

A RAMBLE THROUGH BELGIAN BATTLE FIELDS. AND A FEW WAYSIDE THOUGHTS.

Battle fields are curious places. There has only been a village with its little street, its church, its pothouse, a few cottages in the midst of gardens, hedges of hawthorn and elders, a blacksmith's forge and a graveyard full of mounds and nettles, —close by, perhaps, there is a river, or a road leads to a great city or mighty fortress.

One day there comes a vast crowd of men and horses, the church and the cottages are full of soldiers, guns roll through the narrow street, horses stand picketed in the gardens, and the fields around are black by day and red by night with the figures and the fires of an army; the villagers fly from their homes, the walls are loopholed, garden hedges are cut through, and the black muzzles of great guns frown behind red earthworks.

All at once these mouths speak, the horses charge, shell and shot crash through the red tiles, bullets whistle and ping through hedge row and orchard, the graveyard has more dead upon its surface than below, men slaughter each other in passages and out-houses, roofs are on fire, blood is on the pavement, wounded men crave water from the duck pond, for a battle is being fought, and to win, or keep this village, is to win, or keep a kingdom; no one ever heard of it before, but henceforth history will have its name; golden letters will flaunt it upon silken standards, a prince or a duke will take his title from it, maps will mark it with crossed swords, and to-morrow when its people come out from their hiding