

A VISIT TO THE FRONT

that went rumbling by, the drivers staring at us with that strange expression that dwells in soldiers' eyes.

We left the motors behind and went out from the cover of the woods and walked along the road, stretching dusty yellow before us in the sun, toward a little village where was the entrance to the rear trenches. On either side lay the neglected fields, overgrown with grass and weeds, and beautiful with poppies, *bleuets*, and buttercups, and great masses of an exquisite lavender—some flower that I did not know. And in their wonderful colours under that serene sky those fields breathed peace, even with the shells overhead and the trenches lying just beyond.

We walked on in the hot sun for a quarter of a mile. On each side soldiers were digging new trenches to be used in case of a retreat or, as one officer explained, as if he considered retreat unlikely, to keep the soldiers busy; there were barbed-wire entanglements in the woods, some of them cunningly concealed; and a kind of *chevaux-de-frise* called, to Villalobar's amusement, Spanish cavalry. And always those flowers in the fields and the perfume of them and the sweet morning sunlight, and always overhead that noise of the shrapnel that seemed to darken the sky. There was a lane—a quiet, peaceful country lane, that turned away to the left into the woods that lay across the field; at the entrance to the lane there was a sentinel, a pretty boy, he could not have been more than seventeen. He came to attention, his blue eyes fixed in a kind of terror on those officers; his eyes never left them. He stood very erect and constantly tried to stand more erect, ever more respectfully and attentively and correctly, by jerking his head back again and again—in an agony of fear, an ob-