**“IN MEMORY OF HERBERT SMITH, ESSEX REGIMENT;   
KILLED IN ACTION, OCTOBER, 1914.”**

The village of X\* is perched on a hill. Its ancient church has a tall, square tower and there’s an oval-shaped hole in its tapering top, which looks, in the distance, for all the world like the eye of a giant needle. This sinister eye never shuts, never sleeps, but watches the country in each direction for several miles around. But we are not concerned with the church, you say, but a soldier boy who died for the cause: yet the old church tower with its hideous needle eye looked down on it all.

At the foot of the hill, by the tree-lined road is the first farm-house of X. (I can see it now with its sloping roof of thatch and tiles and over all a covering of moss like a beautiful green carpet: its pea-green shutters, quite freshly painted: the crazy pump near the low, porchless doorway: the miniature, broken-down fence --- and the little garden, with its wooden cross. And I can feel the old church tower, with its hideous needle eye, looking down on us all.)

When the fighting was over at X, and our soldiers had driven the enemy out, his comrades carried him, dying, to the little farmhouse. But the thin trail of blood they left has long since disappeared. In gasping breaths he asked them faintly for water, and they rushed to the crazy pump: but he died before they could bring it. ---- And they buried him in the middle of the dear little garden. And the old church tower, with its hideous needle eye, looked down on it all.

Now all that remains is the cross, and the mound, and two little snowdrop plants, for the soul of the soldier boy himself has fled to another world. And soldiers come and soldiers go, with guns and stores for the busy war, and the old church tower with its hideous needle eye still looks down on it all.

\* **[This poem was inspired by the old church at Méteren, pictured in Postcard no. 17, dated 25th April 1918, see overleaf..... (w.b.)]**