

# THE TIMES LITERARY SUPPLEMENT

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## MR. MUIRHEAD BONE AT THE WAR.

THE WESTERN FRONT. Drawings by MUIRHEAD BONE. (Published by the Authority of the War Office. *Country Life*. Part I. 2s. net.)

In these drawings Mr. Muirhead Bone has resolutely refused to become a journalist. He has not allowed the novelty of his subject-matter to affect his treatment. There he differs from Mr. Nevinson. Mr. Nevinson in his pictures of the war is not a journalist, but at least an illustrator. The essence of illustration is that it lays stress on what is novel and unusual in its subject-matter. It shows us some new thing and appeals to us with the vividness of its novelty. It tells us news, in fact; but Mr. Bone, although he deals with novelty, is not concerned to tell us news. He draws the Western front, he draws a tank even, as if he were drawing the streets of London, or a windmill, or an old ship in a harbour. Whatever he draws looks to us not strange but familiar, because we are used to his way of drawing, and he has pursued that with perfect calm even at the front.

The result may disappoint some people, who will expect the Western front to look like nothing they have ever seen before. But Sir Douglas Haig, in his introduction, says that the drawings illustrate admirably the daily life of the troops under his command. And no doubt they do, just because it is a daily life. We can well believe that they seem more like the reality to the soldier than any artistic expression of surprise, because the soldier is not surprised, because he is used to that reality; it has become his business to him, his routine. And what Mr. Bone draws is a routine seen with the imper- turbable eye of the artist, not with the excited mind of the correspondent. Imper- turbable is the word that one must apply to these drawings; and we wonder whether, if Mr. Bone could meet an ichthyosaurus, he would draw it as he has drawn his tank, whether he would make it look like a common and picturesque object of the country-side. His tank seems perfectly at home in its environment, as much at home as an old sailing ship on the sea. And so it is with everything and every one that Mr. Bone has drawn. The street in Ypres, the ruined

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church in Flanders, are ghastly in their desolation, but it looks an old and gradual desolation; the great wall in Ypres may fall any moment, and its insecurity is wonderfully drawn; but it seems to be part of a long-deserted city of the dead. As to the Battle of the Somme, it is like a far-stretching landscape of de Koninck. We are told that the puffs of smoke high in the air are bursting shrapnel; but they do not look strange or dangerous, and there are soldiers sitting in the foreground just as if they were peasants at dinner. So, no doubt, it all looks to the soldier himself; and that is why Mr. Bone's drawings are likely to please him. They may please us, too, if we can get rid of our desire for the expression of our own sense of novelty; for Mr. Bone always draws with precision. What he shows us is what he has seen; and he has not allowed his vision to be perturbed by the sense that he was seeing what had never been before in the history of the world. He has not tried to draw ghastly miracles for us, but the routine of war, which has the expectedness of all routine. He has failed only in his larger drawings of human beings. They are oddly commonplace, and one feels that he did them merely from a sense of duty; but the crowd of walking wounded at a base station is excellent, and best of all, perhaps, are the dug-outs, with their look of makeshift homeliness admirably expressed in the very character of the execution.