

BELGIUM

In the rear of a house, close by an old wall, in an entrance cunningly concealed, we descended steps cut in the earth to a narrow trench, six feet deep, scarcely a yard wide, like those dug for water pipes in city streets, and were lost in the labyrinth of the German trenches. I was in advance with the monocled Captain, the others came on in single file behind, clattering on the wooden gratings that made a floor for the trenches. And always overhead those shells, those bullets; the English were not all at breakfast, surely!

The trench was cut directly through a graveyard; on either side I could have laid my hand on a grave where still reposed those ugly, too enduring artificial flowers in which French cemeteries abound. And there in the centre, high over our heads, was reared a great Golgotha, a monstrous crucifix, the white body of the Christ on its wooden cross, spotted again and again by black holes where bullets had pierced it. The arms of the cross were splintered, but there the Christ hung pitifully, in that hail of balls, a great black hole in His white side, with an aspect terribly human—and no one commented on the dramatic picture and all its fearful, poignant, ironic implications. We walked on in silence. . . .

Soldiers here and there flattened themselves against the wall of the trench to let us pass, or blotted themselves out of sight in little recesses and niches. They looked more like working-men than soldiers; they wore only trousers, boots and undershirts. We came from time to time to little dug-outs where men were standing idly about; and in a place as wide as a cistern some men were sawing wood, making grating for the trenches. The soldiers were silent and very sober. They never