28th Noyon: (Bullen gard(ener) no headstones: *
Ham: (gard. away) no headstones: box and notice b(oa)rd.*
- 30 Dury: (Mil. Asyl. Cem.) no headstones. Stones stacked for a year *
- 31: Longeau: (outside Amiens St. Acheul) Headstones H
Villers Bocage: headstones H
Warlincourt Halte: headstones H
Bac du Sud: headstones P.R. H
Arras Road: no book
Nine Elms: *
La Chaudière: headstones H
St. Mary’s A.D.S: Headstones & kerb:H
Ninth Avenue: no headstones *
- 1 Petit Vimy: §
Thélus Mil.: H (no gardener’s address.)
Zivy Crater: (bad disorder. No book) *
Cabaret Rouge: §
Maroc: H (Bully Grenay)
St. Patrick: * Mil,
Loos Brit. Mil.: headstones stacked but not up. Gate bad/*
- 2 Ferme Buterne: bad right of way – inaccessibility

Houplines Comm: two plots *

Houplines Old British: * line of fine poplars.

X Farm

Desplanque Farm: H and Cross up.

Ration Farm: Headstones stacked only (P.R.) §

Brewery Orchard: Headstones stack (P.R.) §

Y. Farm: * Several Indians

Rue David: (Mil. C) defective quality stones. Indian plot. H.

These cemeteries were all in the north of France, or just over the border in Belgium.

Noyon

Mr. Bullen, the locked cemetery – no headstones but shaven turf and blaze of flowers – nearly all “Unknown Brit. Sold.” Women in refugee hut who spoke of him as L’Anglais. He’d gone to his lunch and was not yet back, otherwise was there most of the time, they said.

The little hill by Noyon crowned with dead trees, still angry and telling about the fight tho’ so long ago.

A restored town with its contrasts worse than a flatly ruined one. The contrast of old and new – the dainty confections in one house and the other a charnel of bricks and rafters of all ages.

Muille la Blette

Ham Brit. Cem.

Gardener – C. Rhodes

Notice under glass all foxed

Brick field on one side & factories all round – (big flat landscape & chrysanthemums, scabious)

The flat roof-line of a tile-works, Pannée

Cemetery register top & sides needs painting – book inside all damp and register inside will also go to pieces if not kept dry.

Eppeville Cemetery

No headstones.

The bow-legged cockney (I heard her saying) always “wife of the other fellow”, had been 4 yrs. in France.

Halt for coffee in still wood of beech outside Senlis on way back – a fallen log and bracken behind us and utter motorless hush of the later afternoon. A wayside Calvary almost black by age against the dark green.

Doullens, Les 4 Fils Hotel. IWGC notice in salle à manger put too high up and can't be read.

-
- 28th (Noyon
(Ham – Muille
30 Dury Mil. Hosp.
31 Longeau (Amiens 9.30) Cross up
Villers-Bocage (next to Communal Cem.) Cross and headstones up in good order.
Gardener, C. Everett. Rue de Parke, Vignencourt.
A hedged cemetery planted with small trees.

All the above notes are on their visits to cemeteries on or near the battlefield of the Somme. Most lie between St. Quentin and Compiègne, and south of the river Somme itself. Villers-Bocage is confusing, because there are two communes of that name in northern France; and probably the best-known one to later generations is the one in Normandy, in the Calvados Département, the site of heavy fighting in WW 2 shortly after the D-Day landings, well away to the west of the Somme. But there is another commune of the same name, about seven miles north of Amiens, and that is the cemetery they visited on 31 August 1924. It was slightly unusual since it appears to have been marked by a hedge, rather than a brick and stone kerb. And the gardener's home was at Vignacourt.

31 August was a Sunday, and the next page of the diary typescript is a narrative account of their troubles when the Duchess got bogged down in the morning – place not stated.

11 a.m. Stuck in the mud trying to join the main road.

1 o'clock, saved. The trek into the shut Sunday village (E. and I); the women who knew nothing. Everyone at Mass & the rest not available.

Dogs in reeking farmyards. Mdme. Bertrand (M. Bertrand evidently was a great man, but with a lurid past. “He didn’t go to Mass – not him” – No one told where he was, but all seemed to know) with her mean person and eyes trying to think out what we’d pay for horses. Finally the café – the mistress, the men playing cannon-billiards, the two policemen & E telling her tale for the 6th time. General interest. The crapulous person in the street volunteered to go & fetch the two horses we begged for. He faded out. We watched the billiards – a fat policeman & a thin one being the leading social lights. I talked to the fat one, the keen-eyed tallish lady at the bar to E. A woman (called Madame) went out on a bicycle – we waited. Anon she returned with a nice young man with a whip to whom E. for the 7th time told her tale of the stuck motor in the mud on the crest of the hill by the five tethered kine (Oh they knew that road). The young man said he’d be there in ½ hour with two horses (Dick and Gamine the two setter-pointer-spaniels who came in and fawned); the brick-floored billiard room and the balls like maps of the world. So then back to the stuck car but accompanied by the handsome policeman who put on a civvy coat & kept his blue official bags. He was joined by a weird brown-coloured boy on a bike – with an intellect. The talk as we stepped along together amicably turned on farming, English drinks (“stoot”, they understood, was most drunk). The thin bobby told of a French girl who had married an Englishman in the Postal Dept. He knew all about it because he had “conducted the correspondence”. And what was life like in England? Then details of cattle and crops as we ploughed on & saw the car like a careened wreck on the hillcrest. While we were away, Taylor had pantomimed a man and a horse out of it. He was seen advancing across the wet harvest land. The brown boy threw himself almost under the car and began digging and clawing with his hands under the wheel: supplicating for the jack which Taylor gave him to amuse him. It sank into the mud (on the way up a little wayside hollow where the boy said a French soldier who had tried 3 times to desert was “fusillé”. He had friends at Amiens). On the time set a brown and a white gorse turned up with the nice young man, and a sort of perambulator bearing planks and chains. Here the brown weird boy proved himself an engineering genius and after the car had been jerked out by the two wise beasts, fended her from sliding back into the rut she had made by cunningly arranging the planks. Once out she had to be backed over the greasy chalk (and it had begun to rain) till she reached a place where she could be turned. Most intricate & safely accomplished amid smiles.

The diary then reverts to notes on each cemetery visited.

Warlincourt Halte

Kerbed and with (?)

Printed register inside – box in perfect order.

Gard(ener). T Vallens, Warlincourt, par Pas-en-Artois, Pas de Calais.

All headstones and crosses up. Cross of S(*acrifice*) at far end against sky. Standard roses all round.

Bac-de Sud

Box: all in order.

On a fork in the trees – roses & trees.

Low red brick kerb and wall on side nearest road.

Printed register.

Gard. J. Hither, Rue de Bapaume, Ronville Camp, Arras.

(Hollins, cook at Arras H.Q. rude.)

Arras Road

4 p.m. Tiny Cemetery beautifully flowered Geraniums, alone in ploughed field with hawthorn hedge and two maples.

No Book.

All Canadians. Kerb.

Improve access to this.

4.10 Nine Elms Mil. Cem.

4.20 La Chaudière, as one drops off Vimy Ridge.

Splendidly placed cross – behind stone group.

All headstones except one row.

Verges wider – printed register.

4.50 St. Mary's A.D. S.

Spoilt by Gardener's shed. Dead flat, low kerb.

Vimy in distance; the dumps of ruins on horizon.

Grey cloud.

Gold of stubble.

Sun on marigolds.

Ninth Avenue

Across stubble. A long plot with low poplars behind it and half a dozen graves set with pansies, candytuft Canterbury bells. Golden stubble.

Note Nothing but the smallest plants should be set in front of the headstones as they hide the relatives' texts.

7The next page would appear to be the start of the diary proper.

“I plough deep” said the car.
“I plough old wounds afresh –
“What you thought was a scar,
“I will show you is stricken flesh.”

“I plough deep” said the car.
“I tear open the well-smoother ground
“Where the lost idols are.
“I plough near and far.”

Aug. 25th

Left B(ateman's) 8.30 p.m. Arr. Met (*ropole*) Hot(*el*) Folkestone 10.20. Jazz; electric; paint; bad service; expensive.

He clearly didn't think much of Folkestone's Metropole Hotel, which was noisy and probably had just been newly 'electrified' and repainted.

Aug. 26th

Left by 11 boat (dullish: cloudy: calm). Ar. Boulogne and déj at Hotel de Folkestone. Dep. 2.10. Cloudy still and on the edge of rain/ Usual route; St. Omer, Montreuil, Abbeville, Grandvillers: arr. Hotel de France 5. (Beauvais: Hotel de France et d'Angleterre, M. Piat). Rainy towards Abbeville: thence getting progressively more wet: very nice to be on the broad straight poplar-lined roads again and to smell the smell of France. Car pulling beautifully: no sort of adventures: walk all round the market square from 6-6.45 in small fine wet: and some very good French beer, in the even while waiting the Brander Matthews. Late drunken man passing at midnight with clopping feet and a song (obviously improper) with the refrain of “Oui! Oui!” that echoed crapulously up the street.

The Hotel de France et d'Angleterre in Beauvais had long been the Kiplings' favourite hotel in northern France, and its proprietor, M. Piat, and his family were family friends.



Brander Matthews (1852-1929) was an American writer and academic, the Professor of Literature at Columbia University, 1892-1924, and he and Kipling had been long acquainted (their earliest surviving correspondence dates from January 1894 and much more features in the various volumes of PINNEY, Letters).

He had just retired from Columbia, and was presumably touring in France with his family; and Kipling would seem to have been expecting to meet them. However a letter, written to Matthews on this date (PINNEY, Letters, vol. 5, pp. 170), from Beauvais, suggests otherwise.

Kipling thought it worthy of remark that the car was going well – today we are used to our cars being unexcitingly reliable.

Aug. 27th

A hint of a fine morning – which remains to be seen: out for small stroll among just-opened shops and over twinkling swilled-down pavé.

L(ef)t. Beauvais by No. 1 N.R. via Beaumont where the new bridge is being made. Weather closed in shortly after Beauvais and at 10.30 had to shelter in lee of tall wood of acacias while a drifting rain storm and a crack or two of lightning got over. Came in on St. Denis from the N. and hit the Porte de la Chapelle. Had to circle half Paris to reach the Porte Maillot. Taylor had a little wind-up about city driving but otherwise, did well and got us in at 12.15. Found our old rooms No. 311. Déj. at once and at once wet began: with every promise of a wet afternoon.

This entry is more or less a copy of the entry on page 1 of this diary. They were staying at the Hotel Brighton.

Aug. 28th

Left at 9.50 for Noyon. Most way among St. Denis suburbs – but splendid run to Chantilly - Senlis and Compiègne – dullish day with bursts of sun. Got to Noyon at 12.35, excellent déj. at Hotel de Mont Renard – inspected cemetery at Noyon (locked – Gardener, Mr. Bullen) but in perfect order and beautifully full of flowers. Went on to Ham and found cemetery there (Gardener, Rhodes) in good order among its brickfields. Met the crippled wife of the under gardener who did cicerone.

Saw box for book and register needed painting, and notice under glass was foxed and needed repair. Went to find Eppely cemetery but missed it. Neither Noyon nor Ham bore their headstones. Turned back at 2.50 and were not back in Paris until 6.10 (halted for coffee and petrol en route). About 150 miles in the day.

Noyon is a town in the Département of the Oise, in northern France some 60 miles NE by N from Paris: and Ham is a village some 12 miles further north of Noyon. Nor have we been able to find Eppely cemetery.

Aug. 29th

Wet in Paris and nothing taken out.

Aug. 30th

Wet and dull. Left Hotel Brighton at 2 p.m. Came out by Clichy and St. Ouen to St. Denis. Got more of a scotch mist as we went on. Just outside Amiens got out for Dury (Asylum) Hospital which lies in an angle of the vast Asylum wall on the edge of naked wheat country. Owing to wet the road to it was very foul. Cemetery (except actually where our dead lay) was in bad shape, neglected and full of weeds. All the headstones had been delivered and seemed to have been put aside for months and months, stacked in the grass. One entry in the visitors' book said that the stones had been there at least a year. Register sopped with damp and almost illegible – same with visitors' book. Gate of cemetery open and all information as to gardener, etc., was fairly washed off the notice under glass – not at all satisfactory. Went to see the tablets in A(miens) Cathedral (specially the Newfoundland tablet) which did not look at all bad. Then wet descended again. In Cath. met one Murray who said he knew me in India and when I met him at the hotel after dinner he certainly did – had “seen me kill all my lions”. To bed at 9.30 but was kept awake by the trams and the multitudinous drunkards of Amiens.



Amiens

Dury lies some two miles SSE of Amiens city centre: Amiens is a city 72 miles N. of Paris, and is divided by the river Somme. The “tablets in A. Cathedral” would have been the general one, on which he had been working when they stayed at Aix-les-Bains in April 1923, and “the Newfoundland tablet” must have been either the original or a copy of the one which was to go on the memorial at Beaumont-Hamel (the memorial to the Newfoundland troops had not been formally unveiled yet).

Sunday Aug. 31

Wet – wet – wet! An inauspicious dat. Left at 10.15 but went out in taxi to look at Longeau (St. Acheul) Cem. This was in perfect order (no headstones up) and the Register book and visitors’ book were not, as usual, wet: first cemetery was Villers-Bocage communal extension ten kms. up the Doullens Road. Reached it 10.30. It lies off the main road. (Gardener C. Everett, Rue de Parke, Vignencourt.) A growing hedge and small trees planted and the turf mown and bright with flowers. Instead of going back to safety we went on up communal road (mud on chalk) which, as it had rained heavily, grew worse.

Finally under small crest of farmland full of stacked sheaves, and five tethered kine grazing, she slid sideways over the grease and half buried her near hind wheel against the bank. A whizz and a whirr showed she couldn’t bite. Taylor wisely forebore any attempts and demanded horses! And this on a Sunday in an absolutely deserted landscape and with all the inhabitants in their best clothes at Mass! A council of war. Sent E. and I back to the village, twenty minutes muggy and amazingly muddy walk to find – nobody anywhere except here and there a child behind a half-door, opening on a yard whose centre was a dunghill and which was guarded by a loud, but luckily tied-up, dog.

The passage which follows is an expanded version of the description of their negotiations in the village – presumably Villers-Bocage- which appeared after the earlier notes on that cemetery.

At last, a woman to whom E. with much drama told the tale – and could anyone in the village hire us horse to pull out the auto? She didn’t quite know. Her own husband and another man were both abed, ill. But there was a farm next door. Same sort of silent square but this time a white-haired hard-featured woman, backed by a totally inadequate man. Yes, there were horses, but, you see, everyone was at Mass. No help there, tho’ E. for the second time had told her tale. Up the silent street again. A chance look showed us a fattish middle-aged woman of unrevolting countenance. She said there was a M. Bertrand in the village who had horses.

He wouldn't be at Mass – not him, and vaguely indicated the direction in which he lived. E. had only told the tale thrice. It was better told each time.

So round a corner which showed us a wee brick-floored café where the bad boys of the village (two) were playing billiards with a fat and a thin policeman. The lady of the bar directed us to where M. Bertrand lived. But B. was out and Mme B. was a loathly peasant woman, with thin lips and a calculating eye. She couldn't place us at all. She said B. was out – she didn't know when he'd be back (private suspicion B. was drunk somewhere). After a fourth telling of the tale we departed from that evil house. The only thing of note being a contraption like an elongated squirrel's revolving cage on the top of the half door, which no chicken could perch upon.

Thence to a white and dusty elderly man with fine eyes, at his déj. to whom for the 5th time E. told her tale. He referred us, a few doors down to a thin young brown man with a suspicious wife to whom – for the 6th time E. told her story. No help at all there. Then back to the café: our road there interrupted by a man either drunk or the village imbecile, who seemed to have the idea of getting help from someone. By this time a few villagers were interested in our little procession. We returned to the Café. The bar lady, another lady, and both policemen were told the story for the 7th time, the drunken man was sent off (obviously to keep him quiet) to talk to someone about it.

We entered, sat down, watched the bad boys play billiards while the policeman (fat) and the bar lady occasionally talked to us. Suddenly the other lady plunged forth on her bicycle in the wake, apparently, of the drunken man. We didn't see this but were aware that she had been sent by her coming back and shortly afterwards being followed by a nice fair young man with a carter's whip. He asked pertinent questions as to weight and position of car – planks, ropes, etc., and for the eighth time E. told her tale. The fat policeman with much drama showed him how theoretically one extricated a car. In the end the young man said:- “I will be there in half an hour!” With profuse farewells we two went back to the wreck but not alone. The young policeman, still keeping his official trousers, slipped on a civil coat and accompanied us. Then sprang from nowhere, on a bicycle, a weird, keen-eyed, brown-skinned boy of fifteen – a genius, as was proved later. We four walked, in great amity, talking of life, of farming of cattle, of a French girl the policeman knew who had married an Englishman in the postal department. “And I know all about it, because I conducted the correspondence.” “And what would life be like in England – down there?” said the policeman. “Oh, very different” said E. “And they don't drink wine?” he pursued. “No. They drink pellall and stoot”, said the boy swiftly.

(It took this editor a moment or two to interpret the foregoing. "Stoot" was "stout", that was clear enough, but "pellall" ("pale ale") took longer to work out.)

We explained. And thus talking passed a little hollow in the downs – a shallow pit. "There!" said the boy "a French soldier was fusillé". "Who did it? The Boches?" "No, he tried to desert three times and was caught. He came from hereabout – had friends in Amiens. The fourth time he was fusillé." And thus beguiling the way we came to the firmly anchored car. M. was alone. T., unable to bear the sight of a lone horse on the lonely horizon had gone off, naked of all but English and had fairly pantomimed a horse out of a farmer. The horse – in a cart – could be seen advancing across the sodden fields. The weird brown boy clamoured, at once, for the lifting jack. He had evolved (being French) a theory of how to extricate the car, on his way up.

Taylor let him have the jack to amuse himself. He adjusted it under the sunken wheel axle. It naturally sank though the mud. The boy kept on turning it, till the handle twisted up great muddy swathes of grass from end to end. Then, the single horse in the cart came nearer. At the same time, from the village approached a brown and a white horse brought up by the fair young man – who had run ahead of his promise. There was very little fuss. The policeman, the brown boy, the man in charge of the one horse and a friend, made an informal committee to decide the plan of action. The brown boy who really had a mind possessed himself of the planks. Chains were fitted on to the front axle. They pulled but their first pull was maladroit. The fair young man readjusted their harness in an esoteric manner. The owner of the single horse stood hopefully by. He had brought no chain but was an authority on the hardness or softness of the edge of the track – a vital matter.

The second pull, a miracle of craft, jerked her out and forward (sucking) out of her rut and under her own speed she scrambled forward. Then came the immensely ticklish job of backing her down the misty track of greasy chalk – and it had begun to rain savagely now for a while, just enough to grease the soapy chalk. Here the brown boy, squeezed between the bank and the uncertain car, saying nothing, but working as nimbly as a thinblerigger, so managed the planks in her descent that he fended her two tons weight from sliding back into the very slough they had been yanked out of. All the rest of the track was to the left. So she was backed down, more than a hundred yards, slipping and sliding; her front wheels scraping like a dog's paws, avoiding great water-channels in the chalk that would have slid her into a bog again, till at last she came to a patch of rough grass – just above where the deserter was fusillé – on to which she slid all her length and was just – only just able to turn and face the road that she should go.

Then, amid mutual congratulations, came the question (unraised until then) of payment. “Oh,” said the owner of the two horses, tentatively and shyly: “shall we say fifteen francs?” and it was said, but he was given sixty with a hint to spread it among the other four. The owner of the single horse was given ten – for his advice in the steering of the car. The musing motor waddled into the dip under the cemetery, under her own power, pushed and rooted through the last slough of despond and got on to the firm road she should never have left, opp. the cemetery once more. It was E’s triumph from first to last. And that was one o’clock – two hours lost amid kindly and helpful souls.

One-thirty saw us raging hungry at the 4 Fils d’Aymon at Doullens where one of the best déjs. we’d eaten (7 fr a head) rejoiced us and my boots were scraped of several hundredweight of mud. Selah!

Got into Lille (Royal Hotel) at 6.30 p.m. – and enjoyed a very good dinner.

Then followed in order these Cemeteries:

Warlincourt Halte. (printed register) – all headstones and t’s – box in perfect order. T. Vallens, Gardener. And a wealth of standard roses.

Bac au Sud. Box trees at entrance – on falling ground with a view. Low red brick wall on side nearest road. J. Hillier, Gardener. Headstones,

Visited H.Q. at Amiens and was rudely treated by a cook called Holles who should be removed. A fat man called bacon talked smooth officialities at me.

Arras Road. (No book), a tiny (Canadian) cemetery beautifully flowered, alone in a ploughed field, and the farmer pinching with his plough into the right of way. To report this. Hdstns.

Nine Elms. Mil. Cem. (signed book)

La Chaudière. (under Vimy Ridge) splendidly placed cross all in place except one row near road. Kerb up.

St. Mary’s A.D.S. (Hulluch) Spoilt by Gardner’s shed – but otherwise very good cem. Golden stubble, sun on marigolds, grey clouds pyramidal dumps and the loom of Vimy.

Tenth Avenue (A quiet plot – no book) behind it farm of golden stubble. A dozen graves all marked with pansies, candytuft, etc., in borders. Most peaceful.

Sept 1/24

Got off at 2 p.m. from Lille via Carvin to Petit Vimy Cem. looking over the great Lens plain, the flank of wooded Vimy Ridge behind it (less than 100 dead), long red-bricked path to it and cornfield on slope below.

Théelus Mil. Cem. Atop of ridge with right of way marked across the plough. Cross splendidly backed against open sky and immense views all round except to E. and S.E.

Then Zivy Crater – Souchez way – an inexplicable and dangerous hole in the ground where the earth had slidden away from the foundations of the cross.



Zivy Crater Cemetery

Then in the cloudy grey on to the huge Cabaret Rouge. Crosses only – and just over the swell of the downs Notre Dame de Lorette where 50,000 dead French lie.

Notre Dame de Lorette, NW of Arras, contains the graves of over 40,000 French and colonial troops, killed in the three Battles of Artois in 1914-15. France lost as many casualties here as at the better-known Battle of Verdun.

Then to Maroc, flat and square in the middle of Bully-Grenay town – over vile roads to St. Patrick's Cemetery in Loos, and lost the Loos British cemetery under a partly-planted embankment of what looked like cinders.

Did not get back to Lille till after 7 and went down to dinner at 8 p.m. H.N.

We are not sure of the significance of "H.N."

Sept. 2

Out at 1.30 on Armentières road and by 4.30 had covered these nine cemeteries:



. Houplines Cemetery today

Ferme Buterne

Houplines Communal

Houplines Old British Cem. Row of poplars, rowan, ash and a street looking into it like a garden and farm.

Despalnques Farm (a dream behind the old farm moat)

Ration Farm

Brewery Orchard

Y Farm (with its row of unknown Indians outside the wall) and

Rue David (with its stones to dead Indians)

A strong afternoon. Back at 5.15

One can't hold more than a certain no. of cemeteries distinct.

Two delightful small maids (one dark, one fair) between 8 and 11 helped us to Houplines Communal Cem. Volunteered to show us as we were coming away from the curiously inaccessible Ferme Buterne. We signalled up the car and put 'em in the front seat, to their no small delight.

All the cemeteries were different in character and it was delightful to see how the architects had troubled to give to each an individuality.

Dined at the restaurant where Bird ordered us a superb dinner – Chicken Maryland (with corn and fried banana) and for me Crepes Suzette. It took an hour and a half but it was more than worth it. Mem. For one whole happy week now we have dined in our own rooms or in a restaurant where they do not change.

They then had a break from inspecting cemeteries. Elsie's wedding was fixed for the end of October, and she would be living in Brussels after her marriage (George had an appointment as an Honorary Attaché at the British Embassy.)

Sept. 3

Left at 9.30 a.m. for Bruxelles. The 24 miles to Tournai took ever so long owing to the delay at the French (especially the French) and the Belgian frontiers. Later on a halt of over 20 min. at Ath level crossing where a 40 waggon goods train came to rest across the road. Also, had a deuce of a time trying to find the Rue Royale in Brussels. Result, rest at the Hotel Astoria till nearly one o'clock where George met us. After lunch G. and E. went forth to hunt houses. C. and I (after an interval inquiring for luggage from Lille which should have come with Clark, the maid, but hadn't) went to the Rue l'Evêque to Cook's office to buy a ticket for Clark by the 10.50 (Sunday), 2nd class to London and 1st on the boat. Matter took 20 min. to complete, and the reservation of seat should come to us tomorrow.

Home at 5.30 and renewed exertions after missing luggage. Also telephoned to Royal Hotel at Lille enquiring what had become of it. Suddenly the Astoria's concierge announces that it has arrived here, and will be up in 10 min. which it is. It seems that, despite anything that they say at Lille, luggage, even registered, must be inspected at the frontier and can't be registered to Brussels. Then E. returned with the tale of her house-hunting and – dressing for dinner for the first time in eight days – we went down to dinner with George at 8.30, All Belgium, so far as seen, is one long pavé street of meritorious industry: and the faces of the inhabitants reflect it.

The Kiplings themselves would always have travelled 'first' by train, although in Britain 'third' could be pretty respectable and comfortable ('second' class on Britain's railways had been abolished on various dates in the last quarter of the 19th century), but continental railways continued to have three passenger classes, of which the 'third' was, one might say, pretty dire. So the British lines serving the Channel ports continued to provide a second class until the late 1950s, and it was customary to travel "second on the train, first on the boat. ('Third' on the boat had no facilities to mitigate a rough crossing; over the ship's rail was only facility to cope with sea-sickness). This editor has limited experience of modern Belgium, but he can say with certainty that the description of Belgium as being "one long pavé street" remained true in 1949, when he made the journey by car (a Citroen 'Flying 15') from Paris to Brussels.

4th.

Nothing in the car line.

5th.

Tried to get from Waterloo to Louvain and lost our way.

This is a fascinating, but frustrating, entry – it seems reasonable to assume that they had paid a visit to the site of the Battle of Waterloo, but there is no mention of it in Carrie’s diary, nor any further mention in this diary, either. Nor is there any surviving, published, correspondence covering this visit, other than a single letter from Beauvais on Aug. 26th. It would have been interesting to have had Kipling’s comments on the site, and the battle.

6th.

Went to Louvain in afternoon (very hot for the first time) and saw what the Huns had done to the Library, etc., there.

Louvain, a Belgian university city between Brussels and Liège had been sacked and burnt by the Germans in August 1914, in pursuance of their deliberate policy of Shrecklichkeit (frightfulness) intimidating the civilian population. The event had attracted international condemnation. See Kipling’s 1915 story, “Swept and Garnished”.



Louvain today

7th.

Left at 9.30 for Ypres via Ninove – concierge warned us against the Oudenarde road so we went to Renaix (indifferent pavé).

From Renaix tried to get across to Courtrai via Quarremond. Found bridge under repair by Heighem and had to turn south via Genappes, a slow detour, and a slower progress from Courtrai to Roulers via Heule, Langelede, Iseghem.

As all Belgium continues to be one street one can’t go along to any extent. After Roulers did not go to Passchendaele but held on through Poelcapelle where saw new Brit. Cem. and the concrete beams that hold the headstones. All the land thick with cemeteries, all very well-kept and trim-looking. Came into Ypres by St Jean and déj’d at the Splendide – sufficiently bad – at 1 o’clock.

Away by a little after two, after a glance at the concrete foundations of the Menin Gate – long concrete piles (90 m., from Brussels).



Lijssenthoek Cemetery today

Turned aside to Lijssenhoek (grid from Cornwall), a wonderful city of the dead with Chinamen, natives, all the Dominions, French and a few Americans. 10,000 plus. A nursery attached and very good standard roses (printed Register), the best yew hedges we had seen; and the local hoppers coming in by dozens to walk about in it. Rather a pretty sight. Tyre went flat at gate while waiting and small knot of natives assisted; including Suzanne aged 2½ from Langemarck and a boy in a gilt-braided cap. Lijssenhoek quite the most impressive of the cemeteries.

Mem. Outside Pop(*eringhe*) a company of Archers with bows and arrows.

Thence to the French border at last. Capelle: the Belg. wasn't visible so we had to turn back for him to give us our sortie. "They're never outside" – so over twisted pavé through a wonderful town of Bergues, all old ditches of fortifications with men and boys fishing – so to Dunkerque and to the Casino (a sort of grubbier Ostend) with all the world and his family disporting 'emselves. A mild flavour of decay about all the buildings but the beach full of life. Chocolate there: and then got bewitched getting out of D(*unkerque*).

After being extricated, were hung up at the same level crossing where, years before, we had waited, not realising that there was a way under the track. A man in the railway explained this in most lucid dumb show. Then off again. Got nearly bewitched in the mad town of Gravelines, twisting and turning among the back docks. Got into Calais, but couldn't find Grand Hotel. Finally set down here at 6.30 p.m. having been on the road since 9.30, 150 miles more or less.

A general impression of a hot Sunday, in a continuous suburb, untidy men playing, sports, quoits, etc., in the streets and the streets hung with flags and "welcom". But the archers and the procession of fishermen (headed by a band) between Amiens and Lille. They enjoy themselves in all ways,

A still hot evening culminating in a heavy vertical downpour at Calais and a very hot night followed, Sept. 8th, by a cloudless and hot morning.

They had spent the day traversing the country over which British armies had fought since 1658, when Cromwell's new model army fought at Dunkerque with the French under Marshal Turenne against the Austrians and a Royalist contingent, to be followed by William of Orange's and Marlborough's men, and the Duke of Cumberland's in 1745 – we managed to keep out of Europe in the Seven Years' War, but were back again in 1793, and again in 1815: and most recently in 1914-18

We are slightly baffled by the "company of Archers". We know only of the Scottish body of that name who are the Sovereign's bodyguard in Scotland, performing a function similar to the Yeomen Warders in England. We have not been able to discover that the Belgians had a similar ceremonial corps, nor have we ever heard of the Scots going abroad ceremonially. Pop (for Poperinghe) would have been a well-known abbreviation to anyone who had served on the Western Front during the war.

And the second reference in the diary to the archers is inconsistent with the first. In the first, they were met outside 'Pop', which was next door to Ypres, but the second reference can be read as their being between Amiens and Lille – except that the Kiplings had been nowhere near either of those towns that day: and the sentence is incomplete; there is no verb in it. There follow some remarks on the cemeteries that they had visited that day.

Sept. 7th, 1924.

Poelcappelle New Brit. Cem. Beams being put up for headstones.

Left at 9.30. Came from Brussels via Ninove and the Oudenarde Road to Reneaiz, thence tried the direct pavé to Roulers – found bridge being repaired at Beighem and had to come back south to Avelinghem, losing much time and finally getting on to much worse road to Courtrai. More time lost in Courtrai feeling one's way towards Roulers via Heule, N. to Iseghem. Also time lost on Dixmude Road. Came in finally by Poelcappelle at St. Jean (Cemeteries all in good state everywhere). Saw the Poelcappelle New Brit. And beams being put in for headstones.

Reached Ypres at 1. 90 miles

Those who have visited an IWGC/CWGC cemetery will have remarked the meticulous straightness of the lines of stones. This was achieved by burying a long concrete beam with a trough in its upper surface into which the stone was cemented. This gave both straightness to the line and stability to the stone.



Vlamertinghe Military Cemetery

2.15 p.m. Vlamertinghe Cemetery Printed Register. Standard roses yellow and red above rosemary and lavender.

2.40. Lijssenhoek. Printed Register. 13,000. Standard roses – plot of French graves. Yew hedge on one side. Hoppers walking in the wet. Nursing Sister Spindler. Best yew in all the cemeteries.

We are not quite sure what he means by “hoppers”. At home, he would refer to the east-enders who came to pick the hops in the local hop-fields as “hoppers”, but that certainly is not the sense here. The sense seems to be what we would today call “trippers”- casual visitors on a day’s outing.

4.45. Dunkerque – a sort of grubbier Ostend – with a most wonderfully clear atmosphere and all the world and his wife and babe playing on the sand before the grey sea with two full-sized ships on it. Hot chocolate there. An end of queer adventures. Lost way coming out of Dunkerque for Calais and got hung up at some old level crossing before we realised there was a road under the track. Got bewitched as before in Gravelines; and at the last couldn’t find the Grand Hotel in Calais. Result, arrived at 6.30 having been in the saddle since 9.30 and covered about 140 miles. Here should end the trip.

As indeed it did: the extracts that remain from Carrie’s diaries record that they were back in London on 8 September, doing some shopping with Elsie. However, there followed some more notes on the various cemeteries they had visited.

Aug. 31

Longeau: (perfect order) notice and register book not wet as usual but names not clear enough.

Sept. 1

Petit Vimy: no gardener's name on notice board: (very pretty) no headstones – looking over the Lens plain dotted with red roofs – wooded flank of Vimy behind (less than 10 kms).



Thélus Military Cemetery

3.40. Thélus Mil. Cem.: on very top of ridge – right of way marked with stones across plough land. Cross splendidly backed against naked sky. Plain low red brick wall with white stone topping. Bronze palm and laurel wreath at base of Cross of Sacrifice. No headstones. Turfing unfinished – no Stone of Remembrance, but good seat opp. Cross. Enormous roof of world view in every direction except E. and S.E. where ground rises. Planted with very young planes. Gardener's tin hut inside and as usual spoiling appearance. Green box repainted, No G's address on notice board. 2pp. Register written in pencil. Notice board leaking badly.

4 p.m. Zivy Crater Cem.: huge circle of craters kept and walled round atop after having been made a complete circle – lined with grey flints – cross looking down into it – no gardener's address in leaking wet notice board – no visitor's book. Visitors had written their names on the outer sheet of the register.

4.20 p.m. Cabaret Rouge: with 6000 dead in a great fold of the downs and Lens below – all crosses – not headstones but very bright with flowers – Register in pencil. Just across the downs, Lorette Cem. Tower with 50,000 French dead. Blangy Cem. concentrated here – central path lined with willow. Stones being delivered, very few. Plants microscopical asters – lavateras, pinks. Aster No. 1213.

On initial interment, often while the war was still in progress, graves were marked with a wooden cross, which remained until replaced by the headstone.

5.10. Maroc: square and flat in the middle of Bully-Grenay – all headstones up and roaring town all around it. H. Attril.

5.35. St. Patrick's Cemetery: very awkward to reach and posted as to [*Blank*] Notice Board in bad order. Prettily planted with clump of lilac in foreground on edge of village with ag(*ricultural*) land all about.

5.50 Loos British Cem: on the edge of unrepaired land and a partly wooded embankment behind it. Another large new notice bd. Illegible. Headstones stacked 8 high at one end. Noticed birches planted as trees.

These were all cemeteries close together in the area south of Ypres, where the front line turned south, after the bulge of 'the salient'. They spent the night, before and after, in Lille.

Sep. 2/24.

Went out 1.30 for Armentières.

2.10. Ferme Buterne – Houplines: with cattle-trodden ground all round, no visible means of access except through barbed wire of farm. Crosses only. Gate wired. Cross of S(*acrifice*) up. Gate sagging on hinges. Right of way should be posted.

2.20 Houplines Comm. Cem: just inside gate of Comm. Cem. a little corner to themselves –some under a pear tree. Men at work on memorial statue to the French dead of these parts.

2.30 Houplines Old Brit. Cem.: row of poplars behind Cem. No headstones, well kept, rowan, ashes - gate needs re-pointing. Cross up. Milburn, gardener. Gate needs repair. Row of red brick cottages looking into it.

Ferme Phillipeaux: fence in bad shape. Box needs repairing.

3 p.m. Farm X: notice board almost illegible, two gardeners at work.

3.10. Desplanques Farm: sloping to moat round farmhouse in a pasture. H(*eadstones*). Very lonely with small cross. Hasp and latch off gate. No kerb. Entire bright red farm buildings. 3 rows of graves and 4 over.

3.20 Ration Farm: Headstones stacked. Fence only – footway over ditch, worn-out slats. Hawthorn hedge – printed register book. Lime in central avenue.

3.35. Brewery Orchard: low red wall with white topping. Some headstones stacked, cross up: good brick rubble path wire both sides. Cross in wood: belt of turf: well-kept poplars planted. House all restored across fields. Printed register. Iron gate and catch wants immediate attention. Hawthorn hedge inside.

Y. Farm Mil. Cem.: red brick wall; stone entrance (big enough for stray cow). Stone and cross – no headstones up. Register box in front of stone. Register in pencil. Nine of almost all unknown Indians of the winter of `14-`15, one Gurkha, four Sikhs and 1 Baluchi. Layout very pretty.

4.10. Rue David: banking in front – dead flat – trees on one side, but headstones; no cross. Notice board rusted, wants painting. Limes planting. (Gregory Ugside name on stone.) “Dadle Senior el Descanso eterno. Que la luz perpetua brille para el!” Spanish. Very many stones in this Cem. are defective and cracking. Moisture. Indian plot. Rue David ought to be better marked.

One of the most interesting and delightful things about the Cemeteries is their wonderful individuality of character – when one thinks there are more than three thousand of them in France alone, this is the more astonishing. Naturally the treatment of each Cemetery must vary with the nature of the ground: but the architects have, in every case, done more than vary: they have managed to give each one some touch apart and personal – so that, even after one has seen between thirty and forty in a few days, one is not conscious of duplication. The glories, the appeals, the sentiment is different.

Cabaret Rouge, with her thousands, lies in the swell of a great wave of land which is topped in the distance by the towers of Notre Dame de Lorette where 50,000 French dead lie. It is frankly an army camped in position – all open to one glance of the eye: and the blaze of the lines of flowers is as frank and robust as the drums and colours of “an army with banners”. The multitude of crosses keep each other in countenance: and the lines of the graves run like lines in echelon. Immense space and a sense of swing and freedom dominate the whole idea. “A movement of population” is taking place here. They are concentrating the unknown dead and others from tiny cemeteries and a whole battalion of “unknown” soldiers is added in a few months. The gay marigolds, lavateras, minute asters and pansies welcome them all equally. It is almost as though the dead themselves were gay in their Cabaret Rouge: within eyesight of brooding, silent Lorette on the far slope.



Petit Vimy

For utter contrast – Petit Vimy – hanging on to the wooded slope under Vimy Ridge – a handful – less than a hundred – still corn fields at their feet, the wood on two sides and the slope giving on to the huge view of the Lens plain dotted with new-tiled red roofs. By happy accident, the Cross of Sacrifice is erected but there are no headstones – only wooden crosses springing from the more-than-lawn-like turf. A couple of women are trying to stook the wet corn just outside the low stone wall. They are the only figures visible: yet one can hear the roar of the camions (*lorries*) ascending and descending the Ridge but hidden by the trees. It is as tho' half a company of tired men still in service kit had thrown themselves down to rest awhile in the little recess cut out of the deep green woods. Presently they must rise and swing away again across the cornfield down and towards Loos, and Cuinchy and Neuve Chapelle.



Desplanques Farm Cemetery

Desplanques Farm – close to Armentières where all the land is as flat as poured quicksilver – cannot be found without search. An enormous block of blood-red farm buildings, obviously not two years old, scientific and complete, points the road. There are hollows and dimples under the grass at one side of it – the veiled ruins and wreckage of some abolished farm of the old days. A purplish smear (brick rubble under sprouting grass) runs along one side of a lazy weeded moat flanking the long line of farm buildings. Some day that will be a road – now it is the rubbish of shell-fire thrown where it does not show. It gives on to an uneven-surfaced meadow where cows are grazing. This is sure nowadays that here was a bit of shell-tortured land brought into shape for pasture (the cornfield beyond is level and smooth, for the sake of the ploughs and the reapers).

Follow the smear till I leads you past the flank of the buildings, look left where the moat guards the back of the square. A little Cross of Sacrifice keeps watch over not more than sixty of our men, each beneath his own carven headstone. There are three rows of them and four over by themselves – almost all of one regiment (machine gun work perhaps) and the flowers have taken them all into their confidence. The moat at their feet divides them from the “real” world where the motors go. They see nothing except the willows and thorns along its bank, the patches of brambles, and the long red wall pierced with an arch inside which the farmyard lies golden and brown. It is so utterly still that one can hear the cows tearing the grass fifty yards away – so still and sheltered that not the bell of a flower moves. The white headstones tell that they have settled there in peace for a long, long while – until their loves come for them across the pasture, open the little gate whose latch is broken in advance, steal across the little, level interlude of perfect lawn and – they are happy for ever afterwards! . . . And as one goes back and turns the square corner of the tree-grown moat, the whole vision is shut out.

Thélus Cemetery (on the very top of Vimy Ridge). Here the land and the weather are both loose and fighting against the big Cross of sacrifice that shoots up into the naked sky. A low, strong, red-brick wall, topped with white stone, vigorously bounds the big enclosure from the big sweep of cornfield in which it stands. The right of way to it (more than a quarter of a mile) down the road, is marked by deep-set boundary stones but (and you would think there was land enough not to be mean) the French farmer has ploughed even beyond that narrow connecting line and has turned his furrow inward upon it (for which he shall be reported). Plain, thick, low and very strong is the entrance and the bronze-latched gate: a bronze palm leaf and bronze laurel wreath are fixed at the base of the Cross of Sacrifice. Wind and weather have turned them black. The great War Stone of Remembrance is not yet in place. Its vacant place is ready for it, at the far end where one can where one can lean over the wall and look down (as did the Huns) on half France.

Only towards one point is the gigantic view broken, and there the ground swells like some enormous wave of the Atlantic, running more than level with a ship's rail. The lines on lines of blackened crosses are tilting already. The Cross shows a trifle of wind-graining on the S.W. side where the storms have begun to etch the stones. This is a frontier post, very solid, very practical, very stern, and here men only hear the eternal wind changing its notes as it grows or dies down sweeping over the stone wall. It is time, and over time, that the fixed headstones came.

Zivy Crater, on the other hand, is frankly mad. It must have been originally the crater of a mine, which had been "formalized" – rounded in a complete circle, stoned at the sides, and with a circular path round its lip. Then, evidently after wet, the sides had slipped after the Cross of Sacrifice had been put up overlooking the hole. The ground had all slid away beneath the Cross, leaving it raw concrete foundations exposed and in danger of falling into the pit. Of graves there was no sign except a single wooden cross which carried the tin stamped names of some eight or ten Canadian soldiers "killed here". No one ever seems to come that way, and there is no explanation.



Zivy Crater Cemetery today

Zivy Crater was indeed, and remains, just that. Nearly a century after Kipling's visit the site has matured and the Cross has been stabilised. But there are no individual graves here – just plaques with the names of 48 of the 53 bodies interred here, all Canadians who died in the vicinity of Vimy Ridge.

Last – Maroc – a single, solid, dead flat square of dead, jammed down opposite a busy road in the busy middle of Bois-Grenier – a mining and industrial suburb, almost, of Lens. The soil is poor - the outlines of the place are rigid: the houses crowd round it on three sides, but the flowers flame and will not be defeated, and the low hawthorn hedge under the lee of the boundary-wall grows strongly.

The people seem to look on it as an “open space”. They don’t invade but they lean over the wall and admire the greens and the colours.

And yet one more – Armentières way again. A long row of red brick “industrial” cottages looking across the road at six or eight superb feathered poplars which make the background of Houplines Old British Cemetery. The Cross of Sacrifice backed against these. The headstones were not yet in place, only the wooden crosses: but the turf was flawless and the flowers were a show of beauty – very simple: asters, lavateras, pansies, marigolds, tufts of rosemary, roses and so forth. The gardener was a “decent-spoken body” and some touch in his voice made me say “And how near are you to Forth?” “Musselburgh” said he: his whole face changing. And oddly enough – tho’ he had not set them out – there were rowans planted all about that quiet place into which the little row of cottages looked.

These last notes were the long reports on the visits they had made on Sept. 1. They were the last in the diaries for this trip to Belgium and France in August/September 1924.
