

A VISIT TO THE FRONT

smiled; they simply stared at us without interest or curiosity, dull, or, maybe, benumbed—though perhaps only properly disciplined. In one of the dug-outs there was a bench and a bunk where men were sleeping and there was a little pup chained within—a cowering, whining, pitiful thing which, when I stooped to pat it, shivered all over in its fawning affection. The soldiers had tried to find little comforts, little distractions, little ameliorations—prints cut from illustrated journals or portraits of the Kaiser or of Hindenburg or other German worthies. Some of the trenches were named, like streets, after Paris or other cities; one, in clumsy humour, was "Rue des Barbares."

And so we threaded the trenches, piercing deeper into the hopeless labyrinth. There were more and more soldiers as we progressed, though the trenches were not full of them, as I had imagined them. But the Captain showed us a rusty iron gong on which the alarm was beaten in case of attack, so that the concealed reserves could come forward to the defense. I could not understand how he could find his way through this maze, but presently he told me that we were in the second line of trenches. We were now seeing more men, more guns, more alarm-gongs, boxes of hand-grenades. Two black wires ran along the trench for electric lights; some of the trenches in water-bearing ground were made with gabions, and here and there reinforcements of concrete, and there were structures like Esquimaux huts, also made of concrete—depots for ammunition.

There was a curious effect of silence in those trenches; the infernal noise of the shells overhead seemed, somehow, remote; we got used to it. I neglected after a while