

A VISIT TO THE FRONT

the disgusting dirt of war, that seemed to sift into every crevice, every crack and cranny, and to cover everything. The Crown Prince Rupprecht of Bavaria, who commanded that district, had invited us to dine with him that night. Villalobar had scented the function from afar and we had taken dinner jackets, absurd as it seemed to do so with a visit to the trenches in prospect, and I dressed that evening in my room overlooking the courtyard of l'Hôtel de l'Europe, the typical caravansari of the French provinces, with the sound of booming guns in my ears.

An old servitor in long dark grey coat with two rows of brass buttons, his bald head bowed in an habitual servile stoop, descended the steps to meet us when at twilight we entered through the great gate between bearded sentinels and drove up to the château which the Prince occupied outside the town. The long *salon* into which we were shown was furnished in the execrable taste of some new rich manufacturer and ornamented with a portrait-bust of the proprietor, which, as a last touch of taste and to lend an air of artistic verisimilitude, the resemblance so much desired in portraiture, wore a pince-nez on its marble nose.

The officers who composed the suite of the Crown Prince came one after another into the *salon*, pausing in the doorway to click their heels and to bow formally, and one after the other were presented; and presently we all fell back and there entered a slender, tall, rather wary man, in a grey tunic jacket, and dark blue trousers, with very wide red stripes, strapped under his military boots. And every one bowed before the Crown Prince. He entered with a vague and rather sad, wan smile on his lips, and von der Lancken presented Villa-