§ 10

For days the broader side of Mr. Britling's mind, as distinguished from its egotistical edge, had been reflecting more and more vividly and coherently the spectacle of civilisation casting aside the thousand dispersed activities of peace, clutching its weapons and setting its teeth, for a supreme struggle against militarist imperialism. From the point of view of Matching's Easy that colossal crystallising of accumulated antagonisms was for a time no more than a confusion of headlines and a rearrangement of columns in the white windows of the newspapers through which those who lived in the securities of England looked out upon the world. It was a display in the sphere of thought and print immeasurably remote from the real green turf on which one walked, from the voice and the church-bells of Mr. Dimple that sounded their ample caresses in one's ears, from the clashing of the stags who were beginning to knock the velvet from their horns in the park, or the clatter of the butcher's cart and the respectful greeting of the butcher boy down the lane. It was the spectacle of the world less real even to most imaginations than the world of novels or plays. People talked of these things always with an underlying feeling that they romanced and intellectualised.

On Thursday, July 23rd, the Austro-Hungarian minister at Belgrade presented his impossible ultimatum to the Serbian government, and demanded a reply within forty-eight hours. With the wisdom of retrospect we know now clearly enough what that meant. The Sarajevo crime was to be resuscitated and made an excuse for war. But nine hundred and ninety-nine Europeans out of a thousand had still no suspicion of what was happening to them. The ultimatum figured prominently in the morning papers that came to Matching's Easy on Friday, but it by no means dominated the rest of the news; Sir Edward Carson's rejection of the government proposals for Ulster was given the pride of place, and almost equally conspicuous with the Serbian news were the Caillaux trial and the storming of the St. Petersburg barricades by Cossacks. Herr Heinrich's questions at lunch time received reassuring replies.

On Saturday Sir Edward Carson was still in the central limelight, Russia had intervened and demanded more time for Serbia, and the Daily Chronicle declared the day a critical one for Europe. Dublin with bayonet charges and bullets thrust Serbia into a corner on Monday. No shots had yet been fired in the East, and the mischief in Ireland that Germany had counted on was well ahead. Sir Edward Grey was said to be working hard for peace.

"It's the cry of wolf," said Mr. Britling to Herr Heinrich.

"But at last there did come a wolf," said Herr Heinrich. "I wish I had not sent my first moneys to that Conference upon Esperanto. I feel sure it will be put off."

"See!" said Teddy very cheerfully to Herr Heinrich on Tuesday, and held up the paper, in which "The Bloodshed in Dublin" had squeezed the "War Cloud Lifting" into a quite subordinate position.

"What did we tell you?" said Mrs. Britling. "Nobody wants a European war."

But Wednesday's paper vindicated his fears. Germany had commanded Russia not to mobilise.

"Of course Russia will mobilise," said Herr Heinrich.

"Or else forever after hold her peace," said Teddy.

"And then Germany will mobilise," said Herr Heinrich, "and all my holiday will vanish. I shall have to go and mobilise too. I shall have to fight. I have my papers."

"I never thought of you as a soldier before," said Teddy.

"I have deferred my service until I have done my thesis," said Herr Heinrich. "Now all that will be—Piff! And my thesis three-quarters finished."

"That is serious," said Teddy.

"Verdammte Dummheit!" said Herr Heinrich. "Why do they do such things?"

On Thursday, the 30th of July, Caillaux, Carson, strikes, and all the common topics of life had been swept out of the front page of the paper altogether; the stock exchanges were in a state of wild perturbation, and food prices were leaping fantastically. Austria was bombarding Belgrade, contrary to the rules of war hitherto accepted; Russia was mobilising; Mr. Asquith was, he declared, not relaxing his efforts "to do everything possible to circumscribe the area of possible conflict," and the Vienna Conference of Peace Societies was postponed. "I do not see why a conflict between Russia and Austria should involve Western Europe," said Mr. Britling. "Our concern is only for Belgium and France."

But Herr Heinrich knew better. "No," he said. "It is the war. It has come. I have heard it talked about in Germany many times. But I have never believed that it was obliged to come. Ach! It considers no one. So long as Esperanto is disregarded, all these things must be."

Friday brought photographs of the mobilisation in Vienna, and the news that Belgrade was burning. Young men in straw hats very like English or French or Belgian young men

in straw hats were shown parading the streets of Vienna, carrying flags and banners portentously, blowing trumpets or waving hats and shouting. Saturday saw all Europe mobilising, and Herr Heinrich upon Teddy's bicycle in wild pursuit of evening papers at the junction. Mobilisation and the emotions of Herr Heinrich now became the central facts of the Dower House situation. The two younger Britlings mobilised with great vigour upon the playroom floor. The elder had one hundred and ninety toy soldiers with a considerable equipment of guns and wagons; the younger had a force of a hundred and twenty-three, not counting three railway porters (with trucks complete), a policeman, five civilians and two ladies. Also they made a number of British and German flags out of paper. But as neither would allow his troops to be any existing foreign army, they agreed to be Redland and Blueland, according to the colour of their prevailing uniforms. Meanwhile Herr Heinrich confessed almost promiscuously the complication of his distresses by a hitherto unexpected emotional interest in the daughter of the village publican. She was a placid receptive young woman named Maud Hickson, on whom the young man had, it seemed, imposed the more poetical name of Marguerite.

"Often we have spoken together, oh yes, often," he assured Mrs. Britling. "And now it must all end. She loves flowers, she loves birds. She is most sweet and innocent. I have taught her many words in German and several times I have tried to draw her in pencil, and now I must go away and never see her any more."

His implicit appeal to the whole literature of Teutonic romanticism disarmed Mrs. Britling's objection that he had no business whatever to know the young woman at all.

"Also," cried Herr Heinrich, facing another aspect of his distresses, "how am I to pack my things? Since I have been here I have bought many things, many books, and two pairs of white flannel trousers and some shirts and a tin instrument that I cannot work, for developing privately Kodak films. All this must go into my little portmanteau. And it will not go into my little portmanteau!

"And there is Billy! Who will now go on with the education of Billy?"

The hands of fate paused not for Herr Heinrich's embarrassments and distresses. He fretted from his room downstairs and back to his room, he went out upon mysterious and futile errands towards the village inn, he prowled about the garden. His head and face grew pinker and pinker; his eyes were flushed and distressed. Everybody sought to say and do kind and reassuring things to him.

"Ach!" he said to Teddy; "you are a civilian. You live in a free country. It is not your war. You can be amused at it...."

But then Teddy was amused at everything.

Something but very dimly apprehended at Matching's Easy, something methodical and compelling away in London, seemed to be fumbling and feeling after Herr Heinrich, and Herr Heinrich it appeared was responding. Sunday's post brought the decision.

"I have to go," he said. "I must go right up to London to-day. To an address in Bloomsbury. Then they will tell me how to go to Germany. I must pack and I must get the taxi-cab from the junction and I must go. Why are there no trains on the branch line on Sundays for me to go by it?"

At lunch he talked politics. "I am entirely opposed to the war," he said. "I am entirely opposed to any war."

"Then why go?" asked Mr. Britling. "Stay here with us. We all like you. Stay here and do not answer your mobilisation summons."

"But then I shall lose all my country. I shall lose my papers. I shall be outcast. I must go."

"I suppose a man should go with his own country," Mr. Britling reflected.

"If there was only one language in all the world, none of such things would happen," Herr Heinrich declared. "There would be no English, no Germans, no Russians."

"Just Esperantists," said Teddy.

"Or Idoists," said Herr Heinrich. "I am not convinced of which. In some ways Ido is much better."

"Perhaps there would have to be a war between Ido and Esperanto to settle it," said Teddy.

"Who shall we play skat with when you have gone?" asked Mrs. Britling.

"All this morning," said Herr Heinrich, expanding in the warmth of sympathy, "I have been trying to pack and I have been unable to pack. My mind is too greatly disordered. I have been told not to bring much luggage. Mrs. Britling, please."

Mrs. Britling became attentive.

"If I could leave much of my luggage, my clothes, some of them, and particularly my violin, it would be much more to my convenience. I do not care to be mobilised with my violin. There may be much crowding. Then I would but just take my rucksack...."

"If you will leave your things packed up."

"And afterwards they could be sent."

But he did not leave them packed up. The taxi-cab, to order which he had gone to the junction in the morning on Teddy's complaisant machine, came presently to carry him off, and the whole family and the first contingent of the usual hockey players gathered about it to see him off. The elder boy of the two juniors put a distended rucksack upon the seat. Herr Heinrich then shook hands with every one.

"Write and tell us how you get on," cried Mrs. Britling.

"But if England also makes war!"

"Write to Reynolds—let me give you his address; he is my agent in New York," said Mr. Britling, and wrote it down.

"We'll come to the village corner with you, Herr Heinrich," cried the boys.

"No," said Herr Heinrich, sitting down into the automobile, "I will part with you altogether. It is too much...."

"Auf Wiedersehen!" cried Mr. Britling. "Remember, whatever happens there will be peace at last!"

"Then why not at the beginning?" Herr Heinrich demanded with a reasonable exasperation and repeated his maturer verdict on the whole European situation; "Verdammte Bummelei!"

"Go," said Mr. Britling to the taxi driver.

"Auf Wiedersehen, Herr Heinrich!"

"Auf Wiedersehen!"

"Good-bye, Herr Heinrich!"

"Good luck, Herr Heinrich!"

The taxi started with a whir, and Herr Heinrich passed out of the gates and along the same hungry road that had so recently consumed Mr. Direck. "Give him a last send-off," cried Teddy. "One, Two, Three! Auf Wiedersehen!"

The voices, gruff and shrill, sounded raggedly together. The dog-rose hedge cut off the sight of the little face. Then the pink head bobbed up again. He was standing up and waving the panama hat. Careless of sunstroke....

Then Herr Heinrich had gone altogether....

"Well," said Mr. Britling, turning away.

"I do hope they won't hurt him," said a visitor.

"Oh, they won't put a youngster like that in the fighting line," said Mr. Britling. "He's had no training yet. And he has to wear glasses. How can he shoot? They'll make a clerk of him."

"He hasn't packed at all," said Mrs. Britling to her husband. "Just come up for an instant and peep at his room. It's—touching."

It was touching.

It was more than touching; in its minute, absurd way it was symbolical and prophetic, it was the miniature of one small life uprooted.

The door stood wide open, as he had left it open, careless of all the little jealousies and privacies of occupation and ownership. Even the windows were wide open as though he had needed air; he who had always so sedulously shut his windows since first he came to England. Across the empty fireplace stretched the great bough of oak he had brought in for Billy, but now its twigs and leaves had wilted, and many had broken off and fallen on the floor. Billy's cage stood empty upon a little table in the corner of the room. Instead of packing, the young man had evidently paced up and down in a state of emotional elaboration; the bed was disordered as though he had several times flung himself upon it, and his books had been thrown about the room despairfully. He had made some little commencements of packing in a borrowed cardboard box. The violin lay as if it lay in state upon the chest of drawers, the drawers were all partially open, and in the middle of the floor sprawled a pitiful shirt of blue, dropped there, the most flattened and broken-hearted of garments. The fireplace contained an unsuccessful pencil sketch of a girl's face, torn across....

Husband and wife regarded the abandoned room in silence for a time, and when Mr. Britling spoke he lowered his voice.

"I don't see Billy," he said.

"Perhaps he has gone out of the window," said Mrs. Britling also in a hushed undertone....

"Well," said Mr. Britling abruptly and loudly, turning away from this first intimation of coming desolations, "let us go down to our hockey! He had to go, you know. And Billy will probably come back again when he begins to feel hungry...."

§ 11

Monday was a public holiday, the First Monday in August, and the day consecrated by long-established custom to the Matching's Easy Flower Show in Claverings Park. The day was to live in Mr. Britling's memory with a harsh brightness like the brightness of that sunshine one sees at times at the edge of a thunderstorm. There were tents with the exhibits, and a tent for "Popular Refreshments," there was a gorgeous gold and yellow steam roundabout with motor-cars and horses, and another in green and silver with wonderfully undulating ostriches and lions, and each had an organ that went by steam; there were cocoanut shies and many ingenious prize-giving shooting and dart-throwing and ring-throwing stalls, each displaying a marvellous array of crockery, clocks, metal ornaments, and suchlike rewards. There was a race of gas balloons, each with a postcard attached to it begging the finder to say where it descended, and you could get a balloon for a shilling and have a chance of winning various impressive and embarrassing prizes if your balloon went far enough—fish carvers, a silver-handled walking-stick, a bog-oak gramophone-record cabinet, and things like that. And by a special gate one could go for sixpence into the Claverings gardens, and the sixpence would be doubled by Lady Homartyn and devoted next winter to the Matching's Easy coal club. And Mr. Britling went through all the shows with his boys, and finally left them with a shilling each and his blessing and paid his sixpence for the gardens and made his way as he had promised, to have tea with Lady Homartyn.

The morning papers had arrived late, and he had been reading them and re-reading them and musing over them intermittently until his family had insisted upon his coming out to the festivities. They said that if for no other reason he must come to witness Aunt Wilshire's extraordinary skill at the cocoanut shy. She could beat everybody. Well, one must not miss a thing like that. The headlines proclaimed, "The Great Powers at War; France Invaded by Germany; Germany invaded by Russia; 100,000 Germans march into Luxemburg; Can England Abstain? Fifty Million Loan to be Issued." And Germany had not only violated the Treaty of London but she had seized a British ship in the Kiel Canal.... The roundabouts were very busy and windily melodious, and the shooting gallery kept popping and jingling as people shot and broke bottles, and the voices of the young men and women inviting the crowd to try their luck at this and that rang loud and clear. Teddy and Letty and Cissie and Hugh were developing a quite disconcerting skill at the dart-throwing, and were bent upon compiling a complete tea-set for the Teddy cottage out of their winnings. There was a

score of automobiles and a number of traps and gigs about the entrance to the portion of the park that had been railed off for the festival, the small Britling boys had met some nursery visitors from Claverings House and were busy displaying skill and calm upon the roundabout ostriches, and less than four hundred miles away with a front that reached from Nancy to Liège more than a million and a quarter of grey-clad men, the greatest and best-equipped host the world had ever seen, were pouring westward to take Paris, grip and paralyse France, seize the Channel ports, invade England, and make the German Empire the master-state of the earth. Their equipment was a marvel of foresight and scientific organisation, from the motor kitchens that rumbled in their wake to the telescopic sights of the sharp-shooters, the innumerable machine-guns of the infantry, the supply of entrenching material, the preparations already made in the invaded country....

"Let's try at the other place for the sugar-basin!" said Teddy, hurrying past. "Don't get two sugar-basins," said Cissie breathless in pursuit. "Hugh is trying for a sugar-basin at the other place."

Then Mr. Britling heard a bellicose note.

"Let's have a go at the bottles," said a cheerful young farmer. "Ought to keep up our shooting, these warlike times...."

Mr. Britling ran against Hickson from the village inn and learnt that he was disturbed about his son being called up as a reservist. "Just when he was settling down here. It seems a pity they couldn't leave him for a bit."

"'Tis a noosence," said Hickson, "but anyhow, they give first prize to his radishes. He'll be glad to hear they give first prize to his radishes. Do you think, Sir, there's very much probability of this war? It do seem to be beginning like."

"It looks more like beginning than it has ever done," said Mr. Britling. "It's a foolish business."

"I suppose if they start in on us we got to hit back at them," said Mr. Hickson. "Postman—he's got his papers too...."

Mr. Britling made his way through the drifting throng towards the little wicket that led into the Gardens....

He was swung round suddenly by a loud bang.

It was the gun proclaiming the start of the balloon race.

He stood for some moments watching the scene. The balloon start had gathered a little crowd of people, village girls in white gloves and cheerful hats, young men in bright ties and ready-made Sunday suits, fathers and mothers, boy scouts, children, clerks in straw hats, bicyclists and miscellaneous folk. Over their heads rose Mr. Cheshunt, the factotum of the estate. He was standing on a table and handing the little balloons up into the air one by one. They floated up from his hand like many-coloured grapes, some rising and falling, some soaring steadily upward, some spinning and eddying, drifting eastward before the gentle breeze, a string of bubbles against the sky and the big trees that bounded the park. Farther away to the right were the striped canvas tents of the flower-show, still farther off the roundabouts churned out their music, the shooting galleries popped, and the swing boats creaked through the air. Cut off from these things by a line of fencing lay the open park in which the deer grouped themselves under the great trees and regarded the festival mistrustfully. Teddy and Hugh appeared breaking away from the balloon race cluster, and hurrying back to their dart-throwing. A man outside a little tent that stood apart was putting up a brave-looking notice, "Unstinted Teas One Shilling." The Teddy perambulator was moored against the cocoanut shy, and Aunt Wilshire was still displaying her terrible prowess at the cocoanuts. Already she had won twenty-seven. Strange children had been impressed by her to carry them, and formed her retinue. A wonderful old lady was Aunt Wilshire....

Then across all the sunshine of this artless festival there appeared, as if it were writing showing through a picture, "France Invaded by Germany; Germany Invaded by Russia."

Mr. Britling turned again towards the wicket, with its collectors of tribute, that led into the Gardens.

§ 12

The Claverings gardens, and particularly the great rockery, the lily pond, and the herbaceous borders, were unusually populous with unaccustomed visitors and shy young couples. Mr. Britling had to go to the house for instructions, and guided by the under-butler found Lady Homartyn hiding away in the walled Dutch garden behind the dairy. She had been giving away the prizes of the flower-show, and she was resting in a deck chair while a spinster relation presided over the tea. Mrs. Britling had fled the outer festival earlier, and was sitting by the tea-things. Lady Meade and two or three

visitors had motored out from Hartleytree to assist, and Manning had come in with his tremendous confirmation of all that the morning papers had foreshadowed.

"Have you any news?" asked Mr. Britling.

"It's war!" said Mrs. Britling.

"They are in Luxemburg," said Manning. "That can only mean that they are coming through Belgium."

"Then I was wrong," said Mr. Britling, "and the world is altogether mad. And so there is nothing else for us to do but win.... Why could they not leave Belgium alone?"

"It's been in all their plans for the last twenty years," said Manning.

"But it brings us in for certain."

"I believe they have reckoned on that."

"Well!" Mr. Britling took his tea and sat down, and for a time he said nothing.

"It is three against three," said one of the visitors, trying to count the Powers engaged.

"Italy," said Manning, "will almost certainly refuse to fight. In fact Italy is friendly to us. She is bound to be. This is, to begin with, an Austrian war. And Japan will fight for us...."

"I think," said old Lady Meade, "that this is the suicide of Germany. They cannot possibly fight against Russia and France and ourselves. Why have they ever begun it?"

"It may be a longer and more difficult war than people suppose," said Manning. "The Germans reckon they are going to win."

"Against us all?"

"Against us all. They are tremendously prepared."

"It is impossible that Germany should win," said Mr. Britling, breaking his silence. "Against her Germany has something more than armies; all reason, all instinct—the three greatest peoples in the world."

"At present very badly supplied with war material."

"That may delay things; it may make the task harder; but it will not alter the end. Of course we are going to win. Nothing else is thinkable. I have never believed they meant it. But I see now they meant it. This insolent arming and marching, this forty years of national blustering; sooner or later it had to topple over into action...."

He paused and found they were listening, and he was carried on by his own thoughts into further speech.

"This isn't the sort of war," he said, "that is settled by counting guns and rifles. Something that has oppressed us all has become intolerable and has to be ended. And it will be ended. I don't know what soldiers and politicians think of our prospects, but I do know what ordinary reasonable men think of the business. I know that all we millions of reasonable civilised onlookers are prepared to spend our last shillings and give all our lives now, rather than see Germany unbeaten. I know that the same thing is felt in America, and that given half a chance, given just one extra shake of that foolish mailed fist in the face of America, and America also will be in this war by our side. Italy will come in. She is bound to come in. France will fight like one man. I'm quite prepared to believe that the Germans have countless rifles and guns; have got the most perfect maps, spies, plans you can imagine. I'm quite prepared to hear that they have got a thousand tremendous surprises in equipment up their sleeves. I'm quite prepared for sweeping victories for them and appalling disasters for us. Those are the first things. What I do know is that the Germans understand nothing of the spirit of man; that they do not dream for a moment of the devil of resentment this war will arouse. Didn't we all trust them not to let off their guns? Wasn't that the essence of our liberal and pacific faith? And here they are in the heart of Europe letting off their guns?"

"And such a lot of guns," said Manning.

"Then you think it will be a long war, Mr. Britling?" said Lady Meade.

"Long or short, it will end in the downfall of Germany. But I do not believe it will be long. I do not agree with Manning. Even now I cannot believe that a whole great people can be possessed by war madness. I think the war is the work of the German armaments party and of the Court party. They have forced this war on Germany. Well—they must win and go on winning. So long as they win, Germany will hold together, so long as their armies are not clearly defeated nor their navy destroyed. But once check them and stay them and beat them, then I believe that suddenly the spirit of Germany will change even as it changed after Jena...."

"Willie Nixon," said one of the visitors, "who came back from Hamburg yesterday, says they are convinced they will have taken Paris and St. Petersburg and one or two other little places and practically settled everything for us by about Christmas."

"And London?"

"I forgot if he said London. But I suppose a London more or less hardly matters. They don't think we shall dare come in, but if we do they will Zeppelin the fleet and walk through our army—if you can call it an army."

Manning nodded confirmation.

"They do not understand," said Mr. Britling.

"Sir George Padish told me the same sort of thing," said Lady Homartyn. "He was in Berlin in June."

"Of course the efficiency of their preparations is almost incredible," said another of Lady Meade's party.

"They have thought out and got ready for everything—literally everything."

§ 13

Mr. Britling had been a little surprised by the speech he had made. He hadn't realised before he began to talk how angry and scornful he was at this final coming into action of the Teutonic militarism that had so long menaced his world. He had always said it would never really fight—and here it was fighting! He was furious with the indignation of an apologist betrayed. He had only realised the strength and passion of his own belligerent opinions as he had heard them, and as he walked back with his wife through the village to the Dower House, he was still in the swirl of this self-discovery; he was darkly silent, devising fiercely denunciatory phrases against Krupp and Kaiser. "Krupp and Kaiser," he grasped that obvious, convenient alliteration. "It is all that is bad in mediævalism allied to all that is bad in modernity," he told himself.

"The world," he said, startling Mrs. Britling with his sudden speech, "will be intolerable to live in, it will be unendurable for a decent human being, unless we win this war.

"We must smash or be smashed...."

His brain was so busy with such stuff that for a time he stared at Mrs. Harrowdean's belated telegram without grasping the meaning of a word of it. He realised slowly that it was incumbent upon him to go over to her, but he postponed his departure very readily in order to play hockey. Besides which it would be a full moon, and he felt that summer moonlight was far better than sunset and dinner time for the declarations he

was expected to make. And then he went on phrase-making again about Germany until he had actually bullied off at hockey.

Suddenly in the midst of the game he had an amazing thought. It came to him like a physical twinge.

"What the devil are we doing at this hockey?" he asked abruptly of Teddy, who was coming up to bully after a goal. "We ought to be drilling or shooting against those infernal Germans."

Teddy looked at him questioningly.

"Oh, come on!" said Mr. Britling with a gust of impatience, and snapped the sticks together.

§ 14

Mr. Britling started for his moonlight ride about half-past nine that night. He announced that he could neither rest nor work, the war had thrown him into a fever; the driving of the automobile was just the distraction he needed; he might not, he added casually, return for a day or so. When he felt he could work again he would come back. He filled up his petrol tank by the light of an electric torch, and sat in his car in the garage and studied his map of the district. His thoughts wandered from the road to Pyecrafts to the coast, and to the possible route of a raider. Suppose the enemy anticipated a declaration of war! Here he might come, and here....

He roused himself from these speculations to the business in hand.

The evening seemed as light as day, a cool moonshine filled the world. The road was silver that flushed to pink at the approach of Mr. Britling's headlight, the dark turf at the wayside and the bushes on the bank became for a moment an acid green as the glare passed. The full moon was climbing up the sky, and so bright that scarcely a star was visible in the blue grey of the heavens. Houses gleamed white a mile away, and ever and again a moth would flutter and hang in the light of the lamps, and then vanish again in the night.

Gladys was in excellent condition for a run, and so was Mr. Britling. He went neither fast nor slow, and with a quite unfamiliar confidence. Life, which had seemed all day a congested confusion darkened by threats, became cool, mysterious and aloof and with a quality of dignified reassurance.

He steered along the narrow road by the black dog-rose hedge, and so into the high road towards the village. The village was alight at several windows but almost deserted. Out beyond, a coruscation of lights burnt like a group of topaz and rubies set in the silver shield of the night. The festivities of the Flower Show were still in full progress, and the reduction of the entrance fee after seven had drawn in every lingering outsider. The roundabouts churned out their relentless music, and the bottle-shooting galleries popped and crashed. The well-patronised ostriches and motorcars flickered round in a pulsing rhythm; black, black, black, before the naphtha flares.

Mr. Britling pulled up at the side of the road, and sat for a little while watching the silhouettes move hither and thither from shadow to shadow across the bright spaces.

"On the very brink of war—on the brink of Armageddon," he whispered at last. "Do they understand? Do any of us understand?"

He slipped in his gear to starting, and was presently running quietly with his engine purring almost inaudibly along the level road to Hartleytree. The sounds behind him grew smaller and smaller, and died away leaving an immense unruffled quiet under the moon. There seemed no motion but his own, no sound but the neat, subdued, mechanical rhythm in front of his feet. Presently he ran out into the main road, and heedless of the lane that turned away towards Pyecrafts, drove on smoothly towards the east and the sea. Never before had he driven by night. He had expected a fumbling and tedious journey; he found he had come into an undreamt-of silvery splendour of motion. For it seemed as though even the automobile was running on moonlight that night.... Pyecrafts could wait. Indeed the later he got to Pyecrafts the more moving and romantic the little comedy of reconciliation would be. And he was in no hurry for that comedy. He felt he wanted to apprehend this vast summer calm about him, that alone of all the things of the day seemed to convey anything whatever of the majestic tragedy that was happening to mankind. As one slipped through this still vigil one could imagine for the first time the millions away there marching, the wide river valleys, villages, cities, mountain-ranges, ports and seas inaudibly busy.

"Even now," he said, "the battleships may be fighting."

He listened, but the sound was only the low intermittent drumming of his cylinders as he ran with his throttle nearly closed, down a stretch of gentle hill.

He felt that he must see the sea. He would follow the road beyond the Rodwell villages, and then turn up to the crest of Eastonbury Hill. And thither he went and saw in the gap of the low hills beyond a V-shaped level of moonlit water that glittered and

yet lay still. He stopped his car by the roadside, and sat for a long time looking at this and musing. And once it seemed to him three little shapes like short black needles passed in line ahead across the molten silver.

But that may have been just the straining of the eyes....

All sorts of talk had come to Mr. Britling's ears about the navies of England and France and Germany; there had been public disputes of experts, much whispering and discussion in private. We had the heavier vessels, the bigger guns, but it was not certain that we had the preeminence in science and invention. Were they relying as we were relying on Dreadnoughts, or had they their secrets and surprises for us? To-night, perhaps, the great ships were steaming to conflict....

To-night all over the world ships must be in flight and ships pursuing; ten thousand towns must be ringing with the immediate excitement of war....

Only a year ago Mr. Britling had been lunching on a battleship and looking over its intricate machinery. It had seemed to him then that there could be no better human stuff in the world than the quiet, sunburnt, disciplined men and officers he had met.... And our little army, too, must be gathering to-night, the little army that had been chastened and reborn in South Africa, that he was convinced was individually more gallant and self-reliant and capable than any other army in the world. He would have sneered or protested if he had heard another Englishman say that, but in his heart he held the dear belief....

And what other aviators in the world could fly as the Frenchmen and Englishmen he had met once or twice at Eastchurch and Salisbury could fly? These are things of race and national quality. Let the German cling to his gasbags. "We shall beat them in the air," he whispered. "We shall beat them on the seas. Surely we shall beat them on the seas. If we have men enough and guns enough we shall beat them on land.... Yet—For years they have been preparing...."

There was little room in the heart of Mr. Britling that night for any love but the love of England. He loved England now as a nation of men. There could be no easy victory. Good for us with our too easy natures that there could be no easy victory. But victory we must have now—or perish....

He roused himself with a sigh, restarted his engine, and went on to find some turning place. He still had a colourless impression that the journey's end was Pyecrafts.

"We must all do the thing we can," he thought, and for a time the course of his automobile along a winding down-hill road held his attention so that he could not get

beyond it. He turned about and ran up over the hill again and down long slopes inland, running very softly and smoothly with his lights devouring the road ahead and sweeping the banks and hedges beside him, and as he came down a little hill through a village he heard a confused clatter and jingle of traffic ahead, and saw the danger triangle that warns of cross-roads. He slowed down and then pulled up abruptly.

Riding across the gap between the cottages was a string of horsemen, and then a grey cart, and then a team drawing a heavy object—a gun, and then more horsemen, and then a second gun. It was all a dim brown procession in the moonlight. A mounted officer came up beside him and looked at him and then went back to the cross-roads, but as yet England was not troubling about spies. Four more guns passed, and then a string of carts and more mounted men, sitting stiffly. Nobody was singing or shouting; scarcely a word was audible, and through all the column there was an effect of quiet efficient haste. And so they passed, and rumbled and jingled and clattered out of the scene, leaving Mr. Britling in his car in the dreaming village. He restarted his engine once more, and went his way thoughtfully.

He went so thoughtfully that presently he missed the road to Pyecrafts—if ever he had been on the road to Pyecrafts at all—altogether. He found himself upon a highway running across a flattish plain, and presently discovered by the sight of the Great Bear, faint but traceable in the blue overhead, that he was going due north. Well, presently he would turn south and west; that in good time; now he wanted to feel; he wanted to think. How could he best help England in the vast struggle for which the empty silence and beauty of this night seemed to be waiting? But indeed he was not thinking at all, but feeling, feeling wonder, as he had never felt it since his youth had passed from him. This war might end nearly everything in the world as he had known the world; that idea struggled slowly through the moonlight into consciousness, and won its way to dominance in his mind.

The character of the road changed; the hedges fell away, the pine trees and pine woods took the place of the black squat shapes of the hawthorn and oak and apple. The houses grew rarer and the world emptier and emptier, until he could have believed that he was the only man awake and out-of-doors in all the slumbering land....

For a time a little thing caught hold of his dreaming mind. Continually as he ran on, black, silent birds rose startled out of the dust of the road before him, and fluttered noiselessly beyond his double wedge of light. What sort of bird could they be? Were they night-jars? Were they different kinds of birds snatching at the quiet of the night for a dust bath in the sand? This little independent thread of inquiry ran through the texture of his mind and died away....

And at one place there was a great bolting of rabbits across the road, almost under his wheels....

The phrases he had used that afternoon at Claverings came back presently into his head. They were, he felt assured, the phrases that had to be said now. This war could be seen as the noblest of wars, as the crowning struggle of mankind against national dominance and national aggression; or else it was a mere struggle of nationalities and pure destruction and catastrophe. Its enormous significances, he felt, must not be lost in any petty bickering about the minor issues of the conflict. But were these enormous significances being stated clearly enough? Were they being understood by the mass of liberal and pacific thinkers? He drove more and more slowly as these questions crowded upon his attention until at last he came to a stop altogether.... "Certain things must be said clearly," he whispered. "Certain things—The meaning of England.... The deep and long-unspoken desire for kindliness and fairness.... Now is the time for speaking. It must be put as straight now as her gun-fire, as honestly as the steering of her ships."

Phrases and paragraphs began to shape themselves in his mind as he sat with one arm on his steering-wheel.

Suddenly he roused himself, turned over the map in the map-case beside him, and tried to find his position....

So far as he could judge he had strayed right into Suffolk....

About one o'clock in the morning he found himself in Newmarket. Newmarket too was a moonlit emptiness, but as he hesitated at the cross-roads he became aware of a policeman standing quite stiff and still at the corner by the church.

"Matching's Easy?" he cried.

"That road, Sir, until you come to Market Saffron, and then to the left...."

Mr. Britling had a definite purpose now in his mind, and he drove faster, but still very carefully and surely. He was already within a mile or so of Market Saffron before he remembered that he had made a kind of appointment with himself at Pyecrafts. He stared at two conflicting purposes. He turned over certain possibilities.

At the Market Saffron cross-roads he slowed down, and for a moment he hung undecided.

"Oliver," he said, and as he spoke he threw over his steering-wheel towards the homeward way.... He finished his sentence when he had negotiated the corner safely. "Oliver must have her...."

And then, perhaps fifty yards farther along, and this time almost indignantly: "She ought to have married him long ago...."

He put his automobile in the garage, and then went round under the black shadow of his cedars to the front door. He had no key, and for a long time he failed to rouse his wife by flinging pebbles and gravel at her half-open window. But at last he heard her stirring and called out to her.

He explained he had returned because he wanted to write. He wanted indeed to write quite urgently. He went straight up to his room, lit his reading-lamp, made himself some tea, and changed into his nocturnal suit. Daylight found him still writing very earnestly at his pamphlet. The title he had chosen was: "And Now War Ends."

§ 15

In this fashion it was that the great war began in Europe and came to one man in Matching's Easy, as it came to countless intelligent men in countless pleasant homes that had scarcely heeded its coming through all the years of its relentless preparation. The familiar scenery of life was drawn aside, and War stood unveiled. "I am the Fact," said War, "and I stand astride the path of life. I am the threat of death and extinction that has always walked beside life, since life began. There can be nothing else and nothing more in human life until you have reckoned with me."

BOOK II

MATCHING'S EASY AT WAR

CHAPTER THE FIRST

ONLOOKERS

§ 1

On that eventful night of the first shots and the first deaths Mr. Britling did not sleep until daylight had come. He sat writing at this pamphlet of his, which was to hail the last explosion and the ending of war. For a couple of hours he wrote with energy, and then his energy flagged. There came intervals when he sat still and did not write. He yawned and yawned again and rubbed his eyes. The day had come and the birds were noisy when he undressed slowly, dropping his clothes anyhow upon the floor, and got into bed....

He woke to find his morning tea beside him and the housemaid going out of the room. He knew that something stupendous had happened to the world, but for a few moments he could not remember what it was. Then he remembered that France was invaded by Germany and Germany by Russia, and that almost certainly England was going to war. It seemed a harsh and terrible fact in the morning light, a demand for stresses, a certainty of destruction; it appeared now robbed of all the dark and dignified beauty of the night. He remembered just the same feeling of unpleasant, anxious expectation as he now felt when the Boer War had begun fifteen years ago, before the first news came. The first news of the Boer War had been the wrecking of a British armoured train near Kimberley. What similar story might not the overdue paper tell when presently it came?

Suppose, for instance, that some important division of our Fleet had been surprised and overwhelmed....

Suppose the Germans were already crumpling up the French armies between Verdun and Belfort, very swiftly and dreadfully....

Suppose after all that the Cabinet was hesitating, and that there would be no war for some weeks, but only a wrangle about Belgian neutrality. While the Germans smashed France....

Or, on the other hand, there might be some amazing, prompt success on our part. Our army and navy people were narrow, but in their narrow way he believed they were extraordinarily good....

What would the Irish do?...

His thoughts were no more than a thorny jungle of unanswerable questions through which he struggled in un-progressive circles.

He got out of bed and dressed in a slow, distraught manner. When he reached his braces he discontinued dressing for a time; he opened the atlas at Northern France,

and stood musing over the Belgian border. Then he turned to Whitaker's Almanack to browse upon the statistics of the great European armies. He was roused from this by the breakfast gong.

At breakfast there was no talk of anything but war. Hugh was as excited as a cat in thundery weather, and the small boys wanted information about flags. The Russian and the Serbian flag were in dispute, and the flag page of Webster's Dictionary had to be consulted. Newspapers and letters were both abnormally late, and Mr. Britling, tiring of supplying trivial information to his offspring, smoked cigarettes in the garden. He had an idea of intercepting the postman. His eyes and ears informed him of the approach of Mrs. Faber's automobile. It was an old, resolute-looking machine painted red, and driven by a trusted gardener; there was no mistaking it.

Mrs. Faber was in it, and she stopped it outside the gate and made signals. Mrs. Britling, attracted by the catastrophic sounds of Mrs. Faber's vehicle, came out by the front door, and she and her husband both converged upon the caller.

§ 2

"I won't come in," cried Mrs. Faber, "but I thought I'd tell you. I've been getting food."

"Food?"

"Provisions. There's going to be a run on provisions. Look at my flitch of bacon!"

"But——"

"Faber says we have to lay in what we can. This war—it's going to stop everything. We can't tell what will happen. I've got the children to consider, so here I am. I was at Hickson's before nine...."

The little lady was very flushed and bright-eyed. Her fair hair was disordered, her hat a trifle askew. She had an air of enjoying unwonted excitements. "All the gold's being hoarded too," she said, with a crow of delight in her voice. "Faber says that probably our cheques won't be worth that in a few days. He rushed off to London to get gold at his clubs—while he can. I had to insist on Hickson taking a cheque. 'Never,' I said, 'will I deal with you again—never—unless you do....' Even then he looked at me almost as if he thought he wouldn't.

"It's Famine!" she said, turning to Mr. Britling. "I've laid hands on all I can. I've got the children to consider."

"But why is it famine?" asked Mr. Britling.

"Oh! it is!" she said.

"But why?"

"Faber understands," she said. "Of course it's Famine...."

"And would you believe me," she went on, going back to Mrs. Britling, "that man Hickson stood behind his counter—where I've dealt with him for years, and refused absolutely to let me have more than a dozen tins of sardines. Refused! Point blank!

"I was there before nine, and even then Hickson's shop was crowded—crowded, my dear!"

"What have you got?" said Mr. Britling with an inquiring movement towards the automobile.

She had got quite a lot. She had two sides of bacon, a case of sugar, bags of rice, eggs, a lot of flour.

"What are all these little packets?" said Mr. Britling.

Mrs. Faber looked slightly abashed.

"Cerebos salt," she said. "One gets carried away a little. I just got hold of it and carried it out to the car. I thought we might have to salt things later."

"And the jars are pickles?" said Mr. Britling.

"Yes. But look at all my flour! That's what will go first...."

The lady was a little flurried by Mr. Britling's too detailed examination of her haul. "What good is blacking?" he asked. She would not hear him. She felt he was trying to spoil her morning. She declared she must get on back to her home. "Don't say I didn't warn you," she said. "I've got no end of things to do. There's peas! I want to show cook how to bottle our peas. For this year—it's lucky, we've got no end of peas. I came by here just for the sake of telling you." And with that she presently departed—obviously ruffled by Mrs. Britling's lethargy and Mr. Britling's scepticism.

Mr. Britling watched her go off with a slowly rising indignation.

"And that," he said, "is how England is going to war! Scrambling for food—at the very beginning."

"I suppose she is anxious for the children," said Mrs. Britling.

"Blacking!"

"After all," said Mr. Britling, "if other people are doing that sort of thing—"

"That's the idea of all panics. We've got not to do it.... The country hasn't even declared war yet! Hallo, here we are! Better late than never."

The head of the postman, bearing newspapers and letters, appeared gliding along the top of the hedge as he cycled down the road towards the Dower House corner.

§ 3

England was not yet at war, but all the stars were marching to that end. It was as if an event so vast must needs take its time to happen. No doubt was left upon Mr. Britling's mind, though a whole-page advertisement in the Daily News, in enormous type and of mysterious origin, implored Great Britain not to play into the hands of Russia, Russia the Terrible, that bugbear of the sentimental Radicals. The news was wide and sweeping, and rather inaccurate. The Germans were said to be in Belgium and Holland, and they had seized English ships in the Kiel Canal. A moratorium had been proclaimed, and the reports of a food panic showed Mrs. Faber to be merely one example of a large class of excitable people.

Mr. Britling found the food panic disconcerting. It did not harmonise with his leading motif of the free people of the world rising against the intolerable burthen of militarism. It spoilt his picture....

Mrs. Britling shared the paper with Mr. Britling, they stood by the bed of begonias near the cedar tree and read, and the air was full of the cheerful activities of the lawn-mower that was being drawn by a carefully booted horse across the hockey field.

Presently Hugh came flitting out of the house to hear what had happened. "One can't work somehow, with all these big things going on," he apologised. He secured the Daily News while his father and mother read The Times. The voices of the younger boys came from the shade of the trees; they had brought all their toy soldiers out of doors, and were making entrenched camps in the garden.

"The financial situation is an extraordinary one," said Mr. Britling, concentrating his attention.... "All sorts of staggering things may happen. In a social and economic system that has grown just anyhow.... Never been planned.... In a world full of Mrs. Fabers...."

"Moratorium?" said Hugh over his Daily News. "In relation to debts and so on? Modern side you sent me to, Daddy. I live at hand to mouth in etymology. Mors and crematorium—do we burn our bills instead of paying them?"

"Moratorium," reflected Mr. Britling; "Moratorium. What nonsense you talk! It's something that delays, of course. Nothing to do with death. Just a temporary stoppage of payments.... Of course there's bound to be a tremendous change in values...."

§ 4

"There's bound to be a tremendous change in values."

On that text Mr. Britling's mind enlarged very rapidly. It produced a wonderful crop of possibilities before he got back to his study. He sat down to his desk, but he did not immediately take up his work. He had discovered something so revolutionary in his personal affairs that even the war issue remained for a time in suspense.

Tucked away in the back of Mr. Britling's consciousness was something that had not always been there, something warm and comforting that made life and his general thoughts about life much easier and pleasanter than they would otherwise have been, the sense of a neatly arranged investment list, a shrewdly and geographically distributed system of holdings in national loans, municipal investments, railway debentures, that had amounted altogether to rather over five-and-twenty thousand pounds; his and Mrs. Britling's, a joint accumulation. This was, so to speak, his economic viscera. It sustained him, and kept him going and comfortable. When all was well he did not feel its existence; he had merely a pleasant sense of general well-being. When here or there a security got a little disarranged he felt a vague discomfort. Now he became aware of grave disorders. It was as if he discovered he had been accidentally eating toadstools, and didn't quite know whether they weren't a highly poisonous sort. But an analogy may be carried too far....

At any rate, when Mr. Britling got back to his writing-desk he was much too disturbed to resume "And Now War Ends."

"There's bound to be a tremendous change in values!"

He had never felt quite so sure as most people about the stability of the modern financial system. He did not, he felt, understand the working of this moratorium, or the peculiar advantage of prolonging the bank holidays. It meant, he supposed, a stoppage of payment all round, and a cutting off of the supply of ready money. And Hickson the grocer, according to Mrs. Faber, was already looking askance at cheques.

Even if the bank did reopen Mr. Britling was aware that his current balance was low; at the utmost it amounted to twenty or thirty pounds. He had been expecting cheques from his English and American publishers, and the usual Times cheque. Suppose these payments were intercepted!

All these people might, so far as he could understand, stop payment under this moratorium! That hadn't at first occurred to him. But, of course, quite probably they might refuse to pay his account when it fell due.

And suppose The Times felt his peculiar vein of thoughtfulness unnecessary in these stirring days!

And then if the bank really did lock up his deposit account, and his securities became unsaleable!

Mr. Britling felt like an oyster that is invited to leave its shell....

He sat back from his desk contemplating these things. His imagination made a weak attempt to picture a world in which credit has vanished and money is of doubtful value. He supposed a large number of people would just go on buying and selling at or near the old prices by force of habit.

His mind and conscience made a valiant attempt to pick up "And Now War Ends" and go on with it, but before five minutes were out he was back at the thoughts of food panic and bankruptcy....

§ 5

The conflict of interests at Mr. Britling's desk became unendurable. He felt he must settle the personal question first. He wandered out upon the lawn and smoked cigarettes.

His first conception of a great convergent movement of the nations to make a world peace and an end to militant Germany was being obscured by this second, entirely incompatible, vision of a world confused and disorganised. Mrs. Fabers in great multitudes hoarding provisions, riotous crowds attacking shops, moratorium, shut banks and waiting queues. Was it possible for the whole system to break down through a shock to its confidence? Without any sense of incongruity the dignified pacification of the planet had given place in his mind to these more intimate possibilities. He heard a rustle behind him, and turned to face his wife.

"Do you think," she asked, "that there is any chance of a shortage of food?"

"If all the Mrs. Fabers in the world run and grab—"

"Then every one must grab. I haven't much in the way of stores in the house."

"H'm," said Mr. Britling, and reflected.... "I don't think we must buy stores now."

"But if we are short."

"It's the chances of war," said Mr. Britling.

He reflected. "Those who join a panic make a panic. After all, there is just as much food in the world as there was last month. And short of burning it the only way of getting rid of it is to eat it. And the harvests are good. Why begin a scramble at a groaning board?"

"But people are scrambling! It would be awkward—with the children and everything—if we ran short."

"We shan't. And anyhow, you mustn't begin hoarding, even if it means hardship."

"Yes. But you won't like it if suddenly there's no sugar for your tea."

Mr. Britling ignored this personal application.

"What is far more serious than a food shortage is the possibility of a money panic."

He paced the lawn with her and talked. He said that even now very few people realised the flimsiness of the credit system by which the modern world was sustained. It was a huge growth of confidence, due very largely to the uninquiring indolence of—everybody. It was sound so long as mankind did, on the whole, believe in it; give only a sufficient loss of faith and it might suffer any sort of collapse. It might vanish altogether—as the credit system vanished at the breaking up of Italy by the Goths—and leave us nothing but tangible things, real property, possession nine points of the law, and that sort of thing. Did she remember that last novel of Gissing's?—

"Veranilda," it was called. It was a picture of the world when there was no wealth at all except what one could carry hidden or guarded about with one. That sort of thing came to the Roman Empire slowly, in the course of lifetimes, but nowadays we lived in a rapider world—with flimsier institutions. Nobody knew the strength or the weakness of credit; nobody knew whether even the present shock might not send it smashing down.... And then all the little life we had lived so far would roll away....

Mrs. Britling, he noted, glanced ever and again at her sunlit house—there were new sunblinds, and she had been happy in her choice of a colour—and listened with a sceptical expression to this disquisition.

"A few days ago," said Mr. Britling, trying to make things concrete for her, "you and I together were worth five-and-twenty thousand pounds. Now we don't know what we are worth; whether we have lost a thousand or ten thousand...."

He examined his sovereign purse and announced he had six pounds. "What have you?"

She had about eighteen pounds in the house.

"We may have to get along with that for an indefinite time."

"But the bank will open again presently," she said. "And people about here trust us."

"Suppose they don't?"

She did not trouble about the hypothesis. "And our investments will recover. They always do recover."

"Everything may recover," he admitted. "But also nothing may recover. All this life of ours which has seemed so settled and secure—isn't secure. I have felt that we were fixed here and rooted—for all our lives. Suppose presently things sweep us out of it? It's a possibility we may have to face. I feel this morning as if two enormous gates had opened in our lives, like the gates that give upon an arena, gates giving on a darkness—through which anything might come. Even death. Suppose suddenly we were to see one of those great Zeppelins in the air, or hear the thunder of guns away towards the coast. And if a messenger came upon a bicycle telling us to leave everything and go inland...."

"I see no reason why one should go out to meet things like that."

"But there is no reason why one should not envisage them...."

"The curious thing," said Mr. Britling, pursuing his examination of the matter, "is that, looking at these things as one does now, as things quite possible, they are not nearly so terrifying and devastating to the mind as they would have seemed—last week. I believe I should load you all into Gladys and start off westward with a kind of exhilaration...."

She looked at him as if she would speak, and said nothing. She suspected him of hating his home and affecting to care for it out of politeness to her....

"Perhaps mankind tries too much to settle down. Perhaps these stirrings up have to occur to save us from our disposition to stuffy comfort. There's the magic call of the unknown experience, of dangers and hardships. One wants to go. But unless some push comes one does not go. There is a spell that keeps one to the lair and the old familiar ways. Now I am afraid—and at the same time I feel that the spell is broken. The magic prison is suddenly all doors. You may call this ruin, bankruptcy, invasion, flight; they are doors out of habit and routine.... I have been doing nothing for so long, except idle things and discursive things."

"I thought that you managed to be happy here. You have done a lot of work."

"Writing is recording, not living. But now I feel suddenly that we are living intensely. It is as if the whole quality of life was changing. There are such times. There are times when the spirit of life changes altogether. The old world knew that better than we do. It made a distinction between weekdays and Sabbaths, and between feasts and fasts and days of devotion. That is just what has happened now. Week-day rules must be put aside. Before—oh! three days ago, competition was fair, it was fair and tolerable to get the best food one could and hold on to one's own. But that isn't right now. War makes a Sabbath, and we shut the shops. The banks are shut, and the world still feels as though Sunday was keeping on...."

He saw his own way clear.

"The scale has altered. It does not matter now in the least if we are ruined. It does not matter in the least if we have to live upon potatoes and run into debt for our rent. These now are the most incidental of things. A week ago they would have been of the first importance. Here we are face to face with the greatest catastrophe and the greatest opportunity in history. We have to plunge through catastrophe to opportunity. There is nothing to be done now in the whole world except to get the best out of this tremendous fusing up of all the settled things of life." He had got what he wanted. He left her standing upon the lawn and hurried back to his desk....

§ 6

When Mr. Britling, after a strenuous morning among high ideals, descended for lunch, he found Mr. Lawrence Carmine had come over to join him at that meal. Mr. Carmine was standing in the hall with his legs very wide apart reading The Times for the fourth time. "I can do no work," he said, turning round. "I can't fix my mind. I suppose we are going to war. I'd got so used to the war with Germany that I never imagined it would happen. Gods! what a bore it will be.... And Maxse and all those scaremongers cock-a-hoop and 'I told you so.' Damn these Germans!"

He looked despondent and worried. He followed Mr. Britling towards the dining-room with his hands deep in his pockets.

"It's going to be a tremendous thing," he said, after he had greeted Mrs. Britling and Hugh and Aunt Wilshire and Teddy, and seated himself at Mr. Britling's hospitable board. "It's going to upset everything. We don't begin to imagine all the mischief it is going to do."

Mr. Britling was full of the heady draught of liberal optimism he had been brewing upstairs. "I am not sorry I have lived to see this war," he said. "It may be a tremendous catastrophe in one sense, but in another it is a huge step forward in human life. It is the end of forty years of evil suspense. It is crisis and solution."

"I wish I could see it like that," said Mr. Carmine.

"It is like a thaw—everything has been in a frozen confusion since that Jew-German Treaty of Berlin. And since 1871."

"Why not since Schleswig-Holstein?" said Mr. Carmine.

"Why not? Or since the Treaty of Vienna?"

"Or since—One might go back."

"To the Roman Empire," said Hugh.

"To the first conquest of all," said Teddy....

"I couldn't work this morning," said Hugh. "I have been reading in the Encyclopædia about races and religions in the Balkans.... It's very mixed."

"So long as it could only be dealt with piecemeal," said Mr. Britling. "And that is just where the tremendous opportunity of this war comes in. Now everything becomes

fluid. We can redraw the map of the world. A week ago we were all quarrelling bitterly about things too little for human impatience. Now suddenly we face an epoch. This is an epoch. The world is plastic for men to do what they will with it. This is the end and the beginning of an age. This is something far greater than the French Revolution or the Reformation.... And we live in it...."

He paused impressively.

"I wonder what will happen to Albania?" said Hugh, but his comment was disregarded.

"War makes men bitter and narrow," said Mr. Carmine.

"War narrowly conceived," said Mr. Britling. "But this is an indignant and generous war."

They speculated about the possible intervention of the United States. Mr. Britling thought that the attack on Belgium demanded the intervention of every civilised power, that all the best instincts of America would be for intervention. "The more," he said, "the quicker."

"It would be strange if the last power left out to mediate were to be China," said Mr. Carmine. "The one people in the world who really believe in peace.... I wish I had your confidence, Britling."

For a time they contemplated a sort of Grand Inquest on Germany and militarism, presided over by the Wisdom of the East. Militarism was, as it were, to be buried as a suicide at four cross-roads, with a stake through its body to prevent any untimely resuscitation.

§ 7

Mr. Britling was in a phase of imaginative release. Such a release was one of the first effects of the war upon many educated minds. Things that had seemed solid forever were visibly in flux; things that had seemed stone were alive. Every boundary, every government, was seen for the provisional thing it was. He talked of his World Congress meeting year by year, until it ceased to be a speculation and became a mere intelligent anticipation; he talked of the "manifest necessity" of a Supreme Court for the world. He beheld that vision at the Hague, but Mr. Carmine preferred Delhi or Samarkand or Alexandria or Nankin. "Let us get away from the delusion of Europe anyhow," said Mr. Carmine....

As Mr. Britling had sat at his desk that morning and surveyed the stupendous vistas of possibility that war was opening, the catastrophe had taken on a more and more beneficial quality. "I suppose that it is only through such crises as these that the world can reconstruct itself," I said. And, on the whole that afternoon he was disposed to hope that the great military machine would not smash itself too easily. "We want the nations to feel the need of one another," he said. "Too brief a campaign might lead to a squabble for plunder. The Englishman has to learn his dependence on the Irishman, the Russian has to be taught the value of education and the friendship of the Pole.... Europe will now have to look to Asia, and recognise that Indians and Chinamem are also 'white.'... But these lessons require time and stresses if they are to be learnt properly...."

They discussed the possible duration of the war.

Mr. Carmine thought it would be a long struggle; Mr. Britling thought that the Russians would be in Berlin by the next May. He was afraid they might get there before the end of the year. He thought that the Germans would beat out their strength upon the French and Belgian lines, and never be free to turn upon the Russian at all. He was sure they had underrated the strength and energy of the French and of ourselves. "The Russians meanwhile," he said, "will come on, slowly, steadily, inevitably...."

§ 8

That day of vast anticipations drew out into the afternoon. It was a day—obsessed. It was the precursor of a relentless series of doomed and fettered days. There was a sense of enormous occurrences going on just out of sound and sight—behind the mask of Essex peacefulness. From this there was no escape. It made all other interests fitful. Games of Badminton were begun and abruptly truncated by the arrival of the evening papers; conversations started upon any topic whatever returned to the war by the third and fourth remark....

After lunch Mr. Britling and Mr. Carmine went on talking. Nothing else was possible. They repeated things they had already said. They went into things more thoroughly. They sat still for a time, and then suddenly broke out with some new consideration....

It had been their custom to play skat with Herr Heinrich, who had shown them the game very explicitly and thoroughly. But there was no longer any Herr Heinrich—and somehow German games were already out of fashion. The two philosophers admitted

that they had already considered skat to be complicated without subtlety, and that its chief delight for them had been the pink earnestness of Herr Heinrich, his inability to grasp their complete but tacit comprehension of its innocent strategy, and his invariable ill-success to bring off the coups that flashed before his imagination.

He would survey the destructive counter-stroke with unconcealed surprise. He would verify his first impression by craning towards it and adjusting his glasses on his nose. He had a characteristic way of doing this with one stiff finger on either side of his sturdy nose.

"It is very fortunate for you that you have played that card," he would say, growing pinker and pinker with hasty cerebration. "Or else—yes"—a glance at his own cards—"it would have been altogether bad for you. I had taken only a very small risk.... Now I must—"

He would reconsider his hand.

"Zo!" he would say, dashing down a card....

Well, he had gone and skat had gone. A countless multitude of such links were snapping that day between hundreds of thousands of English and German homes.

§ 9

The imminence of war produced a peculiar exaltation in Aunt Wilshire. She developed a point of view that was entirely her own.

It was Mr. Britling's habit, a habit he had set himself to acquire after much irritating experience, to disregard Aunt Wilshire. She was not, strictly speaking, his aunt; she was one of those distant cousins we find already woven into our lives when we attain to years of responsibility. She had been a presence in his father's household when Mr. Britling was a boy. Then she had been called "Jane," or "Cousin Jane," or "Your cousin Wilshire." It had been a kindly freak of Mr. Britling's to promote her to Aunty rank.

She eked out a small inheritance by staying with relatives. Mr. Britling's earlier memories presented her as a slender young woman of thirty, with a nose upon which small boys were forbidden to comment. Yet she commented upon it herself, and called his attention to its marked resemblance to that of the great Duke of Wellington. "He was, I am told," said Cousin Wilshire to the attentive youth, "a great friend of your great-grandmother's. At any rate, they were contemporaries. Since then this nose has

been in the family. He would have been the last to draw a veil over it, but other times, other manners. 'Publish,' he said, 'and be damned.'"

She had a knack of exasperating Mr. Britling's father, a knack which to a less marked degree she also possessed in relation to the son. But Mr. Britling senior never acquired the art of disregarding her. Her method—if one may call the natural expression of a personality a method—was an invincibly superior knowledge, a firm and ill-concealed belief that all statements made in her hearing were wrong and most of them absurd, and a manner calm, assured, restrained. She may have been born with it; it is on record that at the age of ten she was pronounced a singularly trying child. She may have been born with the air of thinking the doctor a muff and knowing how to manage all this business better. Mr. Britling had known her only in her ripeness. As a boy, he had enjoyed her confidences—about other people and the general neglect of her advice. He grew up rather to like her—most people rather liked her—and to attach a certain importance to her unattainable approval. She was sometimes kind, she was frequently absurd....

With very little children she was quite wise and Jolly....

So she circulated about a number of houses which at any rate always welcomed her coming. In the opening days of each visit she performed marvels of tact, and set a watch upon her lips. Then the demons of controversy and dignity would get the better of her. She would begin to correct, quietly but firmly, she would begin to disapprove of the tone and quality of her treatment. It was quite common for her visit to terminate in speechless rage both on the side of host and of visitor. The remarkable thing was that this speechless rage never endured. Though she could exasperate she could never offend. Always after an interval during which she was never mentioned, people began to wonder how Cousin Jane was getting on.... A tentative correspondence would begin, leading slowly up to a fresh invitation.

She spent more time in Mr. Britling's house than in any other. There was a legend that she had "drawn out" his mind, and that she had "stood up" for him against his father. She had certainly contradicted quite a number of those unfavourable comments that fathers are wont to make about their sons. Though certainly she contradicted everything. And Mr. Britling hated to think of her knocking about alone in boarding-houses and hydropathic establishments with only the most casual chances for contradiction.

Moreover, he liked to see her casting her eye over the morning paper. She did it with a manner as though she thought the terrestrial globe a great fool, and quite beyond the

reach of advice. And as though she understood and was rather amused at the way in which the newspaper people tried to keep back the real facts of the case from her.

And now she was scornfully entertained at the behaviour of everybody in the war crisis.

She confided various secrets of state to the elder of the younger Britlings—preferably when his father was within earshot.

"None of these things they are saying about the war," she said, "really matter in the slightest degree. It is all about a spoilt carpet and nothing else in the world—a madman and a spoilt carpet. If people had paid the slightest attention to common sense none of this war would have happened. The thing was perfectly well known. He was a delicate child, difficult to rear and given to screaming fits. Consequently he was never crossed, allowed to do everything. Nobody but his grandmother had the slightest influence with him. And she prevented him spoiling this carpet as completely as he wished to do. The story is perfectly well known. It was at Windsor—at the age of eight. After that he had but one thought: war with England....

"Everybody seemed surprised," she said suddenly at tea to Mr. Carmine. "I at least am not surprised. I am only surprised it did not come sooner. If any one had asked me I could have told them, three years, five years ago."

The day was one of flying rumours, Germany was said to have declared war on Italy, and to have invaded Holland as well as Belgium.

"They'll declare war against the moon next!" said Aunt Wilshire.

"And send a lot of Zeppelins," said the smallest boy. "Herr Heinrich told us they can fly thousands of miles."

"He will go on declaring war until there is nothing left to declare war against. That is exactly what he has always done. Once started he cannot desist. Often he has had to be removed from the dinner-table for fear of injury. Now, it is ultimatums."

She was much pleased by a headline in the Daily Express that streamed right across the page: "The Mad Dog of Europe." Nothing else, she said, had come so near her feelings about the war.

"Mark my words," said Aunt Wilshire in her most impressive tones. "He is insane. It will be proved to be so. He will end his days in an asylum—as a lunatic. I have felt it myself for years and said so in private.... Knowing what I did.... To such friends as I could trust not to misunderstand me.... Now at least I can speak out.

"With his moustaches turned up!" exclaimed Aunt Wilshire after an interval of accumulation.... "They say he has completely lost the use of the joint in his left arm, he carries it stiff like a Punch and Judy—and he wants to conquer Europe.... While his grandmother lived there was some one to keep him in order. He stood in Awe of her. He hated her, but he did not dare defy her. Even his uncle had some influence. Now, nothing restrains him.

"A double-headed mad dog," said Aunt Wilshire. "Him and his eagles!... A man like that ought never to have been allowed to make a war.... Not even a little war.... If he had been put under restraint when I said so, none of these things would have happened. But, of course I am nobody.... It was not considered worth attending to."

§ 10

One remarkable aspect of the English attitude towards the war was the disposition to treat it as a monstrous joke. It is a disposition traceable in a vast proportion of the British literature of the time. In spite of violence, cruelty, injustice, and the vast destruction and still vaster dangers of the struggles, that disposition held. The English mind refused flatly to see anything magnificent or terrible in the German attack, or to regard the German Emperor or the Crown Prince as anything more than figures of fun. From first to last their conception of the enemy was an overstrenuous, foolish man, red with effort, with protruding eyes and a forced frightfulness of demeanour. That he might be tremendously lethal did not in the least obscure the fact that he was essentially ridiculous. And if as the war went on the joke grew grimmer, still it remained a joke. The German might make a desert of the world; that could not alter the British conviction that he was making a fool of himself.

And this disposition kept coming to the surface throughout the afternoon, now in a casual allusion, now in some deliberate jest. The small boys had discovered the goose step, and it filled their little souls with amazement and delight. That human beings should consent to those ridiculous paces seemed to them almost incredibly funny. They tried it themselves, and then set out upon a goose-step propaganda. Letty and Cissie had come up to the Dower House for tea and news, and they were enrolled with Teddy and Hugh. The six of them, chuckling and swaying, marched, in vast scissor strides across the lawn. "Left," cried Hugh. "Left."

"Toes out more," said Mr. Lawrence Carmine.

"Keep stiffer," said the youngest Britling.

"Watch the Zeppelins and look proud," said Hugh. "With the chest out. Zo!"

Mrs. Britling was so much amused that she went in for her camera, and took a snapshot of the detachment. It was a very successful snapshot, and a year later Mr. Britling was to find a print of it among his papers, and recall the sunshine and the merriment....

§ 11

That night brought the British declaration of war against Germany. To nearly every Englishman that came as a matter of course, and it is one of the most wonderful facts in history that the Germans were surprised by it. When Mr. Britling, as a sample Englishman, had said that there would never be war between Germany and England, he had always meant that it was inconceivable to him that Germany should ever attack Belgium or France. If Germany had been content to fight a merely defensive war upon her western frontier and let Belgium alone, there would scarcely have been such a thing as a war party in Great Britain. But the attack upon Belgium, the westward thrust, made the whole nation flame unanimously into war. It settled a question that was in open debate up to the very outbreak of the conflict. Up to the last the English had cherished the idea that in Germany, just as in England, the mass of people were kindly, pacific, and detached. That had been the English mistake. Germany was really and truly what Germany had been professing to be for forty years, a War State. With a sigh—and a long-forgotten thrill—England roused herself to fight. Even now she still roused herself sluggishly. It was going to be an immense thing, but just how immense it was going to be no one in England had yet imagined.

Countless men that day whom Fate had marked for death and wounds stared open-mouthed at the news, and smiled with the excitement of the headlines, not dreaming that any of these things would come within three hundred miles of them. What was war to Matching's Easy—to all the Matching's Easies great and small that make up England? The last home that was ever burnt by an enemy within a hundred miles of Matching's Easy was burnt by the Danes rather more than a thousand years ago.... And the last trace of those particular Danes in England were certain horny scraps of indurated skin under the heads of the nails in the door of St. Clement Danes in London....

Now again, England was to fight in a war which was to light fires in England and bring death to English people on English soil. There were inconceivable ideas in August, 1914. Such things must happen before they can be comprehended as possible.

§ 12

This story is essentially the history of the opening and of the realisation of the Great War as it happened to one small group of people in Essex, and more particularly as it happened to one human brain. It came at first to all these people in a spectacular manner, as a thing happening dramatically and internationally, as a show, as something in the newspapers, something in the character of an historical epoch rather than a personal experience; only by slow degrees did it and its consequences invade the common texture of English life. If this story could be represented by sketches or pictures the central figure would be Mr. Britling, now sitting at his desk by day or by night and writing first at his tract "And Now War Ends" and then at other things, now walking about his garden or in Claverings park or going to and fro in London, in his club reading the ticker or in his hall reading the newspaper, with ideas and impressions continually clustering, expanding, developing more and more abundantly in his mind, arranging themselves, reacting upon one another, building themselves into generalisations and conclusions....

All Mr. Britling's mental existence was soon threaded on the war. His more or less weekly Times leader became dissertations upon the German point of view; his reviews of books and Literary Supplement articles were all oriented more and more exactly to that one supreme fact....

It was rare that he really seemed to be seeing the war; few people saw it; for most of the world it came as an illimitable multitude of incoherent, loud, and confusing impressions. But all the time he was at least doing his utmost to see the war, to simplify it and extract the essence of it until it could be apprehended as something epic and explicable, as a stateable issue....

Most typical picture of all would be Mr. Britling writing in a little circle of orange lamplight, with the blinds of his room open for the sake of the moonlight, but the window shut to keep out the moths that beat against it. Outside would be the moon and the high summer sky and the old church tower dim above the black trees half a mile away, with its clock—which Mr. Britling heard at night but never noted by day—beating its way round the slow semicircle of the nocturnal hours. He had always hated

conflict and destruction, and felt that war between civilised states was the quintessential expression of human failure, it was a stupidity that stopped progress and all the free variation of humanity, a thousand times he had declared it impossible, but even now with his country fighting he was still far from realising that this was a thing that could possibly touch him more than intellectually. He did not really believe with his eyes and finger-tips and backbone that murder, destruction, and agony on a scale monstrous beyond precedent was going on in the same world as that which slumbered outside the black ivy and silver shining window-sill that framed his peaceful view.

War had not been a reality of the daily life of England for more than a thousand years. The mental habit of the nation for fifty generations was against its emotional recognition. The English were the spoilt children of peace. They had never been wholly at war for three hundred years, and for over eight hundred years they had not fought for life against a foreign power. Spain and France had threatened in turn, but never even crossed the seas. It is true that England had had her civil dissensions and had made wars and conquests in every part of the globe and established an immense empire, but that last, as Mr. Britling had told Mr. Direck, was "an excursion." She had just sent out younger sons and surplus people, emigrants and expeditionary forces. Her own soil had never seen any successful foreign invasion; her homeland, the bulk of her households, her general life, had gone on untouched by these things. Nineteen people out of twenty, the middle class and most of the lower class, knew no more of the empire than they did of the Argentine Republic or the Italian Renaissance. It did not concern them. War that calls upon every man and threatens every life in the land, war of the whole national being, was a thing altogether outside English experience and the scope of the British imagination. It was still incredible, it was still outside the range of Mr. Britling's thoughts all through the tremendous onrush and check of the German attack in the west that opened the great war. Through those two months he was, as it were, a more and more excited spectator at a show, a show like a baseball match, a spectator with money on the event, rather than a really participating citizen of a nation thoroughly at war....

§ 13

After the jolt of the food panic and a brief, financial scare, the vast inertia of everyday life in England asserted itself. When the public went to the banks for the new paper money, the banks tendered gold—apologetically. The supply of the new notes was

very insufficient, and there was plenty of gold. After the first impression that a universal catastrophe had happened there was an effect as if nothing had happened.

Shops re-opened after the Bank Holiday, in a tentative spirit that speedily became assurance; people went about their business again, and the war, so far as the mass of British folk were concerned, was for some weeks a fever of the mind and intelligence rather than a physical and personal actuality. There was a keen demand for news, and for a time there was very little news. The press did its best to cope with this immense occasion. Led by the Daily Express, all the halfpenny newspapers adopted a new and more resonant sort of headline, the streamer, a band of emphatic type that ran clean across the page and announced victories or disconcerting happenings. They did this every day, whether there was a great battle or the loss of a trawler to announce, and the public mind speedily adapted itself to the new pitch.

There was no invitation from the government and no organisation for any general participation in war. People talked unrestrictedly; every one seemed to be talking; they waved flags and displayed much vague willingness to do something. Any opportunity of service was taken very eagerly. Lord Kitchener was understood to have demanded five hundred thousand men; the War Office arrangements for recruiting, arrangements conceived on a scale altogether too small, were speedily overwhelmed by a rush of willing young men. The flow had to be checked by raising the physical standard far above the national average, and recruiting died down to manageable proportions. There was a quite genuine belief that the war might easily be too exclusively considered; that for the great mass of people it was a disturbing and distracting rather than a vital interest. The phase "Business as Usual" ran about the world, and the papers abounded in articles in which going on as though there was no war at all was demonstrated to be the truest form of patriotism. "Leave things to Kitchener" was another watchword with a strong appeal to the national quality. "Business as usual during Alterations to the Map of Europe" was the advertisement of one cheerful barber, widely quoted....

Hugh was at home all through August. He had thrown up his rooms in London with his artistic ambitions, and his father was making all the necessary arrangements for him to follow Cardinal to Cambridge. Meanwhile Hugh was taking up his scientific work where he had laid it down. He gave a reluctant couple of hours in the afternoon to the mysteries of Little-go Greek, and for the rest of his time he was either working at mathematics and mathematical physics or experimenting in a little upstairs room that had been carved out of the general space of the barn. It was only at the very end of August that it dawned upon him or Mr. Britling that the war might have more than a spectacular and sympathetic appeal for him. Hitherto contemporary history had

happened without his personal intervention. He did not see why it should not continue to happen with the same detachment. The last elections—and a general election is really the only point at which the life of the reasonable Englishman becomes in any way public—had happened four years ago, when he was thirteen.

§ 14

For a time it was believed in Matching's Easy that the German armies had been defeated and very largely destroyed at Liège. It was a mistake not confined to Matching's Easy.

The first raiding attack was certainly repulsed with heavy losses, and so were the more systematic assaults on August the sixth and seventh. After that the news from Liège became uncertain, but it was believed in England that some or all of the forts were still holding out right up to the German entry into Brussels. Meanwhile the French were pushing into their lost provinces, occupying Altkirch, Mulhausen and Saarburg; the Russians were invading Bukovina and East Prussia; the Goeben, the Breslau and the Panther had been sunk by the newspapers in an imaginary battle in the Mediterranean, and Togoland was captured by the French and British. Neither the force nor the magnitude of the German attack through Belgium was appreciated by the general mind, and it was possible for Mr. Britling to reiterate his fear that the war would be over too soon, long before the full measure of its possible benefits could be secured. But these apprehensions were unfounded; the lessons the war had in store for Mr. Britling were far more drastic than anything he was yet able to imagine even in his most exalted moods.

He resisted the intimations of the fall of Brussels and the appearance of the Germans at Dinant. The first real check to his excessive anticipations of victory for the Allies came with the sudden reappearance of Mr. Direck in a state of astonishment and dismay at Matching's Easy. He wired from the Strand office, "Coming to tell you about things," and arrived on the heels of his telegram.

He professed to be calling upon Mr. and Mrs. Britling, and to a certain extent he was; but he had a quick eye for the door or windows; his glance roved irrelevantly as he talked. A faint expectation of Cissie came in with him and hovered about him, as the scent of violets follows the flower.

He was, however, able to say quite a number of things before Mr. Britling's natural tendency to do the telling asserted itself.

"My word," said Mr. Direck, "but this is some war. It is going on regardless of every decent consideration. As an American citizen I naturally expected to be treated with some respect, war or no war. That expectation has not been realised.... Europe is dislocated.... You have no idea here yet how completely Europe is dislocated....

"I came to Europe in a perfectly friendly spirit—and I must say I am surprised. Practically I have been thrown out, neck and crop. All my luggage is lost. Away at some one-horse junction near the Dutch frontier that I can't even learn the name of. There's joy in some German home, I guess, over my shirts; they were real good shirts. This tweed suit I have is all the wardrobe I've got in the world. All my money—good American notes—well, they laughed at them. And when I produced English gold they suspected me of being English and put me under arrest.... I can assure you that the English are most unpopular in Germany at the present time, thoroughly unpopular.... Considering that they are getting exactly what they were asking for, these Germans are really remarkably annoyed.... Well, I had to get the American consul to advance me money, and I've done more waiting about and irregular fasting and travelling on an empty stomach and viewing the world, so far as it was permitted, from railway sidings—for usually they made us pull the blinds down when anything important was on the track—than any cow that ever came to Chicago.... I was handed as freight—low grade freight.... It doesn't bear recalling."

Mr. Direck assumed as grave and gloomy an expression as the facial habits of years would permit.

"I tell you I never knew there was such a thing as war until this happened to me. In America we don't know there is such a thing. It's like pestilence and famine; something in the story books. We've forgotten it for anything real. There's just a few grandfathers go around talking about it. Judge Holmes and sage old fellows like him. Otherwise it's just a game the kids play at.... And then suddenly here's everybody running about in the streets—hating and threatening—and nice old gentlemen with white moustaches and fathers of families scheming and planning to burn houses and kill and hurt and terrify. And nice young women, too, looking for an Englishman to spit at; I tell you I've been within range and very uncomfortable several times.... And what one can't believe is that they are really doing these things. There's a little village called Visé near the Dutch frontier; some old chap got fooling there with a fowling-piece; and they've wiped it out. Shot the people by the dozen, put them out in rows three deep

and shot them, and burnt the place. Short of scalping, Red Indians couldn't have done worse. Respectable German soldiers....

"No one in England really seems to have any suspicion what is going on in Belgium. You hear stories—People tell them in Holland. It takes your breath away. They have set out just to cow those Belgians. They have started in to be deliberately frightful. You do not begin to understand.... Well.... Outrages. The sort of outrages Americans have never heard of. That one doesn't speak of.... Well.... Rape.... They have been raping women for disciplinary purposes on tables in the market-place of Liège. Yes, sir. It's a fact. I was told it by a man who had just come out of Belgium. Knew the people, knew the place, knew everything. People over here do not seem to realise that those women are the same sort of women that you might find in Chester or Yarmouth, or in Matching's Easy for the matter of that. They still seem to think that Continental women are a different sort of women—more amenable to that sort of treatment. They seem to think there is some special Providential law against such things happening to English people. And it's within two hundred miles of you—even now. And as far as I can see there's precious little to prevent it coming nearer...."

Mr. Britling thought there were a few little obstacles.

"I've seen the new British army drilling in London, Mr. Britling. I don't know if you have. I saw a whole battalion. And they hadn't got half-a-dozen uniforms, and not a single rifle to the whole battalion.

"You don't begin to realise in England what you are up against. You have no idea what it means to be in a country where everybody, the women, the elderly people, the steady middle-aged men, are taking war as seriously as business. They haven't the slightest compunction. I don't know what Germany was like before the war, I had hardly gotten out of my train before the war began; but Germany to-day is one big armed camp. It's all crawling with soldiers. And every soldier has his uniform and his boots and his arms and his kit.

"And they're as sure of winning as if they had got London now. They mean to get London. They're cocksure they are going to walk through Belgium, cocksure they will get to Paris by Sedan day, and then they are going to destroy your fleet with Zeppelins and submarines and make a dash across the Channel. They say it's England they are after, in this invasion of Belgium. They'll just down France by the way. They say they've got guns to bombard Dover from Calais. They make a boast of it. They know for certain you can't arm your troops. They know you can't turn out ten thousand rifles a week. They come and talk to any one in the trains, and explain just how your defeat is going to be managed. It's just as though they were talking of rounding up cattle."

Mr. Britling said they would soon be disillusioned.

Mr. Direck, with the confidence of his authentic observations, remarked after a perceptible interval, "I wonder how."

He reverted to the fact that had most struck upon his imagination.

"Grown-up people, ordinary intelligent experienced people, taking war seriously, talking of punishing England; it's a revelation. A sort of solemn enthusiasm. High and low....

"And the trainloads of men and the trainloads of guns...."

"Liège," said Mr. Britling.

"Liège was just a scratch on the paint," said Mr. Direck. "A few thousand dead, a few score thousand dead, doesn't matter—not a red cent to them. There's a man arrived at the Cecil who saw them marching into Brussels. He sat at table with me at lunch yesterday. All day it went on, a vast unending river of men in grey. Endless waggons, endless guns, the whole manhood of a nation and all its stuff, marching....

"I thought war," said Mr. Direck, "was a thing when most people stood about and did the shouting, and a sort of special team did the fighting. Well, Germany isn't fighting like that.... I confess it, I'm scared.... It's the very biggest thing on record; it's the very limit in wars.... I dreamt last night of a grey flood washing everything in front of it. You and me—and Miss Corner—curious thing, isn't it? that she came into it—were scrambling up a hill higher and higher, with that flood pouring after us. Sort of splashing into a foam of faces and helmets and bayonets—and clutching hands—and red stuff.... Well, Mr. Britling, I admit I'm a little bit overwrought about it, but I can assure you you don't begin to realise in England what it is you've butted against...."

§ 15

Cissie did not come up to the Dower House that afternoon, and so Mr. Direck, after some vague and transparent excuses, made his way to the cottage.

Here his report become even more impressive. Teddy sat on the writing desk beside the typewriter and swung his legs slowly. Letty brooded in the armchair. Cissie presided over certain limited crawling operations of the young heir.

"They could have the equal of the whole British Army killed three times over and scarcely know it had happened. They're all in it. It's a whole country in arms."

Teddy nodded thoughtfully.

"There's our fleet," said Letty.

"Well, that won't save Paris, will it?"

Mr. Direck didn't, he declared, want to make disagreeable talk, but this was a thing people in England had to face. He felt like one of them himself—"naturally." He'd sort of hurried home to them—it was just like hurrying home—to tell them of the tremendous thing that was going to hit them. He felt like a man in front of a flood, a great grey flood. He couldn't hide what he had been thinking. "Where's our army?" asked Letty suddenly.

"Lost somewhere in France," said Teddy. "Like a needle in a bottle of hay."

"What I keep on worrying at is this," Mr. Direck resumed. "Suppose they did come, suppose somehow they scrambled over, sixty or seventy thousand men perhaps."

"Every man would turn out and take a shot at them," said Letty.

"But there's no rifles!"

"There's shot guns."

"That's exactly what I'm afraid of," said Mr. Direck. "They'd massacre....

"You may be the bravest people on earth," said Mr. Direck, "but if you haven't got arms and the other chaps have—you're just as if you were sheep."

He became gloomily pensive.

He roused himself to describe his experiences at some length, and the extraordinary disturbance of his mind. He related more particularly his attempts to see the sights of Cologne during the stir of mobilisation. After a time his narrative flow lost force, and there was a general feeling that he ought to be left alone with Cissie. Teddy had a letter that must be posted; Letty took the infant to crawl on the mossy stones under the pear tree. Mr. Direck leant against the window-sill and became silent for some moments after the door had closed on Letty.

"As for you, Cissie," he began at last, "I'm anxious. I'm real anxious. I wish you'd let me throw the mantle of Old Glory over you."

He looked at her earnestly.

"Old Glory?" asked Cissie.

"Well—the Stars and Stripes. I want you to be able to claim American citizenship—in certain eventualities. It wouldn't be so very difficult. All the world over, Cissie, Americans are respected.... Nobody dares touch an American citizen. We are—an inviolate people."

He paused. "But how?" asked Cissie.

"It would be perfectly easy—perfectly."

"How?"

"Just marry an American citizen," said Mr. Direck, with his face beaming with ingenuous self-approval. "Then you'd be safe, and I'd not have to worry."

"Because we're in for a stiff war!" cried Cissie, and Direck perceived he had blundered.

"Because we may be invaded!" she said, and Mr. Direck's sense of error deepened.

"I vow—" she began.

"No!" cried Mr. Direck, and held out a hand.

There was a moment of crisis.

"Never will I desert my country—while she is at war," said Cissie, reducing her first fierce intention, and adding as though she regretted her concession, "Anyhow."

"Then it's up to me to end the war, Cissie," said Mr. Direck, trying to get her back to a less spirited attitude.

But Cissie wasn't to be got back so easily. The war was already beckoning to them in the cottage, and drawing them down from the auditorium into the arena.

"This is the rightest war in history," she said. "If I was an American I should be sorry to be one now and to have to stand out of it. I wish I was a man now so that I could do something for all the decency and civilisation the Germans have outraged. I can't understand how any man can be content to keep out of this, and watch Belgium being destroyed. It is like looking on at a murder. It is like watching a dog killing a kitten...."

Mr. Direck's expression was that of a man who is suddenly shown strange lights upon the world.

Mr. Britling found Mr. Direck's talk very indigestible.

He was parting very reluctantly from his dream of a disastrous collapse of German imperialism, of a tremendous, decisive demonstration of the inherent unsoundness of militarist monarchy, to be followed by a world conference of chastened but hopeful nations, and—the Millennium. He tried now to think that Mr. Direck had observed badly and misconceived what he saw. An American, unused to any sort of military occurrences, might easily mistake tens of thousands for millions, and the excitement of a few commercial travellers for the enthusiasm of a united people. But the newspapers now, with a kindred reluctance, were beginning to qualify, bit by bit, their first representation of the German attack through Belgium as a vast and already partly thwarted parade of incompetence. The Germans, he gathered, were being continually beaten in Belgium; but just as continually they advanced. Each fresh newspaper name he looked up on the map marked an oncoming tide. Alost—Charleroi. Farther east the French were retreating from the Saales Pass. Surely the British, who had now been in France for a fortnight, would presently be manifest, stemming the onrush; somewhere perhaps in Brabant or East Flanders. It gave Mr. Britling an unpleasant night to hear at Claverings that the French were very ill-equipped; had no good modern guns either at Lille or Maubeuge, were short of boots and equipment generally, and rather depressed already at the trend of things. Mr. Britling dismissed this as pessimistic talk, and built his hopes on the still invisible British army, hovering somewhere—

He would sit over the map of Belgium, choosing where he would prefer to have the British hover....

Namur fell. The place names continued to shift southward and westward. The British army or a part of it came to light abruptly at Mons. It had been fighting for thirty-eight hours and defeating enormously superior forces of the enemy. That was reassuring until a day or so later "the Cambray—Le Cateau line" made Mr. Britling realise that the victorious British had recoiled five and twenty miles....

And then came the Sunday of The Times telegram, which spoke of a "retreating and a broken army." Mr. Britling did not see this, but Mr. Manning brought over the report of it in a state of profound consternation. Things, he said, seemed to be about as bad as they could be. The English were retreating towards the coast and in much disorder. They were "in the air" and already separated from the Trench. They had narrowly escaped "a Sedan" under the fortifications of Maubeuge.... Mr. Britling was stunned.

He went to his study and stared helplessly at maps. It was as if David had flung his pebble—and missed!

But in the afternoon Mr. Manning telephoned to comfort his friend. A reassuring despatch from General French had been published and—all was well—practically—and the British had been splendid. They had been fighting continuously for several days round and about Mons; they had been attacked at odds of six to one, and they had repulsed and inflicted enormous losses on the enemy. They had established an incontestable personal superiority over the Germans. The Germans had been mown down in heaps; the British had charged through their cavalry like charging through paper. So at last and very gloriously for the British, British and German had met in battle. After the hard fighting of the 26th about Landrecies, the British had been comparatively unmolested, reinforcements covering double the losses had joined them and the German advance was definitely checked ... Mr. Britling's mind swung back to elation. He took down the entire despatch from Mr. Manning's dictation, and ran out with it into the garden where Mrs. Britling, with an unwonted expression of anxiety, was presiding over the teas of the usual casual Sunday gathering.... The despatch was read aloud twice over. After that there was hockey and high spirits, and then Mr. Britling went up to his study to answer a letter from Mrs. Harrowdean, the first letter that had come from her since their breach at the outbreak of the war, and which he was now in a better mood to answer than he had been hitherto.

She had written ignoring his silence and absence, or rather treating it as if it were an incident of no particular importance. Apparently she had not called upon the patient and devoted Oliver as she had threatened; at any rate, there were no signs of Oliver in her communication. But she reproached Mr. Britling for deserting her, and she clamoured for his presence and for kind and strengthening words. She was, she said, scared by this war. She was only a little thing, and it was all too dreadful, and there was not a soul in the world to hold her hand, at least no one who understood in the slightest degree how she felt. (But why was not Oliver holding her hand?) She was like a child left alone in the dark. It was perfectly horrible the way that people were being kept in the dark. The stories one heard, "often from quite trustworthy sources," were enough to depress and terrify any one. Battleship after battleship had been sunk by German torpedoes, a thing kept secret from us for no earthly reason, and Prince Louis of Battenberg had been discovered to be a spy and had been sent to the Tower. Haldane too was a spy. Our army in France had been "practically sold" by the French. Almost all the French generals were in German pay. The censorship and the press were keeping all this back, but what good was it to keep it back? It was folly not to trust people! But it was all too dreadful for a poor little soul whose only desire was to

live happily. Why didn't he come along to her and make her feel she had protecting arms round her? She couldn't think in the daytime: she couldn't sleep at night....

Then she broke away into the praises of serenity. Never had she thought so much of his beautiful "Silent Places" as she did now. How she longed to take refuge in some such dreamland from violence and treachery and foolish rumours! She was weary of every reality. She wanted to fly away into some secret hiding-place and cultivate her simple garden there—as Voltaire had done.... Sometimes at night she was afraid to undress. She imagined the sound of guns, she imagined landings and frightful scouts "in masks" rushing inland on motor bicycles....

It was an ill-timed letter. The nonsense about Prince Louis of Battenberg and Lord Haldane and the torpedoed battleships annoyed him extravagantly. He had just sufficient disposition to believe such tales as to find their importunity exasperating. The idea of going over to Pyecrafts to spend his days in comforting a timid little dear obsessed by such fears, attracted him not at all. He had already heard enough adverse rumours at Claverings to make him thoroughly uncomfortable. He had been doubting whether after all his "Examination of War" was really much less of a futility than "And Now War Ends"; his mind was full of a sense of incomplete statements and unsubstantial arguments. He was indeed in a state of extreme intellectual worry. He was moreover extraordinarily out of love with Mrs. Harrowdean. Never had any affection in the whole history of Mr. Britling's heart collapsed so swiftly and completely. He was left incredulous of ever having cared for her at all. Probably he hadn't. Probably the whole business had been deliberate illusion from first to last. The "dear little thing" business, he felt, was all very well as a game of petting, but times were serious now, and a woman of her intelligence should do something better than wallow in fears and elaborate a winsome feebleness. A very unnecessary and tiresome feebleness. He came almost to the pitch of writing that to her.

The despatch from General French put him into a kindlier frame of mind. He wrote instead briefly but affectionately. As a gentleman should. "How could you doubt our fleet or our army?" was the gist of his letter. He ignored completely every suggestion of a visit to Pyecrafts that her letter had conveyed. He pretended that it had contained nothing of the sort.... And with that she passed out of his mind again under the stress of more commanding interests....

Mr. Britling's mood of relief did not last through the week. The defeated Germans continued to advance. Through a week of deepening disillusionment the main tide of battle rolled back steadily towards Paris. Lille was lost without a struggle. It was lost with mysterious ease.... The next name to startle Mr. Britling as he sat with newspaper

and atlas following these great events was Compiègne. "Here!" Manifestly the British were still in retreat. Then the Germans were in possession of Laon and Rheims and still pressing south. Maubeuge surrounded and cut off for some days, had apparently fallen....

It was on Sunday, September the sixth, that the final capitulation of Mr. Britling's facile optimism occurred.

He stood in the sunshine reading the Observer which the gardener's boy had just brought from the May Tree. He had spread it open on a garden table under the blue cedar, and father and son were both reading it, each as much as the other would let him. There was fresh news from France, a story of further German advances, fighting at Senlis—"But that is quite close to Paris!"—and the appearance of German forces at Nogent-sur-Seine. "Sur Seine!" cried Mr. Britling. "But where can that be? South of the Marne? Or below Paris perhaps?"

It was not marked upon the Observer's map, and Hugh ran into the house for the atlas.

When he returned Mr. Manning was with his father, and they both looked grave.

Hugh opened the map of northern France. "Here it is," he said.

Mr. Britling considered the position.

"Manning says they are at Rouen," he told Hugh. "Our base is to be moved round to La Rochelle...."

He paused before the last distasteful conclusion.

"Practically," he admitted, taking his dose, "they have got Paris. It is almost surrounded now."

He sat down to the map. Mr. Manning and Hugh stood regarding him. He made a last effort to imagine some tremendous strategic reversal, some stone from an unexpected sling that should fell this Goliath in the midst of his triumph.

"Russia," he said, without any genuine hope....

§ 17

And then it was that Mr. Britling accepted the truth.

"One talks," he said, "and then weeks and months later one learns the meaning of the things one has been saying. I was saying a month ago that this is the biggest thing that has happened in history. I said that this was the supreme call upon the will and resources of England. I said there was not a life in all our empire that would not be vitally changed by this war. I said all these things; they came through my mouth; I suppose there was a sort of thought behind them.... Only at this moment do I understand what it is that I said. Now—let me say it over as if I had never said it before; this is the biggest thing in history, that we are all called upon to do our utmost to resist this tremendous attack upon the peace and freedom of the world. Well, doing our utmost does not mean standing about in pleasant gardens waiting for the newspaper.... It means the abandonment of ease and security....

"How lazy we English are nowadays! How readily we grasp the comforting delusion that excuses us from exertion. For the last three weeks I have been deliberately believing that a little British army—they say it is scarcely a hundred thousand men—would somehow break this rush of millions. But it has been driven back, as any one not in love with easy dreams might have known it would be driven back—here and then here and then here. It has been fighting night and day. It has made the most splendid fight—and the most ineffectual fight.... You see the vast swing of the German flail through Belgium. And meanwhile we have been standing about talking of the use we would make of our victory....

"We have been asleep," he said. "This country has been asleep....

"At the back of our minds," he went on bitterly, "I suppose we thought the French would do the heavy work on land—while we stood by at sea. So far as we thought at all. We're so temperate-minded; we're so full of qualifications and discretions.... And so leisurely.... Well, France is down. We've got to fight for France now over the ruins of Paris. Because you and I, Manning, didn't grasp the scale of it, because we indulged in generalisations when we ought to have been drilling and working. Because we've been doing 'business as usual' and all the rest of that sort of thing, while Western civilisation has been in its death agony. If this is to be another '71, on a larger scale and against not merely France but all Europe, if Prussianism is to walk rough-shod over civilisation, if France is to be crushed and Belgium murdered, then life is not worth having. Compared with such an issue as that no other issue, no other interest matters. Yet what are we doing to decide it—you and I? How can it end in anything but a German triumph if you and I, by the million, stand by...."

He paused despairfully and stared at the map.

"What ought we to be doing?" asked Mr. Manning.

"Every man ought to be in training," said Mr. Britling. "Every one ought to be participating.... In some way.... At any rate we ought not to be taking our ease at Matching's Easy any more...."

§ 18

"It interrupts everything," said Hugh suddenly. "These Prussians are the biggest nuisance the world has ever seen."

He considered. "It's like every one having to run out because the house catches fire. But of course we have to beat them. It has to be done. And every one has to take a share.

"Then we can get on with our work again."

Mr. Britling turned his eyes to his eldest son with a startled expression. He had been speaking—generally. For the moment he had forgotten Hugh.

CHAPTER THE SECOND

TAKING PART

§ 1

There were now two chief things in the mind of Mr. Britling. One was a large and valiant thing, a thing of heroic and processional quality, the idea of taking up one's share in the great conflict, of leaving the Dower House and its circle of habits and activities and going out—. From that point he wasn't quite sure where he was to go, nor exactly what he meant to do. His imagination inclined to the figure of a volunteer in an improvised uniform inflicting great damage upon a raiding invader from behind a hedge. The uniform, one presumes, would have been something in the vein of the costume in which he met Mr. Direck. With a "brassard." Or he thought of himself as working at a telephone or in an office engaged upon any useful quasi-administrative work that called for intelligence rather than training. Still, of course, with a "brassard." A month ago he would have had doubts about the meaning of "brassard"; now it

seemed to be the very keyword for national organisation. He had started for London by the early train on Monday morning with the intention of immediate enrolment in any such service that offered; of getting, in fact, into his brassard at once. The morning papers he bought at the station dashed his conviction of the inevitable fall of Paris into hopeful doubts, but did not shake his resolution. The effect of rout and pursuit and retreat and retreat and retreat had disappeared from the news. The German right was being counter-attacked, and seemed in danger of getting pinched between Paris and Verdun with the British on its flank. This relieved his mind, but it did nothing to modify his new realisation of the tremendous gravity of the war. Even if the enemy were held and repulsed a little there was still work for every man in the task of forcing them back upon their own country. This war was an immense thing, it would touch everybody.... That meant that every man must give himself. That he had to give himself. He must let nothing stand between him and that clear understanding. It was utterly shameful now to hold back and not to do one's utmost for civilisation, for England, for all the ease and safety one had been given—against these drilled, commanded, obsessed millions.

Mr. Britling was a flame of exalted voluntaryism, of patriotic devotion, that day.

But behind all this bravery was the other thing, the second thing in the mind of Mr. Britling, a fear. He was prepared now to spread himself like some valiant turkey-gobbler, every feather at its utmost, against the aggressor. He was prepared to go out and flourish bayonets, march and dig to the limit of his power, shoot, die in a ditch if needful, rather than permit German militarism to dominate the world. He had no fear for himself. He was prepared to perish upon the battlefield or cut a valiant figure in the military hospital. But what he perceived very clearly and did his utmost not to perceive was this qualifying and discouraging fact, that the war monster was not nearly so disposed to meet him as he was to meet the war, and that its eyes were fixed on something beside and behind him, that it was already only too evidently stretching out a long and shadowy arm past him towards Teddy—and towards Hugh....

The young are the food of war....

Teddy wasn't Mr. Britling's business anyhow. Teddy must do as he thought proper. Mr. Britling would not even advise upon that. And as for Hugh—

Mr. Britling did his best to brazen it out.

"My eldest boy is barely seventeen," he said. "He's keen to go, and I'd be sorry if he wasn't. He'll get into some cadet corps of course—he's already done something of

that kind at school. Or they'll take him into the Territorials. But before he's nineteen everything will be over, one way or another. I'm afraid, poor chap, he'll feel sold...."

And having thrust Hugh safely into the background of his mind as—juvenile, doing a juvenile share, no sort of man yet—Mr. Britling could give a free rein to his generous imaginations of a national uprising. From the idea of a universal participation in the struggle he passed by an easy transition to an anticipation of all Britain armed and gravely embattled. Across gulfs of obstinate reality. He himself was prepared to say, and accordingly he felt that the great mass of the British must be prepared to say to the government: "Here we are at your disposal. This is not a diplomatists' war nor a War Office war; this is a war of the whole people. We are all willing and ready to lay aside our usual occupations and offer our property and ourselves. Whim and individual action are for peace times. Take us and use us as you think fit. Take all we possess." When he thought of the government in this way, he forgot the governing class he knew. The slack-trousered Raeburn, the prim, attentive Philbert, Lady Frensham at the top of her voice, stern, preposterous Carson, boozy Bandershoot and artful Taper, wily Asquith, the eloquent yet unsubstantial George, and the immobile Grey, vanished out of his mind; all those representative exponents of the way things are done in Great Britain faded in the glow of his imaginative effort; he forgot the dreary debates, the floundering newspapers, the "bluffs," the intrigues, the sly bargains of the week-end party, the "schoolboy honour" of grown men, the universal weak dishonesty in thinking; he thought simply of a simplified and ideal government that governed. He thought vaguely of something behind and beyond them, England, the ruling genius of the land; something with a dignified assurance and a stable will. He imagined this shadowy ruler miraculously provided with schemes and statistics against this supreme occasion which had for so many years been the most conspicuous probability before the country. His mind leaping forwards to the conception of a great nation reluctantly turning its vast resources to the prosecution of a righteous defensive war, filled in the obvious corollaries of plan and calculation. He thought that somewhere "up there" there must be people who could count and who had counted everything that we might need for such a struggle, and organisers who had schemed and estimated down to practicable and manageable details....

Such lapses from knowledge to faith are perhaps necessary that human heroism may be possible....

His conception of his own share in the great national uprising was a very modest one. He was a writer, a footnote to reality; he had no trick of command over men, his rôle was observation rather than organisation, and he saw himself only as an insignificant individual dropping from his individuality into his place in a great machine, taking a

rifle in a trench, guarding a bridge, filling a cartridge—just with a brassard or something like that on—until the great task was done. Sunday night was full of imaginations of order, of the countryside standing up to its task, of roads cleared and resources marshalled, of the petty interests of the private life altogether set aside. And mingling with that it was still possible for Mr. Britling, he was still young enough, to produce such dreams of personal service, of sudden emergencies swiftly and bravely met, of conspicuous daring and exceptional rewards, such dreams as hover in the brains of every imaginative recruit....

The detailed story of Mr. Britling's two days' search for some easy and convenient ladder into the service of his threatened country would be a voluminous one. It would begin with the figure of a neatly brushed patriot, with an intent expression upon his intelligent face, seated in the Londonward train, reading the war news—the first comforting war news for many days—and trying not to look as though his life was torn up by the roots and all his being aflame with devotion; and it would conclude after forty-eight hours of fuss, inquiry, talk, waiting, telephoning, with the same gentleman, a little fagged and with a kind of weary apathy in his eyes, returning by the short cut from the station across Claverings park to resume his connection with his abandoned roots. The essential process of the interval had been the correction of Mr. Britling's temporary delusion that the government of the British Empire is either intelligent, instructed, or wise.

The great "Business as Usual" phase was already passing away, and London was in the full tide of recruiting enthusiasm. That tide was breaking against the most miserable arrangements for enlistment it is possible to imagine. Overtaxed and not very competent officers, whose one idea of being very efficient was to refuse civilian help and be very, very slow and circumspect and very dignified and overbearing, sat in dirty little rooms and snarled at this unheard-of England that pressed at door and window for enrolment. Outside every recruiting office crowds of men and youths waited, leaning against walls, sitting upon the pavements, waited for long hours, waiting to the end of the day and returning next morning, without shelter, without food, many sick with hunger; men who had hurried up from the country, men who had thrown up jobs of every kind, clerks, shopmen, anxious only to serve England and "teach those damned Germans a lesson." Between them and this object they had discovered a perplexing barrier; an inattention. As Mr. Britling made his way by St. Martin's Church and across Trafalgar Square and marked the weary accumulation of this magnificently patriotic stuff, he had his first inkling of the imaginative insufficiency of the War Office that had been so suddenly called upon to organise victory. He was to be more fully informed when he reached his club.

His impression of the streets through which he passed was an impression of great unrest. There were noticeably fewer omnibuses and less road traffic generally, but there was a quite unusual number of drifting pedestrians. The current on the pavements was irritatingly sluggish. There were more people standing about, and fewer going upon their business. This was particularly the case with the women he saw. Many of them seemed to have drifted in from the suburbs and outskirts of London in a state of vague expectation, unable to stay in their homes.

Everywhere there were the flags of the Allies; in shop windows, over doors, on the bonnets of automobiles, on people's breasts, and there was a great quantity of recruiting posters on the hoardings and in windows: "Your King and Country Need You" was the chief text, and they still called for "A Hundred Thousand Men" although the demand of Lord Kitchener had risen to half a million. There were also placards calling for men on nearly all the taxicabs. The big windows of the offices of the Norddeutscher Lloyd in Cockspur Street were boarded up, and plastered thickly with recruiting appeals.

At his club Mr. Britling found much talk and belligerent stir. In the hall Wilkins the author was displaying a dummy rifle of bent iron rod to several interested members. It was to be used for drilling until rifles could be got, and it could be made for eighteen pence. This was the first intimation Mr. Britling got that the want of foresight of the War Office only began with its unpreparedness for recruits. Men were talking very freely in the club; one of the temporary effects of the war in its earlier stages was to produce a partial thaw in the constitutional British shyness; and men who had glowered at Mr. Britling over their lunches and had been glowered at by Mr. Britling in silence for years now started conversations with him.

"What is a man of my sort to do?" asked a clean-shaven barrister.

"Exactly what I have been asking," said Mr. Britling. "They are fixing the upward age for recruits at thirty; it's absurdly low. A man well over forty like myself is quite fit to line a trench or guard a bridge. I'm not so bad a shot...."

"We've been discussing home defence volunteers," said the barrister. "Anyhow we ought to be drilling. But the War Office sets its face as sternly against our doing anything of the sort as though we were going to join the Germans. It's absurd. Even if we older men aren't fit to go abroad, we could at least release troops who could."

"If you had the rifles," said a sharp-featured man in grey to the right of Mr. Britling.

"I suppose they are to be got," said Mr. Britling.

The sharp-featured man indicated by appropriate facial action and head-shaking that this was by no means the case.

"Every dead man, many wounded men, most prisoners," he said, "mean each one a rifle lost. We have lost five-and-twenty thousand rifles alone since the war began. Quite apart from arming new troops we have to replace those rifles with the drafts we send out. Do you know what is the maximum weekly output of rifles at the present time in this country?"

Mr. Britling did not know.

"Nine thousand."

Mr. Britling suddenly understood the significance of Wilkins and his dummy gun.

The sharp-featured man added with an air of concluding the matter: "It's the barrels are the trouble. Complicated machinery. We haven't got it and we can't make it in a hurry. And there you are!"

The sharp-featured man had a way of speaking almost as if he was throwing bombs. He threw one now. "Zinc," he said.

"We're not short of zinc?" said the lawyer.

The sharp-featured man nodded, and then became explicit.

Zinc was necessary for cartridges; it had to be refined zinc and very pure, or the shooting went wrong. Well, we had let the refining business drift away from England to Belgium and Germany. There were just one or two British firms still left.... Unless we bucked up tremendously we should get caught short of cartridges.... At any rate of cartridges so made as to ensure good shooting. "And there you are!" said the sharp-featured man.

But the sharp-featured man did not at that time represent any considerable section of public thought. "I suppose after all we can get rifles from America," said the lawyer. "And as for zinc, if the shortage is known the shortage will be provided for...."

The prevailing topic in the smoking-room upstairs was the inability of the War Office to deal with the flood of recruits that was pouring in, and its hostility to any such volunteering as Mr. Britling had in mind. Quite a number of members wanted to volunteer; there was much talk of their fitness; "I'm fifty-four," said one, "and I could do my twenty-five miles in marching kit far better than half those boys of nineteen." Another was thirty-eight. "I must hold the business together," he said; "but why anyhow shouldn't I learn to shoot and use a bayonet?" The personal pique of the

rejected lent force to their criticisms of the recruiting and general organisation. "The War Office has one incurable system," said a big mine-owner. "During peace time it runs all its home administration with men who will certainly be wanted at the front directly there is a war. Directly war comes, therefore, there is a shift all round, and a new untried man—usually a dug-out in an advanced state of decay—is stuck into the job. Chaos follows automatically. The War Office always has done this, and so far as one can see it always will. It seems incapable of realising that another man will be wanted until the first is taken away. Its imagination doesn't even run to that."

Mr. Britling found a kindred spirit in Wilkins.

Wilkins was expounding his tremendous scheme for universal volunteering. Everybody was to be accepted. Everybody was to be assigned and registered and—badged.

"A brassard," said Mr. Britling.

"It doesn't matter whether we really produce a fighting force or not," said Wilkins. "Everybody now is enthusiastic—and serious. Everybody is willing to put on some kind of uniform and submit to some sort of orders. And the thing to do is to catch them in the willing stage. Now is the time to get the country lined up and organised, ready to meet the internal stresses that are bound to come later. But there's no disposition whatever to welcome this universal offering. It's just as though this war was a treat to which only the very select friends of the War Office were to be admitted. And I don't admit that the national volunteers would be ineffective—even from a military point of view. There are plenty of fit men of our age, and men of proper age who are better employed at home—armament workers for example, and there are all the boys under the age. They may not be under the age before things are over...."

He was even prepared to plan uniforms.

"A brassard," repeated Mr. Britling, "and perhaps coloured strips on the revers of a coat."

"Colours for the counties," said Wilkins, "and if there isn't coloured cloth to be got there's—red flannel. Anything is better than leaving the mass of people to mob about...."

A momentary vision danced before Mr. Britling's eyes of red flannel petticoats being torn up in a rapid improvisation of soldiers to resist a sudden invasion. Passing washerwomen suddenly requisitioned. But one must not let oneself be laughed out of

good intentions because of ridiculous accessories. The idea at any rate was the sound one....

The vision of what ought to be done shone brightly while Mr. Britling and Mr. Wilkins maintained it. But presently under discouraging reminders that there were no rifles, no instructors, and, above all, the open hostility of the established authorities, it faded again....

Afterwards in other conversations Mr. Britling reverted to more modest ambitions.

"Is there no clerical work, no minor administrative work, a man might be used for?" he asked.

"Any old dug-out," said the man with the thin face, "any old doddering Colonel Newcome, is preferred to you in that matter...."

Mr. Britling emerged from his club about half-past three with his mind rather dishevelled and with his private determination to do something promptly for his country's needs blunted by a perplexing "How?" His search for doors and ways where no doors and ways existed went on with a gathering sense of futility.

He had a ridiculous sense of pique at being left out, like a child shut out from a room in which a vitally interesting game is being played.

"After all, it is our war," he said.

He caught the phrase as it dropped from his lips with a feeling that it said more than he intended. He turned it over and examined it, and the more he did so the more he was convinced of its truth and soundness....

§ 2

By night there was a new strangeness about London. The authorities were trying to suppress the more brilliant illumination of the chief thoroughfares, on account of the possibility of an air raid. Shopkeepers were being compelled to pull down their blinds, and many of the big standard lights were unlit. Mr. Britling thought these precautions were very fussy and unnecessary, and likely to lead to accidents amidst the traffic. But it gave a Rembrandtesque quality to the London scene, turned it into mysterious arrangements of brown shadows and cones and bars of light. At first many people were recalcitrant, and here and there a restaurant or a draper's window still blazed out

and broke the gloom. There were also a number of insubordinate automobiles with big head-lights. But the police were being unusually firm....

"It will all glitter again in a little time," he told himself.

He heard an old lady who was projecting from an offending automobile at Piccadilly Circus in hot dispute with a police officer. "Zeppelins indeed!" she said. "What nonsense! As if they would dare to come here! Who would let them, I should like to know?"

Probably a friend of Lady Frensham's, he thought. Still—the idea of Zeppelins over London did seem rather ridiculous to Mr. Britling. He would not have liked to have been caught talking of it himself.... There never had been Zeppelins over London. They were gas bags....

§ 3

On Wednesday morning Mr. Britling returned to the Dower House, and he was still a civilian unassigned.

In the hall he found a tall figure in khaki standing and reading The Times that usually lay upon the hall table. The figure turned at Mr. Britling's entry, and revealed the aquiline features of Mr. Lawrence Carmine. It was as if his friend had stolen a march on him.

But Carmine's face showed nothing of the excitement and patriotic satisfaction that would have seemed natural to Mr. Britling. He was white and jaded, as if he had not slept for many nights. "You see," he explained almost apologetically of the three stars upon his sleeve, "I used to be a captain of volunteers." He had been put in charge of a volunteer force which had been re-embodied and entrusted with the care of the bridges, gasworks, factories and railway tunnels, and with a number of other minor but necessary duties round about Easinghampton. "I've just got to shut up my house," said Captain Carmine, "and go into lodgings. I confess I hate it.... But anyhow it can't last six months.... But it's beastly.... Ugh!..."

He seemed disposed to expand that "Ugh," and then thought better of it. And presently Mr. Britling took control of the conversation.

His two days in London had filled him with matter, and he was glad to have something more than Hugh and Teddy and Mrs. Britling to talk it upon. What was happening now

in Great Britain, he declared, was adjustment. It was an attempt on the part of a great unorganised nation, an attempt, instinctive at present rather than intelligent, to readjust its government and particularly its military organisation to the new scale of warfare that Germany had imposed upon the world. For two strenuous decades the British navy had been growing enormously under the pressure of German naval preparations, but the British military establishment had experienced no corresponding expansion. It was true there had been a futile, rather foolishly conducted agitation for universal military service, but there had been no accumulation of material, no preparation of armament-making machinery, no planning and no foundations for any sort of organisation that would have facilitated the rapid expansion of the fighting forces of a country in a time of crisis. Such an idea was absolutely antagonistic to the mental habits of the British military caste. The German method of incorporating all the strength and resources of the country into one national fighting machine was quite strange to the British military mind—still. Even after a month of war. War had become the comprehensive business of the German nation; to the British it was an incidental adventure. In Germany the nation was militarised, in England the army was specialised. The nation for nearly every practical purpose got along without it. Just as political life had also become specialised.... Now suddenly we wanted a government to speak for every one, and an army of the whole people. How were we to find it?

Mr. Britling dwelt upon this idea of the specialised character of the British army and navy and government. It seemed to him to be the clue to everything that was jarring in the London spectacle. The army had been a thing aloof, for a special end. It had developed all the characteristics of a caste. It had very high standards along the lines of its specialisation, but it was inadaptable and conservative. Its exclusiveness was not so much a deliberate culture as a consequence of its detached function. It touched the ordinary social body chiefly through three other specialised bodies, the court, the church, and the stage. Apart from that it saw the great unofficial civilian world as something vague, something unsympathetic, something possibly antagonistic, which it comforted itself by snubbing when it dared and tricking when it could, something that projected members of Parliament towards it and was stingy about money. Directly one grasped how apart the army lived from the ordinary life of the community, from industrialism or from economic necessities, directly one understood that the great mass of Englishmen were simply "outsiders" to the War Office mind, just as they were "outsiders" to the political clique, one began to realise the complete unfitness of either government or War Office for the conduct of so great a national effort as was now needed. These people "up there" did not know anything of

the broad mass of English life at all, they did not know how or where things were made; when they wanted things they just went to a shop somewhere and got them. This was the necessary psychology of a small army under a clique government. Nothing else was to be expected. But now—somehow—the nation had to take hold of the government that it had neglected so long....

"You see," said Mr. Britling, repeating a phrase that was becoming more and more essential to his thoughts, "this is our war....

"Of course," said Mr. Britling, "these things are not going to be done without a conflict. We aren't going to take hold of our country which we have neglected so long without a lot of internal friction. But in England we can make these readjustments without revolution. It is our strength....

"At present England is confused—but it's a healthy confusion. It's astir. We have more things to defeat than just Germany....

"These hosts of recruits—weary, uncared for, besieging the recruiting stations. It's symbolical.... Our tremendous reserves of will and manhood. Our almost incredible insufficiency of direction....

"Those people up there have no idea of the Will that surges up in England. They are timid little manoeuvring people, afraid of property, afraid of newspapers, afraid of trade-unions. They aren't leading us against the Germans; they are just being shoved against the Germans by necessity...."

From this Mr. Britling broke away into a fresh addition to his already large collection of contrasts between England and Germany. Germany was a nation which has been swallowed up and incorporated by an army and an administration; the Prussian military system had assimilated to itself the whole German life. It was a State in a state of repletion, a State that had swallowed all its people. Britain was not a State. It was an unincorporated people. The British army, the British War Office, and the British administration had assimilated nothing; they were little old partial things; the British nation lay outside them, beyond their understanding and tradition; a formless new thing, but a great thing; and now this British nation, this real nation, the "outsiders," had to take up arms. Suddenly all the underlying ideas of that outer, greater English life beyond politics, beyond the services, were challenged, its tolerant good humour, its freedom, and its irresponsibility. It was not simply English life that was threatened; it was all the latitudes of democracy, it was every liberal idea and every liberty. It was civilisation in danger. The uncharted liberal system had been taken by the throat; it had to "make good" or perish....

"I went up to London expecting to be told what to do. There is no one to tell any one what to do.... Much less is there any one to compel us what to do....

"There's a War Office like a college during a riot, with its doors and windows barred; there's a government like a cockle boat in an Atlantic gale....

"One feels the thing ought to have come upon us like the sound of a trumpet. Instead, until now, it has been like a great noise, that we just listened to, in the next house.... And now slowly the nation awakes. London is just like a dazed sleeper waking up out of a deep sleep to fire and danger, tumult and cries for help, near at hand. The streets give you exactly that effect. People are looking about and listening. One feels that at any moment, in a pause, in a silence, there may come, from far away, over the houses, faint and little, the boom of guns or the small outcries of little French or Belgian villages in agony...."

Such was the gist of Mr. Britling's discourse.

He did most of the table talk, and all that mattered. Teddy was an assenting voice, Hugh was silent and apparently a little inattentive, Mrs. Britling was thinking of the courses and the servants and the boys, and giving her husband only half an ear, Captain Carmine said little and seemed to be troubled by some disagreeable preoccupation. Now and then he would endorse or supplement the things Mr. Britling was saying. Thrice he remarked: "People still do not begin to understand."...