## § 4

It was only when they sat together in the barn court out of the way of Mrs. Britling and the children that Captain Carmine was able to explain his listless bearing and jaded appearance. He was suffering from a bad nervous shock. He had hardly taken over his command before one of his men had been killed—and killed in a manner that had left a scar upon his mind.

The man had been guarding a tunnel, and he had been knocked down by one train when crossing the line behind another. So it was that the bomb of Sarajevo killed its first victim in Essex. Captain Carmine had found the body. He had found the body in a cloudy moonlight; he had almost fallen over it; and his sensations and emotions had been eminently disagreeable. He had had to drag the body—it was very dreadfully mangled—off the permanent way, the damaged, almost severed head had twisted about very horribly in the uncertain light, and afterwards he had found his sleeves saturated with blood. He had not noted this at the time, and when he had discovered it he had been sick. He had thought the whole thing more horrible and hateful than any nightmare, but he had succeeded in behaving with a sufficient practicality to set an example to his men. Since this had happened he had not had an hour of dreamless sleep.

"One doesn't expect to be called upon like that," said Captain Carmine, "suddenly here in England.... When one is smoking after supper...."

Mr. Britling listened to this experience with distressed brows. All his talking and thinking became to him like the open page of a monthly magazine. Across it this bloody smear, this thing of red and black, was dragged....

## § 5

The smear was still bright red in Mr. Britling's thoughts when Teddy came to him.

"I must go," said Teddy, "I can't stop here any longer."

"Go where?"

"Into khaki. I've been thinking of it ever since the war began. Do you remember what you said when we were bullying off at hockey on Bank Holiday—the day before war was declared?"

Mr. Britling had forgotten completely; he made an effort. "What did I say?"

"You said, 'What the devil are we doing at this hockey? We ought to be drilling or shooting against those confounded Germans!' ... I've never forgotten it.... I ought to have done it before. I've been a scout-master. In a little while they will want officers. In London, I'm told, there are a lot of officers' training corps putting men through the work as quickly as possible.... If I could go...."

"What does Letty think?" said Mr. Britling after a pause. This was right, of course—the only right thing—and yet he was surprised.

"She says if you'd let her try to do my work for a time...."

"She *wants* you to go?"

"Of course she does," said Teddy. "She wouldn't like me to be a shirker.... But I can't unless you help."

"I'm quite ready to do that," said Mr. Britling. "But somehow I didn't think it of you. I hadn't somehow thought of *you*—"

"What *did* you think of me?" asked Teddy.

"It's bringing the war home to us.... Of course you ought to go—if you want to go."

He reflected. It was odd to find Teddy in this mood, strung up and serious and businesslike. He felt that in the past he had done Teddy injustice; this young man wasn't as trivial as he had thought him....

They fell to discussing ways and means; there might have to be a loan for Teddy's outfit, if he did presently secure a commission. And there were one or two other little matters.... Mr. Britling dismissed a ridiculous fancy that he was paying to send Teddy away to something that neither that young man nor Letty understood properly....

The next day Teddy vanished Londonward on his bicycle. He was going to lodge in London in order to be near his training. He was zealous. Never before had Teddy been zealous. Mrs. Teddy came to the Dower House for the correspondence, trying not to look self-conscious and important.

Two Mondays later a very bright-eyed, excited little boy came running to Mr. Britling, who was smoking after lunch in the rose garden. "Daddy!" squealed the small boy. "Teddy! In khaki!"

The other junior Britling danced in front of the hero, who was walking beside Mrs. Britling and trying not to be too aggressively a soldierly figure. He looked a very man in khaki and more of a boy than ever. Mrs. Teddy came behind, quietly elated.

Mr. Britling had a recurrence of that same disagreeable fancy that these young people didn't know exactly what they were going into. He wished he was in khaki himself; then he fancied this compunction wouldn't trouble him quite so much.

The afternoon with them deepened his conviction that they really didn't in the slightest degree understand. Life had been so good to them hitherto, that even the idea of Teddy's going off to the war seemed a sort of fun to them. It was just a thing he was doing, a serious, seriously amusing, and very creditable thing. It involved his dressing up in these unusual clothes, and receiving salutes in the street.... They discussed every possible aspect of his military outlook with the zest of children, who recount the merits of a new game. They were putting Teddy through his stages at a tremendous pace. In quite a little time he thought he would be given the chance of a commission.

"They want subalterns badly. Already they've taken nearly a third of our people," he said, and added with the wistfulness of one who glances at inaccessible delights: "one or two may get out to the front quite soon."

He spoke as a young actor might speak of a star part. And with a touch of the quality of one who longs to travel in strange lands.... One must be patient. Things come at last....

"If I'm killed she gets eighty pounds a year," Teddy explained among many other particulars.

He smiled—the smile of a confident immortal at this amusing idea.

"He's my little annuity," said Letty, also smiling, "dead or alive."

"We'll miss Teddy in all sorts of ways," said Mr. Britling.

"It's only for the duration of the war," said Teddy. "And Letty's very intelligent. I've done my best to chasten the evil in her."

"If you think you're going to get back your job after the war," said Letty, "you're very much mistaken. I'm going to raise the standard."

"*You*!" said Teddy, regarding her coldly, and proceeded ostentatiously to talk of other things.

**§ 6**

"Hugh's going to be in khaki too," the elder junior told Teddy. "He's too young to go out in Kitchener's army, but he's joined the Territorials. He went off on Thursday.... I wish Gilbert and me was older...."

Mr. Britling had known his son's purpose since the evening of Teddy's announcement.

Hugh had come to his father's study as he was sitting musing at his writing-desk over the important question whether he should continue his "Examination of War" uninterruptedly, or whether he should not put that on one side for a time and set himself to state as clearly as possible the not too generally recognised misfit between the will and strength of Britain on the one hand and her administrative and military organisation on the other. He felt that an enormous amount of human enthusiasm and energy was being refused and wasted; that if things went on as they were going there would continue to be a quite disastrous shortage of gear, and that some broadening change was needed immediately if the swift exemplary victory over Germany that his soul demanded was to be ensured. Suppose he were to write some noisy articles at once, an article, for instance, to be called "The War of the Mechanics" or "The War of Gear," and another on "Without Civil Strength there is no Victory." If he wrote such things would they be noted or would they just vanish indistinguishably into the general mental tumult? Would they be audible and helpful shouts, or just waste of shouting?... That at least was what he supposed himself to be thinking; it was, at any rate, the main current of his thinking; but all the same, just outside the circle of his attention a number of other things were dimly apprehended, bobbing up and down in the flood and ready at the slightest chance to swirl into the centre of his thoughts. There was, for instance, Captain Carmine in the moonlight lugging up a railway embankment something horrible, something loose and wet and warm that had very recently been a man. There was Teddy, serious and patriotic—filling a futile penman with incredulous respect. There was the thin-faced man at the club, and a curious satisfaction he had betrayed in the public disarrangement. And there was Hugh. Particularly there was Hugh, silent but watchful. The boy never babbled. He had his mother's gift of deep dark silences. Out of which she was wont to flash, a Black Princess waving a sword. He wandered for a little while among memories.... But Hugh

didn't come out like that, though it always seemed possible he might—perhaps he didn't come out because he was a son. Revelation to his father wasn't his business.... What was he thinking of it all? What was he going to do? Mr. Britling was acutely anxious that his son should volunteer; he was almost certain that he would volunteer, but there was just a little shadow of doubt whether some extraordinary subtlety of mind mightn't have carried the boy into a pacifist attitude. No! that was impossible. In the face of Belgium.... But as greatly—and far more deeply in the warm flesh of his being—did Mr. Britling desire that no harm, no evil should happen to Hugh....

The door opened, and Hugh came in....

Mr. Britling glanced over his shoulder with an affectation of indifference. "Hal-*lo!*" he said. "What do you want?"

Hugh walked awkwardly to the hearthrug.

"Oh!" he said in an off-hand tone; "I suppose I've got to go soldiering for a bit. I just thought—I'd rather like to go off with a man I know to-morrow...."

Mr. Britling's manner remained casual.

"It's the only thing to do now, I'm afraid," he said.

He turned in his chair and regarded his son. "What do you mean to do? O.T.C.?"

"I don't think I should make much of an officer. I hate giving orders to other people. We thought we'd just go together into the Essex Regiment as privates...."

There was a little pause. Both father and son had rehearsed this scene in their minds several times, and now they found that they had no use for a number of sentences that had been most effective in these rehearsals. Mr. Britling scratched his cheek with the end of his pen. "I'm glad you want to go, Hugh," he said.

"I *don't* want to go," said Hugh with his hands deep in his pockets. "I want to go and work with Cardinal. But this job has to be done by every one. Haven't you been saying as much all day?... It's like turning out to chase a burglar or suppress a mad dog. It's like necessary sanitation...."

"You aren't attracted by soldiering?"

"Not a bit. I won't pretend it, Daddy. I think the whole business is a bore. Germany seems to me now just like some heavy horrible dirty mass that has fallen across Belgium and France. We've got to shove the stuff back again. That's all...."

He volunteered some further remarks to his father's silence.

"You know I can't get up a bit of tootle about this business," he said. "I think killing people or getting killed is a thoroughly nasty habit.... I expect my share will be just drilling and fatigue duties and route marches, and loafing here in England...."

"You can't possibly go out for two years," said Mr. Britling, as if he regretted it.

A slight hesitation appeared in Hugh's eyes. "I suppose not," he said.

"Things ought to be over by then—anyhow," Mr. Britling added, betraying his real feelings.

"So it's really just helping at the furthest end of the shove," Hugh endorsed, but still with that touch of reservation in his manner....

The pause had the effect of closing the theoretical side of the question. "Where do you propose to enlist?" said Mr. Britling, coming down to practical details.

**§ 7**

The battle of the Marne passed into the battle of the Aisne, and then the long lines of the struggle streamed north-westward until the British were back in Belgium failing to clutch Menin and then defending Ypres. The elation of September followed the bedazzlement and dismay of August into the chapter of forgotten moods; and Mr. Britling's sense of the magnitude, the weight and duration of this war beyond all wars, increased steadily. The feel of it was less and less a feeling of crisis and more and more a feeling of new conditions. It wasn't as it had seemed at first, the end of one human phase and the beginning of another; it was in itself a phase. It was a new way of living. And still he could find no real point of contact for himself with it all except the point of his pen. Only at his writing-desk, and more particularly at night, were the great presences of the conflict his. Yet he was always desiring some more personal and physical participation.

Hugh came along one day in October in an ill-fitting uniform, looking already coarser in fibre and with a nose scorched red by the autumnal sun. He said the life was rough, but it made him feel extraordinarily well; perhaps man was made to toil until he dropped asleep from exhaustion, to fast for ten or twelve hours and then eat like a wolf. He was acquiring a taste for Woodbine cigarettes, and a heady variety of mineral waters called Monsters. He feared promotion; he felt he could never take the high line with other human beings demanded of a corporal. He was still trying to read a little

chemistry and crystallography, but it didn't "go with the life." In the scanty leisure of a recruit in training it was more agreeable to lie about and write doggerel verses and draw caricatures of the men in one's platoon. Invited to choose what he liked by his family, he demanded a large tuckbox such as he used to have at school, only "*much* larger," and a big tin of insect powder. It must be able to kill ticks....

When he had gone, the craving for a personal share in the nation's physical exertions became overpowering in Mr. Britling. He wanted, he felt, to "get his skin into it." He had decided that the volunteer movement was a hopeless one. The War Office, after a stout resistance to any volunteer movement at all, decided to recognise it in such a manner as to make it ridiculous. The volunteers were to have no officers and no uniforms that could be remotely mistaken for those of the regulars, so that in the event of an invasion the Germans would be able to tell what they had to deal with miles away. Wilkins found his conception of a whole nation, all enrolled, all listed and badged according to capacity, his dream of every one falling into place in one great voluntary national effort, treated as the childish dreaming of that most ignorant of all human types, a "novelist." *Punch* was delicately funny about him; he was represented as wearing a preposterous cocked hat of his own design, designing cocked hats for every one. Wilkins was told to "shut up" in a multitude of anonymous letters, and publicly and privately to "leave things to Kitchener." To bellow in loud clear tones "leave things to Kitchener," and to depart for the theatre or the river or an automobile tour, was felt very generally at that time to be the proper conduct for a patriot. There was a very general persuasion that to become a volunteer when one ought to be just modestly doing nothing at all, was in some obscure way a form of disloyalty....

So Mr. Britling was out of conceit with volunteering, and instead he went and was duly sworn and entrusted with the badge of a special constable. The duties of a special constable were chiefly not to understand what was going on in the military sphere, and to do what he was told in the way of watching and warding conceivably vulnerable points. He had also to be available in the event of civil disorder. Mr. Britling was provided with a truncheon and sent out to guard various culverts, bridges, and fords in the hilly country to the north-westward of Matching's Easy. It was never very clear to him what he would do if he found a motor-car full of armed enemies engaged in undermining a culvert, or treacherously deepening some strategic ford. He supposed he would either engage them in conversation, or hit them with his truncheon, or perhaps do both things simultaneously. But as he really did not believe for a moment that any human being was likely to tamper with the telegraphs, telephones, ways and appliances committed to his care, his uncertainty did not trouble him very much. He prowled the lonely lanes and paths in the darkness, and became better acquainted

with a multitude of intriguing little cries and noises that came from the hedges and coverts at night. One night he rescued a young leveret from a stoat, who seemed more than half inclined to give him battle for its prey until he cowed and defeated it with the glare of his electric torch....

As he prowled the countryside under the great hemisphere of Essex sky, or leant against fences or sat drowsily upon gates or sheltered from wind and rain under ricks or sheds, he had much time for meditation, and his thoughts went down and down below his first surface impressions of the war. He thought no longer of the rights and wrongs of this particular conflict but of the underlying forces in mankind that made war possible; he planned no more ingenious treaties and conventions between the nations, and instead he faced the deeper riddles of essential evil and of conceivable changes in the heart of man. And the rain assailed him and thorns tore him, and the soaked soft meadows bogged and betrayed his wandering feet, and the little underworld of the hedges and ditches hissed and squealed in the darkness and pursued and fled, and devoured or were slain.

And one night in April he was perplexed by a commotion among the pheasants and a barking of distant dogs, and then to his great astonishment he heard noises like a distant firework display and saw something like a phantom yellowish fountain-pen in the sky far away to the east lit intermittently by a quivering search-light and going very swiftly. And after he had rubbed his eyes and looked again, he realised that he was looking at a Zeppelin—a Zeppelin flying Londonward over Essex.

And all that night was wonder....

**§ 8**

While Mr. Britling was trying to find his duty in the routine of a special constable, Mrs. Britling set to work with great energy to attend various classes and qualify herself for Red Cross work. And early in October came the great drive of the Germans towards Antwerp and the sea, the great drive that was apparently designed to reach Calais, and which swept before it multitudes of Flemish refugees. There was an exodus of all classes from Antwerp into Holland and England, and then a huge process of depopulation in Flanders and the Pas de Calais. This flood came to the eastern and southern parts of England and particularly to London, and there hastily improvised organisations distributed it to a number of local committees, each of which took a share of the refugees, hired and furnished unoccupied houses for the use of the

penniless, and assisted those who had means into comfortable quarters. The Matching's Easy committee found itself with accommodation for sixty people, and with a miscellaneous bag of thirty individuals entrusted to its care, who had been part of the load of a little pirate steam-boat from Ostend. There were two Flemish peasant families, and the rest were more or less middle-class refugees from Antwerp. They were brought from the station to the Tithe barn at Claverings, and there distributed, under the personal supervision of Lady Homartyn and her agent, among those who were prepared for their entertainment. There was something like competition among the would-be hosts; everybody was glad of the chance of "doing something," and anxious to show these Belgians what England thought of their plucky little country. Mr. Britling was proud to lead off a Mr. Van der Pant, a neat little bearded man in a black tail-coat, a black bowler hat, and a knitted muffler, with a large rucksack and a conspicuously foreign-looking bicycle, to the hospitalities of Dower House. Mr. Van der Pant had escaped from Antwerp at the eleventh hour, he had caught a severe cold and, it would seem, lost his wife and family in the process; he had much to tell Mr. Britling, and in his zeal to tell it he did not at once discover that though Mr. Britling knew French quite well he did not know it very rapidly.

The dinner that night at the Dower House marked a distinct fresh step in the approach of the Great War to the old habits and securities of Matching's Easy. The war had indeed filled every one's mind to the exclusion of all other topics since its very beginning; it had carried off Herr Heinrich to Germany, Teddy to London, and Hugh to Colchester, it had put a special brassard round Mr. Britling's arm and carried him out into the night, given Mrs. Britling several certificates, and interrupted the frequent visits and gossip of Mr. Lawrence Carmine; but so far it had not established a direct contact between the life of Matching's Easy and the grim business of shot, shell, and bayonet at the front. But now here was the Dower House accomplishing wonderful idioms in Anglo-French, and an animated guest telling them—sometimes one understood clearly and sometimes the meaning was clouded—of men blown to pieces under his eyes, of fragments of human beings lying about in the streets; there was trouble over the expression *omoplate d'une femme*, until one of the youngsters got the dictionary and found out it was the shoulder-blade of a woman; of pools of blood—everywhere—and of flight in the darkness.

Mr. Van der Pant had been in charge of the dynamos at the Antwerp Power Station, he had been keeping the electrified wires in the entanglements "alive," and he had stuck to his post until the German high explosives had shattered his wires and rendered his dynamos useless. He gave vivid little pictures of the noises of the bombardment, of the dead lying casually in the open spaces, of the failure of the German guns to hit the

bridge of boats across which the bulk of the defenders and refugees escaped. He produced a little tourist's map of the city of Antwerp, and dotted at it with a pencil-case. "The—what do you call?—*obus*, ah, shells! fell, so and so and so." Across here he had fled on his *bécane*, and along here and here. He had carried off his rifle, and hid it with the rifles of various other Belgians between floor and ceiling of a house in Zeebrugge. He had found the pirate steamer in the harbour, its captain resolved to extract the uttermost fare out of every refugee he took to London. When they were all aboard and started they found there was no food except the hard ration biscuits of some Belgian soldiers. They had portioned this out like shipwrecked people on a raft.... The *mer* had been *calme*; thank Heaven! All night they had been pumping. He had helped with the pumps. But Mr. Van der Pant hoped still to get a reckoning with the captain of that ship.

Mr. Van der Pant had had shots at various Zeppelins. When the Zeppelins came to Antwerp everybody turned out on the roofs and shot at them. He was contemptuous of Zeppelins. He made derisive gestures to express his opinion of them. They could do nothing unless they came low, and if they came low you could hit them. One which ventured down had been riddled; it had had to drop all its bombs—luckily they fell in an open field—in order to make its lame escape. It was all nonsense to say, as the English papers did, that they took part in the final bombardment. Not a Zeppelin.... So he talked, and the Britling family listened and understood as much as they could, and replied and questioned in Anglo-French. Here was a man who but a few days ago had been steering his bicycle in the streets of Antwerp to avoid shell craters, pools of blood, and the torn-off arms and shoulder-blades of women. He had seen houses flaring, set afire by incendiary bombs, and once at a corner he had been knocked off his bicycle by the pouff of a bursting shell.... Not only were these things in the same world with us, they were sitting at our table.

He told one grim story of an invalid woman unable to move, lying in bed in her *appartement*, and of how her husband went out on the balcony to look at the Zeppelin. There was a great noise of shooting. Ever and again he would put his head back into the room and tell her things, and then after a time he was silent and looked in no more. She called to him, and called again. Becoming frightened, she raised herself by a great effort and peered through the glass. At first she was too puzzled to understand what had happened. He was hanging over the front of the balcony, with his head twisted oddly. Twisted and shattered. He had been killed by shrapnel fired from the outer fortifications....

These are the things that happen in histories and stories. They do not happen at Matching's Easy....

Mr. Van der Pant did not seem to be angry with the Germans. But he manifestly regarded them as people to be killed. He denounced nothing that they had done; he related. They were just an evil accident that had happened to Belgium and mankind. They had to be destroyed. He gave Mr. Britling an extraordinary persuasion that knives were being sharpened in every cellar in Brussels and Antwerp against the day of inevitable retreat, of a resolution to exterminate the invader that was far too deep to be vindictive.... And the man was most amazingly unconquered. Mr. Britling perceived the label on his habitual dinner wine with a slight embarrassment. "Do you care," he asked, "to drink a German wine? This is Berncasteler from the Moselle." Mr. Van der Pant reflected. "But it is a good wine," he said. "After the peace it will be Belgian.... Yes, if we are to be safe in the future from such a war as this, we must have our boundaries right up to the Rhine."

So he sat and talked, flushed and, as it were, elated by the vividness of all that he had undergone. He had no trace of tragic quality, no hint of subjugation. But for his costume and his trimmed beard and his language he might have been a Dubliner or a Cockney.

He was astonishingly cut off from all his belongings. His house in Antwerp was abandoned to the invader; valuables and cherished objects very skilfully buried in the garden; he had no change of clothing except what the rucksack held. His only footwear were the boots he came in. He could not get on any of the slippers in the house, they were all too small for him, until suddenly Mrs. Britling bethought herself of Herr Heinrich's pair, still left unpacked upstairs. She produced them, and they fitted exactly. It seemed only poetical justice, a foretaste of national compensations, to annex them to Belgium forthwith....

Also it became manifest that Mr. Van der Pant was cut off from all his family. And suddenly he became briskly critical of the English way of doing things. His wife and child had preceded him to England, crossing by Ostend and Folkestone a fortnight ago; her parents had come in August; both groups had been seized upon by improvised British organisations and very thoroughly and completely lost. He had written to the Belgian Embassy and they had referred him to a committee in London, and the committee had begun its services by discovering a Madame Van der Pant hitherto unknown to him at Camberwell, and displaying a certain suspicion and hostility when he said she would not do. There had been some futile telegrams. "What," asked Mr. Van der Pant, "ought one to do?"

Mr. Britling temporised by saying he would "make inquiries," and put Mr. Van der Pant off for two days. Then he decided to go up to London with him and "make inquiries on

the spot." Mr. Van der Pant did not discover his family, but Mr. Britling discovered the profound truth of a comment of Herr Heinrich's which he had hitherto considered utterly trivial, but which had nevertheless stuck in his memory. "The English," Herr Heinrich had said, "do not understanding indexing. It is the root of all good organisation."

Finally, Mr. Van der Pant adopted the irregular course of asking every Belgian he met if they had seen any one from his district in Antwerp, if they had heard of the name of "Van der Pant," if they had encountered So-and-so or So-and-so. And by obstinacy and good fortune he really got on to the track of Madame Van der Pant; she had been carried off into Kent, and a day later the Dower House was the scene of a happy reunion. Madame was a slender lady, dressed well and plainly, with a Belgian common sense and a Catholic reserve, and André was like a child of wax, delicate and charming and unsubstantial. It seemed incredible that he could ever grow into anything so buoyant and incessant as his father. The Britling boys had to be warned not to damage him. A sitting-room was handed over to the Belgians for their private use, and for a time the two families settled into the Dower House side by side. Anglo-French became the table language of the household. It hampered Mr. Britling very considerably. And both families set themselves to much unrecorded observation, much unspoken mutual criticism, and the exercise of great patience. It was tiresome for the English to be tied to a language that crippled all spontaneous talk; these linguistic gymnastics were fun to begin with, but soon they became very troublesome; and the Belgians suspected sensibilities in their hosts and a vast unwritten code of etiquette that did not exist; at first they were always waiting, as it were, to be invited or told or included; they seemed always deferentially backing out from intrusions. Moreover, they would not at first reveal what food they liked or what they didn't like, or whether they wanted more or less.... But these difficulties were soon smoothed away, they Anglicised quickly and cleverly. André grew bold and cheerful, and lost his first distrust of his rather older English playmates. Every day at lunch he produced a new, carefully prepared piece of English, though for some time he retained a marked preference for "Good morning, Saire," and "Thank you very mush," over all other locutions, and fell back upon them on all possible and many impossible occasions. And he could do some sleight-of-hand tricks with remarkable skill and humour, and fold paper with quite astonishing results. Meanwhile Mr. Van der Pant sought temporary employment in England, went for long rides upon his bicycle, exchanged views with Mr. Britling upon a variety of subjects, and became a wonderful player of hockey.

He played hockey with an extraordinary zest and nimbleness. Always he played in the tail coat, and the knitted muffler was never relinquished; he treated the game entirely as an occasion for quick tricks and personal agility; he bounded about the field like a kitten, he pirouetted suddenly, he leapt into the air and came down in new directions; his fresh-coloured face was alive with delight, the coat tails and the muffler trailed and swished about breathlessly behind his agility. He never passed to other players; he never realised his appointed place in the game; he sought simply to make himself a leaping screen about the ball as he drove it towards the goal. But André he would not permit to play at all, and Madame played like a lady, like a Madonna, like a saint carrying the instrument of her martyrdom. The game and its enthusiasms flowed round her and receded from her; she remained quite valiant but tolerant, restrained; doing her best to do the extraordinary things required of her, but essentially a being of passive dignities, living chiefly for them; Letty careering by her, keen and swift, was like a creature of a different species....

Mr. Britling cerebrated abundantly about these contrasts.

"What has been blown in among us by these German shells," he said, "is essentially a Catholic family. Blown clean out of its setting.... We who are really—Neo-Europeans....

"At first you imagine there is nothing separating us but language. Presently you find that language is the least of our separations. These people are people living upon fundamentally different ideas from ours, ideas far more definite and complete than ours. You imagine that home in Antwerp as something much more rounded off, much more closed in, a cell, a real social unit, a different thing altogether from this place of meeting. Our boys play cheerfully with all comers; little André hasn't learnt to play with any outside children at all. We must seem incredibly *open* to these Van der Pants. A house without sides.... Last Sunday I could not find out the names of the two girls who came on bicycles and played so well. They came with Kitty Westropp. And Van der Pant wanted to know how they were related to us. Or how was it they came?...

"Look at Madame. She's built on a fundamentally different plan from any of our womenkind here. Tennis, the bicycle, co-education, the two-step, the higher education of women.... Say these things over to yourself, and think of her. It's like talking of a nun in riding breeches. She's a specialised woman, specialising in womanhood, her sphere is the home. Soft, trailing, draping skirts, slow movements, a veiled face; for no Oriental veil could be more effectual than her beautiful Catholic quiet. Catholicism invented the invisible purdah. She is far more akin to that sweet little Indian lady with the wonderful robes whom Carmine brought over with her tall

husband last summer, than she is to Letty or Cissie. She, too, undertook to play hockey. And played it very much as Madame Van der Pant played it....

"The more I see of our hockey," said Mr. Britling, "the more wonderful it seems to me as a touchstone of character and culture and breeding...."

Mr. Manning, to whom he was delivering this discourse, switched him on to a new track by asking what he meant by "Neo-European."

"It's a bad phrase," said Mr. Britling. "I'll withdraw it. Let me try and state exactly what I have in mind. I mean something that is coming up in America and here and the Scandinavian countries and Russia, a new culture, an escape from the Levantine religion and the Catholic culture that came to us from the Mediterranean. Let me drop Neo-European; let me say Northern. We are Northerners. The key, the heart, the nucleus and essence of every culture is its conception of the relations of men and women; and this new culture tends to diminish the specialisation of women as women, to let them out from the cell of the home into common citizenship with men. It's a new culture, still in process of development, which will make men more social and co-operative and women bolder, swifter, more responsible and less cloistered. It minimises instead of exaggerating the importance of sex....

"And," said Mr. Britling, in very much the tones in which a preacher might say "Sixthly," "it is just all this Northern tendency that this world struggle is going to release. This war is pounding through Europe, smashing up homes, dispersing and mixing homes, setting Madame Van der Pant playing hockey, and André climbing trees with my young ruffians; it is killing young men by the million, altering the proportions of the sexes for a generation, bringing women into business and office and industry, destroying the accumulated wealth that kept so many of them in refined idleness, flooding the world with strange doubts and novel ideas...."

**§ 9**

But the conflict of manners and customs that followed the invasion of the English villages by French and Belgian refugees did not always present the immigrants as Catholics and the hosts as "Neo-European." In the case of Mr. Dimple it was the other way round. He met Mr. Britling in Claverings park and told him his troubles....

"Of course," he said, "we have to do our Utmost for Brave Little Belgium. I would be the last to complain of any little inconvenience one may experience in doing that. Still, I

must confess I think you and dear Mrs. Britling are fortunate, exceptionally fortunate, in the Belgians you have got. My guests—it's unfortunate— the man is some sort of journalist and quite—oh! much too much—an Atheist. An open positive one. Not simply Honest Doubt. I'm quite prepared for honest doubt nowadays. You and I have no quarrel over that. But he is aggressive. He makes remarks about miracles, quite derogatory remarks, and not always in French. Sometimes he almost speaks English. And in front of my sister. And he goes out, he says, looking for a Café. He never finds a Café, but he certainly finds every public house within a radius of miles. And he comes back smelling dreadfully of beer. When I drop a Little Hint, he blames the beer. He says it is not good beer—our good Essex beer! He doesn't understand any of our simple ways. He's sophisticated. The girls about here wear Belgian flags—and air their little bits of French. And he takes it as an encouragement. Only yesterday there was a scene. It seems he tried to kiss the Hickson girl at the inn—Maudie.... And his wife; a great big slow woman—in every way she is—Ample; it's dreadful even to seem to criticise, but I do so *wish* she would not see fit to sit down and nourish her baby in my poor old bachelor drawing-room—often at the most *unseasonable* times. And—so lavishly...."

Mr. Britling attempted consolations.

"But anyhow," said Mr. Dimple, "I'm better off than poor dear Mrs. Bynne. She secured two milliners. She insisted upon them. And their clothes were certainly beautifully made—even my poor old unworldly eye could tell that. And she thought two milliners would be so useful with a large family like hers. They certainly *said* they were milliners. But it seems—I don't know what we shall do about them.... My dear Mr. Britling, those young women are anything but milliners—anything but milliners...."

A faint gleam of amusement was only too perceptible through the good man's horror.

"Sirens, my dear Mr. Britling. Sirens. By profession."...

**§ 10**

October passed into November, and day by day Mr. Britling was forced to apprehend new aspects of the war, to think and rethink the war, to have his first conclusions checked and tested, twisted askew, replaced. His thoughts went far and wide and deeper—until all his earlier writing seemed painfully shallow to him, seemed a mere automatic response of obvious comments to the stimulus of the war's surprise. As his

ideas became subtler and profounder, they became more difficult to express; he talked less; he became abstracted and irritable at table. To two people in particular Mr. Britling found his real ideas inexpressible, to Mr. Direck and to Mr. Van der Pant.

Each of these gentlemen brought with him the implication or the intimation of a critical attitude towards England. It was all very well for Mr. Britling himself to be critical of England; that is an Englishman's privilege. To hear Mr. Van der Pant questioning British efficiency or to suspect Mr. Direck of high, thin American superiorities to war, was almost worse than to hear Mrs. Harrowdean saying hostile things about Edith. It roused an even acuter protective emotion.

In the case of Mr. Van der Pant matters were complicated by the difficulty of the language, which made anything but the crudest statements subject to incalculable misconception.

Mr. Van der Pant had not the extreme tactfulness of his so typically Catholic wife; he made it only too plain that he thought the British postal and telegraph service slow and slack, and the management of the Great Eastern branch lines wasteful and inefficient. He said the workmen in the fields and the workmen he saw upon some cottages near the junction worked slowlier and with less interest than he had ever seen any workman display in all his life before. He marvelled that Mr. Britling lit his house with acetylene and not electric light. He thought fresh eggs were insanely dear, and his opinion of Matching's Easy pig-keeping was uncomplimentary. The roads, he said, were not a means of getting from place to place, they were a *dédale*; he drew derisive maps with his finger on the table-cloth of the lane system about the Dower House. He was astonished that there was no Café in Matching's Easy; he declared that the "public house" to which he went with considerable expectation was no public house at all; it was just a sly place for drinking beer.... All these were things Mr. Britling might have remarked himself; from a Belgian refugee he found them intolerable.

He set himself to explain to Mr. Van der Pant firstly that these things did not matter in the slightest degree, the national attention, the national interest ran in other directions; and secondly that they were, as a matter of fact and on the whole, merits slightly disguised. He produced a pleasant theory that England is really not the Englishman's field, it is his breeding place, his resting place, a place not for efficiency but good humour. If Mr. Van der Pant were to make inquiries he would find there was scarcely a home in Matching's Easy that had not sent some energetic representative out of England to become one of the English of the world. England was the last place in which English energy was spent. These hedges, these dilatory roads were full of associations. There was a road that turned aside near Market Saffron to avoid Turk's

wood; it had been called Turk's wood first in the fourteenth century after a man of that name. He quoted Chesterton's happy verses to justify these winding lanes.

"The road turned first towards the left,

Where Perkin's quarry made the cleft;

The path turned next towards the right,

Because the mastiff used to bite...."

And again:

"And I should say they wound about

To find the town of Roundabout,

The merry town of Roundabout

That makes the world go round."

If our easy-going ways hampered a hard efficiency, they did at least develop humour and humanity. Our diplomacy at any rate had not failed us....

He did not believe a word of this stuff. His deep irrational love for England made him say these things.... For years he had been getting himself into hot water because he had been writing and hinting just such criticisms as Mr. Van der Pant expressed so bluntly.... But he wasn't going to accept foreign help in dissecting his mother....

And another curious effect that Mr. Van der Pant had upon Mr. Britling was to produce an obstinate confidence about the war and the nearness of the German collapse. He would promise Mr. Van der Pant that he should be back in Antwerp before May; that the Germans would be over the Rhine by July. He knew perfectly well that his ignorance of all the military conditions was unqualified, but still he could not restrain himself from this kind of thing so soon as he began to speak Entente Cordiale—Anglo-French, that is to say. Something in his relationship to Mr. Van der Pant obliged him to be acutely and absurdly the protecting British.... At times he felt like a conscious bankrupt talking off the hour of disclosure. But indeed all that Mr. Britling was trying to say against the difficulties of a strange language and an alien temperament, was that the honour of England would never be cleared until Belgium was restored and avenged....

While Mr. Britling was patrolling unimportant roads and entertaining Mr. Van der Pant with discourses upon the nearness of victory and the subtle estimableness of all that was indolent, wasteful and evasive in English life, the war was passing from its first

swift phases into a slower, grimmer struggle. The German retreat ended at the Aisne, and the long outflanking manoeuvres of both hosts towards the Channel began. The English attempts to assist Belgium in October came too late for the preservation of Antwerp, and after a long and complicated struggle in Flanders the British failed to outflank the German right, lost Ghent, Menin and the Belgian coast, but held Ypres and beat back every attempt of the enemy to reach Dunkirk and Calais. Meanwhile the smaller German colonies and islands were falling to the navy, the Australian battleship *Sydney* smashed the *Emden* at Cocos Island, and the British naval disaster of Coronel was wiped out by the battle of the Falklands. The Russians were victorious upon their left and took Lemberg, and after some vicissitudes of fortune advanced to Przemysl, occupying the larger part of Galicia; but the disaster of Tannenberg had broken their progress in East Prussia, and the Germans were pressing towards Warsaw. Turkey had joined the war, and suffered enormous losses in the Caucasus. The Dardanelles had been shelled for the first time, and the British were at Basra on the Euphrates.

**§ 11**

The Christmas of 1914 found England, whose landscape had hitherto been almost as peaceful and soldierless as Massachusetts, already far gone along the path of transformation into a country full of soldiers and munition makers and military supplies. The soldiers came first, on the well-known and greatly admired British principle of "first catch your hare" and then build your kitchen. Always before, Christmas had been a time of much gaiety and dressing up and prancing and two-stepping at the Dower House, but this year everything was too uncertain to allow of any gathering of guests. Hugh got leave for the day after Christmas, but Teddy was tied; and Cissie and Letty went off with the small boy to take lodgings near him. The Van der Pants had hoped to see an English Christmas at Matching's Easy, but within three weeks of Christmas Day Mr. Van der Pant found a job that he could do in Nottingham, and carried off his family. The two small boys cheered their hearts with paper decorations, but the Christmas Tree was condemned as too German, and it was discovered that Santa Claus had suddenly become Old Father Christmas again. The small boys discovered that the price of lead soldiers had risen, and were unable to buy electric torches, on which they had set their hearts. There was to have been a Christmas party at Claverings, but at the last moment Lady Homartyn had to hurry off

to an orphan nephew who had been seriously wounded near Ypres, and the light of Claverings was darkened.

Soon after Christmas there were rumours of an impending descent of the Headquarters staff of the South-Eastern army upon Claverings. Then Mr. Britling found Lady Homartyn back from France, and very indignant because after all the Headquarters were to go to Lady Wensleydale at Ladyholt. It was, she felt, a reflection upon Claverings. Lady Homartyn became still more indignant when presently the new armies, which were gathering now all over England like floods in a low-lying meadow, came pouring into the parishes about Claverings to the extent of a battalion and a Territorial battery. Mr. Britling heard of their advent only a day or two before they arrived; there came a bright young officer with an orderly, billeting; he was much exercised to get, as he expressed it several times, a quart into a pint bottle. He was greatly pleased with the barn. He asked the size of it and did calculations. He could "stick twenty-five men into it—easy." It would go far to solve his problems. He could manage without coming into the house at all. It was a ripping place. "No end."

"But beds," said Mr. Britling.

"Lord! they don't want *beds*," said the young officer....

The whole Britling family, who were lamenting the loss of their Belgians, welcomed the coming of the twenty-five with great enthusiasm. It made them feel that they were doing something useful once more. For three days Mrs. Britling had to feed her new lodgers—the kitchen motors had as usual gone astray—and she did so in a style that made their boastings about their billet almost insufferable to the rest of their battery. The billeting allowance at that time was ninepence a head, and Mr. Britling, ashamed of making a profit out of his country, supplied not only generous firing and lighting, but unlimited cigarettes, cards and games, illustrated newspapers, a cocoa supper with such little surprises as sprats and jam roly-poly, and a number of more incidental comforts. The men arrived fasting under the command of two very sage middle-aged corporals, and responded to Mrs. Britling's hospitalities by a number of good resolutions, many of which they kept. They never made noises after half-past ten, or at least only now and then when a singsong broke out with unusual violence; they got up and went out at five or six in the morning without a sound; they were almost inconveniently helpful with washing-up and tidying round.

In quite a little time Mrs. Britling's mind had adapted itself to the spectacle of half-a-dozen young men in khaki breeches and shirts performing their toilets in and about her scullery, or improvising an unsanctioned game of football between the hockey goals. These men were not the miscellaneous men of the new armies; they were the

earlier Territorial type with no heroics about them; they came from the midlands; and their two middle-aged corporals kept them well in hand and ruled them like a band of brothers. But they had an illegal side, that developed in directions that set Mr. Britling theorising. They seemed, for example, to poach by nature, as children play and sing. They possessed a promiscuous white dog. They began to add rabbits to their supper menu, unaccountable rabbits. One night there was a mighty smell of frying fish from the kitchen, and the cook reported trout. "Trout!" said Mr. Britling to one of the corporals; "now where did you chaps get trout?"

The "fisherman," they said, had got them with a hair noose. They produced the fisherman, of whom they were manifestly proud. It was, he explained, a method of fishing he had learnt when in New York Harbour. He had been a stoker. He displayed a confidence in Mr. Britling that made that gentleman an accessory after his offence, his very serious offence against pre-war laws and customs. It was plain that the trout were the trout that Mr. Pumshock, the stock-broker and amateur gentleman, had preserved so carefully in the Easy. Hitherto the countryside had been forced to regard Mr. Pumshock's trout with an almost superstitious respect. A year ago young Snooker had done a month for one of those very trout. But now things were different.

"But I don't really fancy fresh-water fish," said the fisherman. "It's just the ketchin' of 'em I like...."

And a few weeks later the trumpeter, an angel-faced freckled child with deep-blue eyes, brought in a dozen partridge eggs which he wanted Mary to cook for him....

The domesticity of the sacred birds, it was clear, was no longer safe in England....

Then again the big guns would go swinging down the road and into Claverings park, and perform various exercises with commendable smartness and a profound disregard for Lady Homartyn's known objection to any departure from the public footpath....

And one afternoon as Mr. Britling took his constitutional walk, a reverie was set going in his mind by the sight of a neglected-looking pheasant with a white collar. The world of Matching's Easy was getting full now of such elderly birds. Would *that* go on again after the war? He imagined his son Hugh as a grandfather, telling the little ones about parks and preserves and game laws, and footmen and butlers and the marvellous game of golf, and how, suddenly, Mars came tramping through the land in khaki and all these things faded and vanished, so that presently it was discovered they were gone....

---

## CHAPTER THE THIRD

## MALIGNITY

### § 1

And while the countryside of England changed steadily from its lax pacific amenity to the likeness of a rather slovenly armed camp, while long-fixed boundaries shifted and dissolved and a great irreparable wasting of the world's resources gathered way, Mr. Britling did his duty as a special constable, gave his eldest son to the Territorials, entertained Belgians, petted his soldiers in the barn, helped Teddy to his commission, contributed to war charities, sold out securities at a loss and subscribed to the War Loan, and thought, thought endlessly about the war.

He could think continuously day by day of nothing else. His mind was as caught as a galley slave, as unable to escape from tugging at this oar. All his universe was a magnetic field which oriented everything, whether he would have it so or not, to this one polar question.

His thoughts grew firmer and clearer; they went deeper and wider. His first superficial judgments were endorsed and deepened or replaced by others. He thought along the lonely lanes at night; he thought at his desk; he thought in bed; he thought in his bath; he tried over his thoughts in essays and leading articles and reviewed them and corrected them. Now and then came relaxation and lassitude, but never release. The war towered over him like a vigilant teacher, day after day, week after week, regardless of fatigue and impatience, holding a rod in its hand.

### § 2

Certain things had to be forced upon Mr. Britling because they jarred so greatly with his habits of mind that he would never have accepted them if he could have avoided doing so.

Notably he would not recognise at first the extreme bitterness of this war. He would not believe that the attack upon Britain and Western Europe generally expressed the concentrated emotion of a whole nation. He thought that the Allies were in conflict

with a system and not with a national will. He fought against the persuasion that the whole mass of a great civilised nation could be inspired by a genuine and sustained hatred. Hostility was an uncongenial thing to him; he would not recognise that the greater proportion of human beings are more readily hostile than friendly. He did his best to believe—in his "And Now War Ends" he did his best to make other people believe—that this war was the perverse exploit of a small group of people, of limited but powerful influences, an outrage upon the general geniality of mankind. The cruelty, mischief, and futility of war were so obvious to him that he was almost apologetic in asserting them. He believed that war had but to begin and demonstrate its quality among the Western nations in order to unify them all against its repetition. They would exclaim: "But we can't do things like this to one another!" He saw the aggressive imperialism of Germany called to account even by its own people; a struggle, a collapse, a liberal-minded conference of world powers, and a universal resumption of amiability upon a more assured basis of security. He believed—and many people in England believed with him—that a great section of the Germans would welcome triumphant Allies as their liberators from intolerable political obsessions.

The English because of their insularity had been political amateurs for endless generations. It was their supreme vice, it was their supreme virtue, to be easy-going. They had lived in an atmosphere of comedy, and denied in the whole tenor of their lives that life is tragic. Not even the Americans had been more isolated. The Americans had had their Indians, their negroes, their War of Secession. Until the Great War the Channel was as broad as the Atlantic for holding off every vital challenge. Even Ireland was away—a four-hour crossing. And so the English had developed to the fullest extent the virtues and vices of safety and comfort; they had a hatred of science and dramatic behaviour; they could see no reason for exactness or intensity; they disliked proceeding "to extremes." Ultimately everything would turn out all right. But they knew what it is to be carried into conflicts by energetic minorities and the trick of circumstances, and they were ready to understand the case of any other country which has suffered that fate. All their habits inclined them to fight good-temperedly and comfortably, to quarrel with a government and not with a people. It took Mr. Britling at least a couple of months of warfare to understand that the Germans were fighting in an altogether different spirit.

The first intimations of this that struck upon his mind were the news of the behaviour of the Kaiser and the Berlin crowd upon the declaration of war, and the violent treatment of the British subjects seeking to return to their homes. Everywhere such people had been insulted and ill-treated. It was the spontaneous expression of a long-

gathered bitterness. While the British ambassador was being howled out of Berlin, the German ambassador to England was taking a farewell stroll, quite unmolested, in St. James's Park.... One item that struck particularly upon Mr. Britling's imagination was the story of the chorus of young women who assembled on the railway platform of the station through which the British ambassador was passing to sing—to his drawn blinds—"Deutschland, Deutschland über Alles." Mr. Britling could imagine those young people, probably dressed more or less uniformly in white, with flushed faces and shining eyes, letting their voices go, full throated, in the modern German way....

And then came stories of atrocities, stories of the shooting of old men and the butchery of children by the wayside, stories of wounded men bayoneted or burnt alive, of massacres of harmless citizens, of looting and filthy outrages....

Mr. Britling did his utmost not to believe these things. They contradicted his habitual world. They produced horrible strains in his mind. They might, he hoped, be misreported so as to seem more violent or less justifiable than they were. They might be the acts of stray criminals, and quite disconnected from the normal operations of the war. Here and there some weak-minded officer may have sought to make himself terrible.... And as for the bombardment of cathedrals and the crime of Louvain, well, Mr. Britling was prepared to argue that Gothic architecture is not sacrosanct if military necessity cuts through it.... It was only after the war had been going on some months that Mr. Britling's fluttering, unwilling mind was pinned down by official reports and a cloud of witnesses to a definite belief in the grim reality of systematic rape and murder, destruction, dirtiness and abominable compulsions that blackened the first rush of the Prussians into Belgium and Champagne....

They came hating and threatening the lands they outraged. They sought occasion to do frightful deeds.... When they could not be frightful in the houses they occupied, then to the best of their ability they were destructive and filthy. The facts took Mr. Britling by the throat....

The first thing that really pierced Mr. Britling with the conviction that there was something essentially different in the English and the German attitude towards the war was the sight of a bale of German comic papers in the study of a friend in London. They were filled with caricatures of the Allies and more particularly of the English, and they displayed a force and quality of passion—an incredible force and quality of passion. Their amazing hate and their amazing filthiness alike overwhelmed Mr. Britling. There was no appearance of national pride or national dignity, but a bellowing patriotism and a limitless desire to hurt and humiliate. They spat. They were red in the face and they spat. He sat with these violent sheets in his hands—*ashamed*.

"But I say!" he said feebly. "It's the sort of thing that might come out of a lunatic asylum...."

One incredible craving was manifest in every one of them. The German caricaturist seemed unable to represent his enemies except in extremely tight trousers or in none; he was equally unable to represent them without thrusting a sword or bayonet, spluttering blood, into the more indelicate parts of their persons. This was the *leit-motif* of the war as the German humorists presented it. "But," said Mr. Britling, "these things can't represent anything like the general state of mind in Germany."

"They do," said his friend.

"But it's blind fury—at the dirt-throwing stage."

"The whole of Germany is in that blind fury," said his friend. "While we are going about astonished and rather incredulous about this war, and still rather inclined to laugh, that's the state of mind of Germany.... There's a sort of deliberation in it. They think it gives them strength. They *want* to foam at the mouth. They do their utmost to foam more. They write themselves up. Have you heard of the 'Hymn of Hate'?"

Mr. Britling had not.

"There was a translation of it in last week's *Spectator*.... This is the sort of thing we are trying to fight in good temper and without extravagance. Listen, Britling!

"*You* will we hate with a lasting hate;

We will never forgo our hate—

Hate by water and hate by land,

Hate of the head and hate of the hand,

Hate of the hammer and hate of the crown,

Hate of seventy millions, choking down;

We love as one, we hate as one,

We have *one* foe, and one alone—

ENGLAND!"

He read on to the end.

"Well," he said when he had finished reading, "what do you think of it?"

"I want to feel his bumps," said Mr. Britling after a pause. "It's incomprehensible."

"They're singing that up and down Germany. Lissauer, I hear, has been decorated...."

"It's—stark malignity," said Mr. Britling. "What have we done?"

"It's colossal. What is to happen to the world if these people prevail?"

"I can't believe it—even with this evidence before me.... No! I want to feel their bumps...."

**§ 3**

"You see," said Mr. Britling, trying to get it into focus, "I have known quite decent Germans. There must be some sort of misunderstanding.... I wonder what makes them hate us. There seems to me no reason in it."

"I think it is just thoroughness," said his friend. "They are at war. To be at war is to hate."

"That isn't at all my idea."

"We're not a thorough people. When we think of anything, we also think of its opposite. When we adopt an opinion we also take in a provisional idea that it is probably nearly as wrong as it is right. We are—atmospheric. They are concrete.... All this filthy, vile, unjust and cruel stuff is honest genuine war. We pretend war does not hurt. They know better.... The Germans are a simple honest people. It is their virtue. Possibly it is their only virtue...."

**§ 4**

Mr. Britling was only one of a multitude who wanted to feel the bumps of Germany at that time. The effort to understand a people who had suddenly become incredible was indeed one of the most remarkable facts in English intellectual life during the opening phases of the war. The English state of mind was unlimited astonishment. There was an enormous sale of any German books that seemed likely to illuminate the mystery of this amazing concentration of hostility; the works of Bernhardi, Treitschke, Nietzsche, Houston Stewart Chamberlain, became the material of countless articles and interminable discussions. One saw little clerks on the way to the office and

workmen going home after their work earnestly reading these remarkable writers. They were asking, just as Mr. Britling was asking, what it was the British Empire had struck against. They were trying to account for this wild storm of hostility that was coming at them out of Central Europe.

It was a natural next stage to this, when after all it became manifest that instead of there being a liberal and reluctant Germany at the back of imperialism and Junkerdom, there was apparently one solid and enthusiastic people, to suppose that the Germans were in some distinctive way evil, that they were racially more envious, arrogant, and aggressive than the rest of mankind. Upon that supposition a great number of English people settled. They concluded that the Germans had a peculiar devil of their own—and had to be treated accordingly. That was the second stage in the process of national apprehension, and it was marked by the first beginnings of a spy hunt, by the first denunciation of naturalised aliens, and by some anti-German rioting among the mixed alien population in the East End. Most of the bakers in the East End of London were Germans, and for some months after the war began they went on with their trade unmolested. Now many of these shops were wrecked.... It was only in October that the British gave these first signs of a sense that they were fighting not merely political Germany but the Germans.

But the idea of a peculiar malignity in the German quality as a key to the broad issue of the war was even less satisfactory and less permanent in Mr. Britling's mind than his first crude opposition of militarism and a peaceful humanity as embodied respectively in the Central Powers and the Russo-Western alliance. It led logically to the conclusion that the extermination of the German peoples was the only security for the general amiability of the world, a conclusion that appealed but weakly to his essential kindliness. After all, the Germans he had met and seen were neither cruel nor hate-inspired. He came back to that obstinately. From the harshness and vileness of the printed word and the unclean picture, he fell back upon the flesh and blood, the humanity and sterling worth, of—as a sample—young Heinrich.

Who was moreover a thoroughly German young German—a thoroughly Prussian young Prussian.

At times young Heinrich alone stood between Mr. Britling and the belief that Germany and the whole German race was essentially wicked, essentially a canting robber nation. Young Heinrich became a sort of advocate for his people before the tribunal of Mr. Britling's mind. (And on his shoulder sat an absurdly pampered squirrel.) s fresh, pink, sedulous face, very earnest, adjusting his glasses, saying "Please," intervened and insisted upon an arrest of judgment....

Since the young man's departure he had sent two postcards of greeting directly to the "Familie Britling," and one letter through the friendly intervention of Mr. Britling's American publisher. Once also he sent a message through a friend in Norway. The postcards simply recorded stages in the passage of a distraught pacifist across Holland to his enrolment. The letter by way of America came two months later. He had been converted into a combatant with extreme rapidity. He had been trained for three weeks, had spent a fortnight in hospital with a severe cold, and had then gone to Belgium as a transport driver—his father had been a horse-dealer and he was familiar with horses. "If anything happens to me," he wrote, "please send my violin at least very carefully to my mother." It was characteristic that he reported himself as very comfortably quartered in Courtrai with "very nice people." The niceness involved restraints. "Only never," he added, "do we talk about the war. It is better not to do so." He mentioned the violin also in the later communication through Norway. Therein he lamented the lost fleshpots of Courtrai. He had been in Posen, and now he was in the Carpathians, up to his knees in snow and "very uncomfortable...."

And then abruptly all news from him ceased.

Month followed month, and no further letter came.

"Something has happened to him. Perhaps he is a prisoner...."

"I hope our little Heinrich hasn't got seriously damaged.... He may be wounded...."

"Or perhaps they stop his letters.... Very probably they stop his letters."

**§ 5**

Mr. Britling would sit in his armchair and stare at his fire, and recall conflicting memories of Germany—of a pleasant land, of friendly people. He had spent many a jolly holiday there. So recently as 1911 all the Britling family had gone up the Rhine from Rotterdam, had visited a string of great cities and stayed for a cheerful month of sunshine at Neunkirchen in the Odenwald.

The little village perches high among the hills and woods, and at its very centre is the inn and the linden tree and—Adam Meyer. Or at least Adam Meyer *was* there. Whether he is there now, only the spirit of change can tell; if he live to be a hundred no friendly English will ever again come tramping along by the track of the Blaue Breiecke or the

Weisse Streiche to enjoy his hospitality; there are rivers of blood between, and a thousand memories of hate....

It was a village distended with hospitalities. Not only the inn but all the houses about the place of the linden tree, the shoe-maker's, the post-mistress's, the white house beyond, every house indeed except the pastor's house, were full of Adam Meyer's summer guests. And about it and over it went and soared Adam Meyer, seeing they ate well, seeing they rested well, seeing they had music and did not miss the moonlight—a host who forgot profit in hospitality, an inn-keeper with the passion of an artist for his inn.

Music, moonlight, the simple German sentiment, the hearty German voices, the great picnic in a Stuhl Wagen, the orderly round games the boys played with the German children, and the tramps and confidences Hugh had with Kurt and Karl, and at last a crowning jollification, a dance, with some gipsy musicians whom Mr. Britling discovered, when the Germans taught the English various entertaining sports with baskets and potatoes and forfeits and the English introduced the Germans to the licence of the two-step. And everybody sang "Britannia, Rule the Waves," and "Deutschland, Deutschland über Alles," and Adam Meyer got on a chair and made a tremendous speech more in dialect than ever, and there was much drinking of beer and sirops in the moonlight under the linden....

Afterwards there had been a periodic sending of postcards and greetings, which indeed only the war had ended.

Right pleasant people those Germans had been, sun and green-leaf lovers, for whom "Frisch Auf" seemed the most natural of national cries. Mr. Britling thought of the individual Germans who had made up the assembly, of the men's amusingly fierce little hats of green and blue with an inevitable feather thrust perkily into the hatband behind, of the kindly plumpnesses behind their turned-up moustaches, of the blonde, sedentary women, very wise about the comforts of life and very kind to the children, of their earnest pleasure in landscape and Art and Great Writers, of their general frequent desire to sing, of their plasticity under the directing hands of Adam Meyer. He thought of the mellow south German landscape, rolling away broad and fair, of the little clean red-roofed townships, the old castles, the big prosperous farms, the neatly marked pedestrian routes, the hospitable inns, and the artless abundant Aussichtthurms....

He saw all those memories now through a veil of indescribable sadness—as of a world lost, gone down like the cities of Lyonesse beneath deep seas....

Right pleasant people in a sunny land! Yet here pressing relentlessly upon his mind were the murders of Visé, the massacres of Dinant, the massacres of Louvain, murder red-handed and horrible upon an inoffensive people, foully invaded, foully treated; murder done with a sickening cant of righteousness and racial pretension....

The two pictures would not stay steadily in his mind together. When he thought of the broken faith that had poured those slaughtering hosts into the decent peace of Belgium, that had smashed her cities, burnt her villages and filled the pretty gorges of the Ardennes with blood and smoke and terror, he was flooded with self-righteous indignation, a self-righteous indignation that was indeed entirely Teutonic in its quality, that for a time drowned out his former friendship and every kindly disposition towards Germany, that inspired him with destructive impulses, and obsessed him with a desire to hear of death and more death and yet death in every German town and home....

**§ 6**

It will be an incredible thing to the happier reader of a coming age—if ever this poor record of experience reaches a reader in the days to come—to learn how much of the mental life of Mr. Britling was occupied at this time with the mere horror and atrocity of warfare. It is idle and hopeless to speculate now how that future reader will envisage this war; it may take on broad dramatic outlines, it may seem a thing, just, logical, necessary, the burning of many barriers, the destruction of many obstacles. Mr. Britling was too near to the dirt and pain and heat for any such broad landscape consolations. Every day some new detail of evil beat into his mind. Now it would be the artless story of some Belgian refugee. There was a girl from Alost in the village for example, who had heard the fusillade that meant the shooting of citizens, the shooting of people she had known, she had seen the still blood-stained wall against which two murdered cousins had died, the streaked sand along which their bodies had been dragged; three German soldiers had been quartered in her house with her and her invalid mother, and had talked freely of the massacres in which they had been employed. One of them was in civil life a young schoolmaster, and he had had, he said, to kill a woman and a baby. The girl had been incredulous. Yes, he had done so! Of course he had done so! His officer had made him do it, had stood over him. He could do nothing but obey. But since then he had been unable to sleep, unable to forget.

"We had to punish the people," he said. "They had fired on us."

And besides, his officer had been drunk. It had been impossible to argue. His officer had an unrelenting character at all times....

Over and over again Mr. Britling would try to imagine that young schoolmaster soldier at Alost. He imagined with a weak staring face and watery blue eyes behind his glasses, and that memory of murder....

Then again it would be some incident of death and mutilation in Antwerp, that Van der Pant described to him. The Germans in Belgium were shooting women frequently, not simply for grave spying but for trivial offences.... Then came the battleship raid on Whitby and Scarborough, and the killing among other victims of a number of children on their way to school. This shocked Mr. Britling absurdly, much more than the Belgian crimes had done. They were *English* children. At home!... The drowning of a great number of people on a torpedoed ship full of refugees from Flanders filled his mind with pitiful imaginings for days. The Zeppelin raids, with their slow crescendo of blood-stained futility, began before the end of 1914.... It was small consolation for Mr. Britling to reflect that English homes and women and children were, after all, undergoing only the same kind of experience that our ships have inflicted scores of times in the past upon innocent people in the villages of Africa and Polynesia....

Each month the war grew bitterer and more cruel. Early in 1915 the Germans began their submarine war, and for a time Mr. Britling's concern was chiefly for the sailors and passengers of the ships destroyed. He noted with horror the increasing indisposition of the German submarines to give any notice to their victims; he did not understand the grim reasons that were turning every submarine attack into a desperate challenge of death. For the Germans under the seas had pitted themselves against a sea power far more resourceful, more steadfast and skilful, sterner and more silent, than their own. It was not for many months that Mr. Britling learnt the realities of the submarine blockade. Submarine after submarine went out of the German harbours into the North Sea, never to return. No prisoners were reported, no boasting was published by the British fishers of men; U boat after U boat vanished into a chilling mystery.... Only later did Mr. Britling begin to hear whispers and form ideas of the noiseless, suffocating grip that sought through the waters for its prey.

The *Falaba* crime, in which the German sailors were reported to have jeered at the drowning victims in the water, was followed by the sinking of the *Lusitania*. At that a wave of real anger swept through the Empire. Hate was begetting hate at last. There were violent riots in Great Britain and in South Africa. Wretched little German hairdressers and bakers and so forth fled for their lives, to pay for the momentary

satisfaction of the Kaiser and Herr Ballin. Scores of German homes in England were wrecked and looted; hundreds of Germans maltreated. War is war. Hard upon the *Lusitania* storm came the publication of the Bryce Report, with its relentless array of witnesses, its particulars of countless acts of cruelty and arrogant unreason and uncleanness in Belgium and the occupied territory of France. Came also the gasping torture of "gas," the use of flame jets, and a new exacerbation of the savagery of the actual fighting. For a time it seemed as though the taking of prisoners along the western front would cease. Tales of torture and mutilation, tales of the kind that arise nowhere and out of nothing, and poison men's minds to the most pitiless retaliations, drifted along the opposing fronts....

The realities were evil enough without any rumours. Over various dinner-tables Mr. Britling heard this and that first-hand testimony of harshness and spite. One story that stuck in his memory was of British prisoners on the journey into Germany being put apart at a station from their French companions in misfortune, and forced to "run the gauntlet" back to their train between the fists and bayonets of files of German soldiers. And there were convincing stories of the same prisoners robbed of overcoats in bitter weather, baited with dogs, separated from their countrymen, and thrust among Russians and Poles with whom they could hold no speech. So Lissauer's Hate Song bore its fruit in a thousand cruelties to wounded and defenceless men. The English had cheated great Germany of another easy victory like that of '71. They had to be punished. That was all too plainly the psychological process. At one German station a woman had got out of a train and crossed a platform to spit on the face of a wounded Englishman.... And there was no monopoly of such things on either side. At some journalistic gathering Mr. Britling met a little white-faced, resolute lady who had recently been nursing in the north of France. She told of wounded men lying among the coal of coal-sheds, of a shortage of nurses and every sort of material, of an absolute refusal to permit any share in such things to reach the German "swine." ... "Why have they come here? Let our own boys have it first. Why couldn't they stay in their own country? Let the filth die."

Two soldiers impressed to carry a wounded German officer on a stretcher had given him a "joy ride," pitching him up and down as one tosses a man in a blanket. "He was lucky to get off with that."...

"All *our* men aren't angels," said a cheerful young captain back from the front. "If you had heard a little group of our East London boys talking of what they meant to do when they got into Germany, you'd feel anxious...."

"But that was just talk," said Mr. Britling weakly, after a pause....

There were times when Mr. Britling's mind was imprisoned beyond any hope of escape amidst such monstrous realities....

He was ashamed of his one secret consolation. For nearly two years yet Hugh could not go out to it. There would surely be peace before that....

**§ 7**

Tormenting the thought of Mr. Britling almost more acutely than this growing tale of stupidly inflicted suffering and waste and sheer destruction was the collapse of the British mind from its first fine phase of braced-up effort into a state of bickering futility.

Too long had British life been corrupted by the fictions of loyalty to an uninspiring and alien Court, of national piety in an official Church, of freedom in a politician-rigged State, of justice in an economic system where the advertiser, the sweater and usurer had a hundred advantages over the producer and artisan, to maintain itself now steadily at any high pitch of heroic endeavour. It had bought its comfort with the demoralisation of its servants. It had no completely honest organs; its spirit was clogged by its accumulated insincerities. Brought at last face to face with a bitter hostility and a powerful and unscrupulous enemy, an enemy socialistic, scientific and efficient to an unexampled degree, it seemed indeed to be inspired for a time by an unwonted energy and unanimity. Youth and the common people shone. The sons of every class went out to fight and die, full of a splendid dream of this war. Easy-going vanished from the foreground of the picture. But only to creep back again as the first inspiration passed. Presently the older men, the seasoned politicians, the owners and hucksters, the charming women and the habitual consumers, began to recover from this blaze of moral exaltation. Old habits of mind and procedure reasserted themselves. The war which had begun so dramatically missed its climax; there was neither heroic swift defeat nor heroic swift victory. There was indecision; the most trying test of all for an undisciplined people. There were great spaces of uneventful fatigue. Before the Battle of the Yser had fully developed the dramatic quality had gone out of the war. It had ceased to be either a tragedy or a triumph; for both sides it became a monstrous strain and wasting. It had become a wearisome thrusting against a pressure of evils....

Under that strain the dignity of England broke, and revealed a malignity less focussed and intense than the German, but perhaps even more distressing. No paternal government had organised the British spirit for patriotic ends; it became now peevish

and impatient, like some ill-trained man who is sick, it directed itself no longer against the enemy alone but fitfully against imagined traitors and shirkers; it wasted its energies in a deepening and spreading net of internal squabbles and accusations. Now it was the wily indolence of the Prime Minister, now it was the German culture of the Lord Chancellor, now the imaginative enterprise of the First Lord of the Admiralty that focussed a vindictive campaign. There began a hunt for spies and of suspects of German origin in every quarter except the highest; a denunciation now of "traitors," now of people with imaginations, now of scientific men, now of the personal friend of the Commander-in-Chief, now of this group and then of that group.... Every day Mr. Britling read his three or four newspapers with a deepening disappointment.

When he turned from the newspaper to his post, he would find the anonymous letter-writer had been busy....

Perhaps Mr. Britling had remarked that Germans were after all human beings, or that if England had listened to Matthew Arnold in the 'eighties our officers by this time might have added efficiency to their courage and good temper. Perhaps he had himself put a touch of irritant acid into his comment. Back flared the hate. "Who are *you*, Sir? What are *you*, Sir? What right have *you*, Sir? What claim have *you*, Sir?"...

**§ 8**

"Life had a wrangling birth. On the head of every one of us rests the ancestral curse of fifty million murders."

So Mr. Britling's thoughts shaped themselves in words as he prowled one night in March, chill and melancholy, across a rushy meadow under an overcast sky. The death squeal of some little beast caught suddenly in a distant copse had set loose this train of thought. "Life struggling under a birth curse?" he thought. "How nearly I come back at times to the Christian theology!... And then, Redemption by the shedding of blood."

"Life, like a rebellious child, struggling out of the control of the hate which made it what it is."

But that was Mr. Britling's idea of Gnosticism, not of orthodox Christianity. He went off for a time into faded reminiscences of theological reading. What had been the Gnostic idea? That the God of the Old Testament was the Devil of the New? But that had been the idea of the Manichæans!...

Mr. Britling, between the black hedges, came back presently from his attempts to recall his youthful inquiries into man's ancient speculations, to the enduring riddles that have outlasted a thousand speculations. Has hate been necessary, and is it still necessary, and will it always be necessary? Is all life a war forever? The rabbit is nimble, lives keenly, is prevented from degenerating into a diseased crawling eater of herbs by the incessant ferret. Without the ferret of war, what would life become?... War is murder truly, but is not Peace decay?

It was during these prowling nights in the first winter of the war that Mr. Britling planned a new writing that was to go whole abysses beneath the facile superficiality of "And Now War Ends." It was to be called the "Anatomy of Hate." It was to deal very faithfully with the function of hate as a corrective to inefficiency. So long as men were slack, men must be fierce. This conviction pressed upon him....

In spite of his detestation of war Mr. Britling found it impossible to maintain that any sort of peace state was better than a state of war. If wars produced destructions and cruelties, peace could produce indolence, perversity, greedy accumulation and selfish indulgences. War is discipline for evil, but peace may be relaxation from good. The poor man may be as wretched in peace time as in war time. The gathering forces of an evil peace, the malignity and waste of war, are but obverse and reverse of the medal of ill-adjusted human relationships. Was there no Greater Peace possible; not a mere recuperative pause in killing and destruction, but a phase of noble and creative living, a phase of building, of discovery, of beauty and research? He remembered, as one remembers the dead, dreams he had once dreamt of the great cities, the splendid freedoms, of a coming age, of marvellous enlargements of human faculty, of a coming science that would be light and of art that could be power....

But would that former peace have ever risen to that?...

After all, had such visions ever been more than idle dreams? Had the war done more than unmask reality?...

He came to a gate and leant over it.

The darkness drizzled about him; he turned up his collar and watched the dim shapes of trees and hedges gather out of the night to meet the dismal dawn. He was cold and hungry and weary.

He may have drowsed; at least he had a vision, very real and plain, a vision very different from any dream of Utopia.

It seemed to him that suddenly a mine burst under a great ship at sea, that men shouted and women sobbed and cowered, and flares played upon the rain-pitted black waves; and then the picture changed and showed a battle upon land, and searchlights were flickering through the rain and shells flashed luridly, and men darkly seen in silhouette against red flames ran with fixed bayonets and slipped and floundered over the mud, and at last, shouting thinly through the wind, leapt down into the enemy trenches....

And then he was alone again staring over a wet black field towards a dim crest of shapeless trees.

**§ 9**

Abruptly and shockingly, this malignity of warfare, which had been so far only a festering cluster of reports and stories and rumours and suspicions, stretched out its arm into Essex and struck a barb of grotesque cruelty into the very heart of Mr. Britling. Late one afternoon came a telegram from Filmington-on-Sea, where Aunt Wilshire had been recovering her temper in a boarding-house after a round of visits in Yorkshire and the moorlands. And she had been "very seriously injured" by an overnight German air raid. It was a raid that had not been even mentioned in the morning's papers. She had asked to see him.

It was, ran the compressed telegraphic phrase, "advisable to come at once."

Mrs. Britling helped him pack a bag, and came with him to the station in order to drive the car back to the Dower House; for the gardener's boy who had hitherto attended to these small duties had now gone off as an unskilled labourer to some munition works at Chelmsford. Mr. Britling sat in the slow train that carried him across country to the junction for Filmington, and failed altogether to realise what had happened to the old lady. He had an absurd feeling that it was characteristic of her to intervene in affairs in this manner. She had always been so tough and unbent an old lady that until he saw her he could not imagine her as being really seriously and pitifully hurt....

But he found her in the hospital very much hurt indeed. She had been smashed in some complicated manner that left the upper part of her body intact, and lying slantingly upon pillows. Over the horror of bandaged broken limbs and tormented flesh below sheets and a counterpane were drawn. Morphia had been injected, he understood, to save her from pain, but presently it might be necessary for her to

suffer. She lay up in her bed with an effect of being enthroned, very white and still, her strong profile with its big nose and her straggling hair and a certain dignity gave her the appearance of some very important, very old man, of an aged pope for instance, rather than of an old woman. She had made no remark after they had set her and dressed her and put her to bed except "send for Hughie Britling, The Dower House, Matching's Easy. He is the best of the bunch." She had repeated the address and this commendation firmly over and over again, in large print as it were, even after they had assured her that a telegram had been despatched.

In the night, they said, she had talked of him.

He was not sure at first that she knew of his presence.

"Here I am, Aunt Wilshire," he said.

She gave no sign.

"Your nephew Hugh."

"Mean and preposterous," she said very distinctly.

But she was not thinking of Mr. Britling. She was talking of something else.

She was saying: "It should not have been known I was here. There are spies everywhere. Everywhere. There is a spy now—or a lump very like a spy. They pretend it is a hot-water bottle. Pretext.... Oh, yes! I admit—absurd. But I have been pursued by spies. Endless spies. Endless, endless spies. Their devices are almost incredible.... He has never forgiven me....

"All this on account of a carpet. A palace carpet. Over which I had no control. I spoke my mind. He knew I knew of it. I never concealed it. So I was hunted. For years he had meditated revenge. Now he has it. But at what a cost! And they call him Emperor. Emperor!

"His arm is withered; his son—imbecile. He will die—without dignity...."

Her voice weakened, but it was evident she wanted to say something more.

"I'm here," said Mr. Britling. "Your nephew Hughie."

She listened.

"Can you understand me?" he asked.

She became suddenly an earnest, tender human being. "My dear!" she said, and seemed to search for something in her mind and failed to find it.

"You have always understood me," she tried.

"You have always been a good boy to me, Hughie," she said, rather vacantly, and added after some moments of still reflection, "*au fond*."

After that she was silent for some minutes, and took no notice of his whispers.

Then she recollected what had been in her mind. She put out a hand that sought for Mr. Britling's sleeve.

"Hughie!"

"I'm here, Auntie," said Mr. Britling. "I'm here."

"Don't let him get at *your* Hughie.... Too good for it, dear. Oh! much—much too good.... People let these wars and excitements run away with them.... They put too much into them.... They aren't—they aren't worth it. Don't let him get at your Hughie."

"No!"

"You understand me, Hughie?"

"Perfectly, Auntie."

"Then don't forget it. Ever."

She had said what she wanted to say. She had made her testament. She closed her eyes. He was amazed to find this grotesque old creature had suddenly become beautiful, in that silvery vein of beauty one sometimes finds in very old men. She was exalted as great artists will sometimes exalt the portraits of the aged. He was moved to kiss her forehead.

There came a little tug at his sleeve.

"I think that is enough," said the nurse, who had stood forgotten at his elbow.

"But I can come again?"

"Perhaps."

She indicated departure by a movement of her hand.

**§ 10**

The next day Aunt Wilshire was unconscious of her visitor.

They had altered her position so that she lay now horizontally, staring inflexibly at the ceiling and muttering queer old disconnected things.

The Windsor Castle carpet story was still running through her mind, but mixed up with it now were scraps of the current newspaper controversies about the conduct of the war. And she was still thinking of the dynastic aspects of the war. And of spies. She had something upon her mind about the King's more German aunts.

"As a precaution," she said, "as a precaution. Watch them all.... The Princess Christian.... Laying foundation stones.... Cement.... Guns. Or else why should they always be laying foundation stones?... Always.... Why?... Hushed up....

"None of these things," she said, "in the newspapers. They ought to be."

And then after an interval, very distinctly, "The Duke of Wellington. My ancestor—in reality.... Publish and be damned."

After that she lay still....

The doctors and nurses could hold out only very faint hopes to Mr. Britling's inquiries; they said indeed it was astonishing that she was still alive.

And about seven o'clock that evening she died....

**§ 11**

Mr. Britling, after he had looked at his dead cousin for the last time, wandered for an hour or so about the silent little watering-place before he returned to his hotel. There was no one to talk to and nothing else to do but to think of her death.

The night was cold and bleak, but full of stars. He had already mastered the local topography, and he knew now exactly where all the bombs that had been showered upon the place had fallen. Here was the corner of blackened walls and roasted beams where three wounded horses had been burnt alive in a barn, here the row of houses, some smashed, some almost intact, where a mutilated child had screamed for two hours before she could be rescued from the debris that had pinned her down, and taken to the hospital. Everywhere by the dim light of the shaded street lamps he could see the black holes and gaps of broken windows; sometimes abundant, sometimes rare and exceptional, among otherwise uninjured dwellings. Many of the victims he had visited in the little cottage hospital where Aunt Wilshire had just died. She was the

eleventh dead. Altogether fifty-seven people had been killed or injured in this brilliant German action. They were all civilians, and only twelve were men.

Two Zeppelins had come in from over the sea, and had been fired at by an anti-aircraft gun coming on an automobile from Ipswich. The first intimation the people of the town had had of the raid was the report of this gun. Many had run out to see what was happening. It was doubtful if any one had really seen the Zeppelins, though every one testified to the sound of their engines. Then suddenly the bombs had come streaming down. Only six had made hits upon houses or people; the rest had fallen ruinously and very close together on the local golf links, and at least half had not exploded at all and did not seem to have been released to explode.

A third at least of the injured people had been in bed when destruction came upon them.

The story was like a page from some fantastic romance of Jules Verne's; the peace of the little old town, the people going to bed, the quiet streets, the quiet starry sky, and then for ten minutes an uproar of guns and shells, a clatter of breaking glass, and then a fire here, a fire there, a child's voice pitched high by pain and terror, scared people going to and fro with lanterns, and the sky empty again, the raiders gone....

Five minutes before, Aunt Wilshire had been sitting in the boarding-house drawing-room playing a great stern "Patience," the Emperor Patience ("Napoleon, my dear!—not that Potsdam creature") that took hours to do. Five minutes later she was a thing of elemental terror and agony, bleeding wounds and shattered bones, plunging about in the darkness amidst a heap of wreckage. And already the German airmen were buzzing away to sea again, proud of themselves, pleased no doubt—like boys who have thrown a stone through a window, beating their way back to thanks and rewards, to iron crosses and the proud embraces of delighted Fraus and Fräuleins....

For the first time it seemed to Mr. Britling he really saw the immediate horror of war, the dense cruel stupidity of the business, plain and close. It was as if he had never perceived anything of the sort before, as if he had been dealing with stories, pictures, shows and representations that he knew to be shams. But that this dear, absurd old creature, this thing of home, this being of familiar humours and familiar irritations, should be torn to pieces, left in torment like a smashed mouse over which an automobile has passed, brought the whole business to a raw and quivering focus. Not a soul among all those who had been rent and torn and tortured in this agony of millions, but was to any one who understood and had been near to it, in some way lovable, in some way laughable, in some way worthy of respect and care. Poor Aunt Wilshire was but the sample thrust in his face of all this mangled multitude, whose

green-white lips had sweated in anguish, whose broken bones had thrust raggedly through red dripping flesh.... The detested features of the German Crown Prince jerked into the centre of Mr. Britling's picture. The young man stood in his dapper uniform and grinned under his long nose, carrying himself jauntily, proud of his extreme importance to so many lives....

And for a while Mr. Britling could do nothing but rage.

"Devils they are!" he cried to the stars.

"Devils! Devilish fools rather. Cruel blockheads. Apes with all science in their hands! My God! but *we will teach them a lesson yet!*..."

That was the key of his mood for an hour of aimless wandering, wandering that was only checked at last by a sentinel who turned him back towards the town....

He wandered, muttering. He found great comfort in scheming vindictive destruction for countless Germans. He dreamt of swift armoured aeroplanes swooping down upon the flying airship, and sending it reeling earthward, the men screaming. He imagined a shattered Zeppelin staggering earthward in the fields behind the Dower House, and how he would himself run out with a spade and smite the Germans down. "Quarter indeed! Kamerad! Take *that*, you foul murderer!"

In the dim light the sentinel saw the retreating figure of Mr. Britling make an extravagant gesture, and wondered what it might mean. Signalling? What ought an intelligent sentry to do? Let fly at him? Arrest him?... Take no notice?...

Mr. Britling was at that moment killing Count Zeppelin and beating out his brains. Count Zeppelin was killed that night and the German Emperor was assassinated; a score of lesser victims were offered up to the *manes* of Aunt Wilshire; there were memorable cruelties before the wrath and bitterness of Mr. Britling was appeased. And then suddenly he had had enough of these thoughts; they were thrust aside, they vanished out of his mind.

**§ 12**

All the while that Mr. Britling had been indulging in these imaginative slaughterings and spending the tears and hate that had gathered in his heart, his reason had been sitting apart and above the storm, like the sun waiting above thunder, like a wise nurse watching and patient above the wild passions of a child. And all the time his reason

had been maintaining silently and firmly, without shouting, without speech, that the men who had made this hour were indeed not devils, were no more devils than Mr. Britling was a devil, but sinful men of like nature with himself, hard, stupid, caught in the same web of circumstance. "Kill them in your passion if you will," said reason, "but understand. This thing was done neither by devils nor fools, but by a conspiracy of foolish motives, by the weak acquiescences of the clever, by a crime that was no man's crime but the natural necessary outcome of the ineffectiveness, the blind motives and muddleheadedness of all mankind."

So reason maintained her thesis, like a light above the head of Mr. Britling at which he would not look, while he hewed airmen to quivering rags with a spade that he had sharpened, and stifled German princes with their own poison gas, given slowly and as painfully as possible. "And what of the towns *our* ships have bombarded?" asked reason unheeded. "What of those Tasmanians *our* people utterly swept away?"

"What of French machine-guns in the Atlas?" reason pressed the case. "Of Himalayan villages burning? Of the things we did in China? Especially of the things we did in China...."

Mr. Britling gave no heed to that.

"The Germans in China were worse than we were," he threw out....

He was maddened by the thought of the Zeppelin making off, high and far in the sky, a thing dwindling to nothing among the stars, and the thought of those murderers escaping him. Time after time he stood still and shook his fist at Boötes, slowly sweeping up the sky....

And at last, sick and wretched, he sat down on a seat upon the deserted parade under the stars, close to the soughing of the invisible sea below....

His mind drifted back once more to those ancient heresies of the Gnostics and the Manichæans which saw the God of the World as altogether evil, which sought only to escape by the utmost abstinences and evasions and perversions from the black wickedness of being. For a while his soul sank down into the uncongenial darknesses of these creeds of despair. "I who have loved life," he murmured, and could have believed for a time that he wished he had never had a son....

Is the whole scheme of nature evil? Is life in its essence cruel? Is man stretched quivering upon the table of the eternal vivisector for no end—and without pity?

These were thoughts that Mr. Britling had never faced before the war. They came to him now, and they came only to be rejected by the inherent quality of his mind. For

weeks, consciously and subconsciously, his mind had been grappling with this riddle. He had thought of it during his lonely prowlings as a special constable; it had flung itself in monstrous symbols across the dark canvas of his dreams. "Is there indeed a devil of pure cruelty? Does any creature, even the very cruellest of creatures, really apprehend the pain it causes, or inflict it for the sake of the infliction?" He summoned a score of memories, a score of imaginations, to bear their witness before the tribunal of his mind. He forgot cold and loneliness in this speculation. He sat, trying all Being, on this score, under the cold indifferent stars.

He thought of certain instances of boyish cruelty that had horrified him in his own boyhood, and it was clear to him that indeed it was not cruelty, it was curiosity, dense textured, thick skinned, so that it could not feel even the anguish of a blinded cat. Those boys who had wrung his childish soul to nigh intolerable misery, had not indeed been tormenting so much as observing torment, testing life as wantonly as one breaks thin ice in the early days of winter. In very much cruelty the real motive is surely no worse than that obtuse curiosity; a mere step of understanding, a mere quickening of the nerves and mind, makes it impossible. But that is not true of all or most cruelty. Most cruelty has something else in it, something more than the clumsy plunging into experience of the hobbledehoy; it is vindictive or indignant; it is never tranquil and sensuous; it draws its incentive, however crippled and monstrous the justification may be, from something punitive in man's instinct, something therefore that implies a sense, however misguided, of righteousness and vindication. That factor is present even in spite; when some vile or atrocious thing is done out of envy or malice, that envy and malice has in it always—*always?* Yes, always—a genuine condemnation of the hated thing as an unrighteous thing, as an unjust usurpation, as an inexcusable privilege, as a sinful overconfidence. Those men in the airship?—he was coming to that. He found himself asking himself whether it was possible for a human being to do any cruel act without an excuse—or, at least, without the feeling of excusability. And in the case of these Germans and the outrages they had committed and the retaliations they had provoked, he perceived that always there was the element of a perceptible if inadequate justification. Just as there would be if presently he were to maltreat a fallen German airman. There was anger in their vileness. These Germans were an unsubtle people, a people in the worst and best sense of the words, plain and honest; they were prone to moral indignation; and moral indignation is the mother of most of the cruelty in the world. They perceived the indolence of the English and Russians, they perceived their disregard of science and system, they could not perceive the longer reach of these greater races, and it seemed to them that the mission of Germany was to chastise and correct this laxity. Surely, they had argued, God was not

on the side of those who kept an untilled field. So they had butchered these old ladies and slaughtered these children just to show us the consequences:

"All along of dirtiness, all along of mess,

All along of doing things rather more or less."

The very justification our English poet has found for a thousand overbearing actions in the East! "Forget not order and the real," that was the underlying message of bomb and gas and submarine. After all, what right had we English *not* to have a gun or an aeroplane fit to bring down that Zeppelin ignominiously and conclusively? Had we not undertaken Empire? Were we not the leaders of great nations? Had we indeed much right to complain if our imperial pose was flouted? "There, at least," said Mr. Britling's reason, "is one of the lines of thought that brought that unseen cruelty out of the night high over the houses of Filmington-on-Sea. That, in a sense, is the cause of this killing. Cruel it is and abominable, yes, but is it altogether cruel? Hasn't it, after all, a sort of stupid rightness?—isn't it a stupid reaction to an indolence at least equally stupid?"

What was this rightness that lurked below cruelty? What was the inspiration of this pressure of spite, this anger that was aroused by ineffective gentleness and kindliness? Was it indeed an altogether evil thing; was it not rather an impulse, blind as yet, but in its ultimate quality *as good as mercy*, greater perhaps in its ultimate values than mercy?

This idea had been gathering in Mr. Britling's mind for many weeks; it had been growing and taking shape as he wrote, making experimental beginnings for his essay, "The Anatomy of Hate." Is there not, he now asked himself plainly, a creative and corrective impulse behind all hate? Is not this malignity indeed only the ape-like precursor of the great disciplines of a creative state?

The invincible hopefulness of his sanguine temperament had now got Mr. Britling well out of the pessimistic pit again. Already he had been on the verge of his phrase while wandering across the rushy fields towards Market Saffron; now it came to him again like a legitimate monarch returning from exile.

"When hate shall have become creative energy....

"Hate which passes into creative power; gentleness which is indolence and the herald of euthanasia....

"Pity is but a passing grace; for mankind will not always be pitiful."

But meanwhile, meanwhile.... How long were men so to mingle wrong with right, to be energetic without mercy and kindly without energy?...

For a time Mr. Britling sat on the lonely parade under the stars and in the sound of the sea, brooding upon these ideas.

His mind could make no further steps. It had worked for its spell. His rage had ebbed away now altogether. His despair was no longer infinite. But the world was dark and dreadful still. It seemed none the less dark because at the end there was a gleam of light. It was a gleam of light far beyond the limits of his own life, far beyond the life of his son. It had no balm for these sufferings. Between it and himself stretched the weary generations still to come, generations of bickering and accusation, greed and faintheartedness, and half truth and the hasty blow. And all those years would be full of pitiful things, such pitiful things as the blackened ruins in the town behind, the little grey-faced corpses, the lives torn and wasted, the hopes extinguished and the gladness gone....

He was no longer thinking of the Germans as diabolical. They were human; they had a case. It was a stupid case, but our case, too, was a stupid case. How stupid were all our cases! What was it we missed? Something, he felt, very close to us, and very elusive. Something that would resolve a hundred tangled oppositions....

His mind hung at that. Back upon his consciousness came crowding the horrors and desolations that had been his daily food now for three quarters of a year. He groaned aloud. He struggled against that renewed envelopment of his spirit. "Oh, blood-stained fools!" he cried, "oh, pitiful, tormented fools!

"Even that vile airship was a ship of fools!

"We are all fools still. Striving apes, irritated beyond measure by our own striving, easily moved to anger."

Some train of subconscious suggestion brought a long-forgotten speech back into Mr. Britling's mind, a speech that is full of that light which still seeks so mysteriously and indefatigably to break through the darkness and thickness of the human mind.

He whispered the words. No unfamiliar words could have had the same effect of comfort and conviction.

He whispered it of those men whom he still imagined flying far away there eastward, through the clear freezing air beneath the stars, those muffled sailors and engineers who had caused so much pain and agony in this little town.

"*Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.*"

---

## CHAPTER THE FOURTH

## IN THE WEB OF THE INEFFECTIVE

### § 1

Hugh's letters were becoming a very important influence upon Mr. Britling's thought. Hugh had always been something of a letter-writer, and now what was perhaps an inherited desire to set things down was manifest. He had been accustomed to decorate his letters from school with absurd little sketches—sometimes his letters had been all sketches—and now he broke from drawing to writing and back to drawing in a way that pleased his father mightily. The father loved this queer trick of caricature; he did not possess it himself, and so it seemed to him the most wonderful of all Hugh's little equipment of gifts. Mr. Britling used to carry these letters about until their edges got grimy; he would show them to any one he felt capable of appreciating their youthful freshness; he would quote them as final and conclusive evidence to establish this or that. He did not dream how many thousands of mothers and fathers were treasuring such documents. He thought other sons were dull young men by comparison with Hugh.

The earlier letters told much of the charms of discipline and the open air. "All the bother about what one has to do with oneself is over," wrote Hugh. "One has disposed of oneself. That has the effect of a great relief. Instead of telling oneself that one ought to get up in the morning, a bugle tells you that.... And there's no nonsense about it, no chance of lying and arguing about it with oneself.... I begin to see the sense of men going into monasteries and putting themselves under rules. One is carried along in a sort of moral automobile instead of trudging the road...."

And he was also sounding new physical experiences.

"Never before," he declared, "have I known what fatigue is. It's a miraculous thing. One drops down in one's clothes on any hard old thing and sleeps...."

And in his early letters he was greatly exercised by the elementary science of drill and discipline, and the discussion of whether these things were necessary. He began by assuming that their importance was overrated. He went on to discover that they

constituted the very essentials of all good soldiering. "In a crisis," he concluded, "there is no telling what will get hold of a man, his higher instincts or his lower. He may show courage of a very splendid sort—or a hasty discretion. A habit is much more trustworthy than an instinct. So discipline sets up a habit of steady and courageous bearing. If you keep your head you are at liberty to be splendid. If you lose it, the habit will carry you through."

The young man was also very profound upon the effects of the suggestion of various exercises upon the mind.

"It is surprising how bloodthirsty one feels in a bayonet charge. We have to shout; we are encouraged to shout. The effect is to paralyse one's higher centres. One ceases to question—anything. One becomes a 'bayoneteer.' As I go bounding forward I imagine fat men, succulent men ahead, and I am filled with the desire to do them in neatly. This sort of thing—"

A sketch of slaughter followed, with a large and valiant Hugh leaving a train of fallen behind him.

"Not like this. This is how I used to draw it in my innocent childhood, but it is incorrect. More than one German on the bayonet at a time is an incumbrance. And it would be swank—a thing we detest in the army."

The second sketch showed the same brave hero with half a dozen of the enemy skewered like cat's-meat.

"As for the widows and children, I disregard 'em."

**§ 2**

But presently Hugh began to be bored.

"Route marching again," he wrote. "For no earthly reason than that they can do nothing else with us. We are getting no decent musketry training because there are no rifles. We are wasting half our time. If you multiply half a week by the number of men in the army you will see we waste centuries weekly.... If most of these men here had just been enrolled and left to go about their business while we trained officers and instructors and got equipment for them, and if they had then been put through their paces as rapidly as possible, it would have been infinitely better for the country.... In a

sort of way we are keeping raw; in a sort of way we are getting stale.... I get irritated by this. I feel we are not being properly done by.

"Half our men are educated men, reasonably educated, but we are always being treated as though we were too stupid for words....

"No good grousing, I suppose, but after Statesminster and a glimpse of old Cardinal's way of doing things, one gets a kind of toothache in the mind at the sight of everything being done twice as slowly and half as well as it need be."

He went off at a tangent to describe the men in his platoon. "The best man in our lot is an ex-grocer's assistant, but in order to save us from vain generalisations it happens that the worst man—a moon-faced creature, almost incapable of lacing up his boots without help and objurgation—is also an ex-grocer's assistant. Our most offensive member is a little cad with a snub nose, who has read Kipling and imagines he is the nearest thing that ever has been to Private Ortheris. He goes about looking for the other two of the Soldiers Three; it is rather like an unpopular politician trying to form a ministry. And he is conscientiously foul-mouthed. He feels losing a chance of saying 'bloody' as acutely as a snob feels dropping an H. He goes back sometimes and says the sentence over again and puts the 'bloody' in. I used to swear a little out of the range of your parental ear, but Ortheris has cured me. When he is about I am mincing in my speech. I perceive now that cursing is a way of chewing one's own dirt. In a platoon there is no elbow-room for indifference; you must either love or hate. I have a feeling that my first taste of battle will not be with Germans, but with Private Ortheris...."

And one letter was just a picture, a parody of the well-known picture of the bivouac below and the soldier's dream of return to his beloved above. But Master Hugh in the dream was embracing an enormous retort, while a convenient galvanometer registered his emotion and little tripods danced around him.

**§ 3**

Then came a letter which plunged abruptly into criticism.

"My dear Parent, this is a swearing letter. I must let go to somebody. And somehow none of the other chaps are convenient. I don't know if I ought to be put against a wall and shot for it, but I hereby declare that all the officers of this battalion over and above the rank of captain are a constellation of incapables—and several of the captains are

herewith included. Some of them are men of a pleasant disposition and carefully aborted mental powers, and some are men of an unpleasant disposition and no mental powers at all. And I believe—a little enlightened by your recent letter to *The Times*—that they are a fair sample of the entire 'army' class which has got to win this war. Usually they are indolent, but when they are thoroughly roused they are fussy. The time they should spend in enlarging their minds and increasing their military efficiency they devote to keeping fit. They are, roughly speaking, fit—for nothing. They cannot move us thirty miles without getting half of us left about, without losing touch with food and shelter, and starving us for thirty-six hours or so in the process, and they cannot count beyond the fingers of one hand, not having learnt to use the nose for arithmetical operations.... I conclude this war is going to be a sort of Battle of Inkerman on a large scale. We chaps in the ranks will have to do the job. Leading is 'off.'...

"All of this, my dear Parent, is just a blow off. I have been needlessly starved, and fagged to death and exasperated. We have moved five-and-twenty miles across country—in fifty-seven hours. And without food for about eighteen hours. I have been with my Captain, who has been billeting us here in Cheasingholt. Oh, he is a MUFF! Oh God! oh God of Heaven! what a MUFF! He is afraid of printed matter, but he controls himself heroically. He prides himself upon having no 'sense of locality, confound it!' Prides himself! He went about this village, which is a little dispersed, at a slight trot, and wouldn't avail himself of the one-inch map I happened to have. He judged the capacity of each room with his eye and wouldn't let me measure, even with God's own paces. Not with the legs I inherit. 'We'll put five fellahs hea!' he said. 'What d'you want to measure the room for? We haven't come to lay down carpets.' Then, having assigned men by *coup d'oeil*, so as to congest half the village miserably, he found the other half unoccupied and had to begin all over again. 'If you measured the floor space first, sir,' I said, 'and made a list of the houses—' 'That isn't the way I'm going to do it,' he said, fixing me with a pitiless eye....

"That isn't the way they are going to do it, Daddy! The sort of thing that is done over here in the green army will be done over there in the dry. They won't be in time; they'll lose their guns where now they lose our kitchens. I'm a mute soldier; I've got to do what I'm told; still, I begin to understand the Battle of Neuve Chapelle.

"They say the relations of men and officers in the new army are beautiful. Some day I may learn to love my officer—but not just yet. Not till I've forgotten the operations leading up to the occupation of Cheasingholt.... He muffs his real job without a blush, and yet he would rather be shot than do his bootlaces up criss-cross. What I say about officers applies only and solely to him really.... How well I understand now the

shooting of officers by their men.... But indeed, fatigue and exasperation apart, this shift has been done atrociously...."

The young man returned to these criticisms in a later letter.

"You will think I am always carping, but it does seem to me that nearly everything is being done here in the most wasteful way possible. We waste time, we waste labour, we waste material, oh Lord! how we waste our country's money. These aren't, I can assure you, the opinions of a conceited young man. It's nothing to be conceited about.... We're bored to death by standing about this infernal little village. There is nothing to do—except trail after a small number of slatternly young women we despise and hate. I *don't*, Daddy. And I don't drink. Why have I inherited no vices? We had a fight here yesterday—sheer boredom. Ortheris has a swollen lip, and another private has a bad black eye. There is to be a return match. I perceive the chief horror of warfare is boredom....

"Our feeding here is typical of the whole system. It is a system invented not with any idea of getting the best results—that does not enter into the War Office philosophy—but to have a rule for everything, and avoid arguments. There is rather too generous an allowance of bread and stuff per man, and there is a very fierce but not very efficient system of weighing and checking. A rather too generous allowance is, of course, a direct incentive to waste or stealing—as any one but our silly old duffer of a War Office would know. The checking is for quantity, which any fool can understand, rather than for quality. The test for the quality of army meat is the smell. If it doesn't smell bad, it is good....

"Then the raw material is handed over to a cook. He is a common soldier who has been made into a cook by a simple ceremony. He is told, 'You are a cook.' He does his best to be. Usually he roasts or bakes to begin with, guessing when the joint is done, afterwards he hacks up what is left of his joints and makes a stew for next day. A stew is hacked meat boiled up in a big pot. It has much fat floating on the top. After you have eaten your fill you want to sit about quiet. The men are fed usually in a large tent or barn. We have a barn. It is not a clean barn, and just to make it more like a picnic there are insufficient plates, knives and forks. (I tell you, no army people can count beyond eight or ten.) The corporals after their morning's work have to carve. When they have done carving they tell me they feel they have had enough dinner. They sit about looking pale, and wander off afterwards to the village pub. (I shall probably become a corporal soon.) In these islands before the war began there was a surplus of women over men of about a million. (See the publications of the Fabian Society, now so popular among the young.) None of these women have been trusted by the

government with the difficult task of cooking and giving out food to our soldiers. No man of the ordinary soldier class ever cooks anything until he is a soldier.... All food left over after the stew or otherwise rendered uneatable by the cook is thrown away. We throw away pail-loads. *We bury meat*....

"Also we get three pairs of socks. We work pretty hard. We don't know how to darn socks. When the heels wear through, come blisters. Bad blisters disable a man. Of the million of surplus women (see above) the government has not had the intelligence to get any to darn our socks. So a certain percentage of us go lame. And so on. And so on.

"You will think all this is awful grousing, but the point I want to make—I hereby to ease my feelings make it now in a fair round hand—is that all this business could be done far better and far cheaper if it wasn't left to these absolutely inexperienced and extremely exclusive military gentlemen. They think they are leading England and showing us all how; instead of which they are just keeping us back. Why in thunder are they doing everything? Not one of them, when he is at home, is allowed to order the dinner or poke his nose into his own kitchen or check the household books.... The ordinary British colonel is a helpless old gentleman; he ought to have a nurse.... This is not merely the trivial grievance of my insulted stomach, it is a serious matter for the country. Sooner or later the country may want the food that is being wasted in all these capers. In the aggregate it must amount to a daily destruction of tons of stuff of all sorts. Tons.... Suppose the war lasts longer than we reckon!"

From this point Hugh's letter jumped to a general discussion of the military mind.

"Our officers are beastly good chaps, nearly all of them. That's where the perplexity of the whole thing comes in. If only they weren't such good chaps! If only they were like the Prussian officers to their men, then we'd just take on a revolution as well as the war, and make everything tidy at once. But they are decent, they are charming.... Only they do not think hard, and they do not understand that doing a job properly means doing it as directly and thought-outly as you possibly can. They won't worry about things. If their tempers were worse perhaps their work might be better. They won't use maps or timetables or books of reference. When we move to a new place they pick up what they can about it by hearsay; not one of our lot has the gumption to possess a contoured map or a Michelin guide. They have hearsay minds. They are fussy and petty and wasteful—and, in the way of getting things done, pretentious. By their code they're paragons of honour. Courage—they're all right about that; no end of it; honesty, truthfulness, and so on—high. They have a kind of horsey standard of smartness and pluck, too, that isn't bad, and they have a fine horror of whiskers and being

unbuttoned. But the mistake they make is to class thinking with whiskers, as a sort of fussy sidegrowth. Instead of classing it with unbuttonedupness. They hate economy. And preparation....

"They won't see that inefficiency is a sort of dishonesty. If a man doesn't steal sixpence, they think it a light matter if he wastes half a crown. Here follows wisdom! *From the point of view of a nation at war, sixpence is just a fifth part of half a crown*....

"When I began this letter I was boiling with indignation, complicated, I suspect, by this morning's 'stew'; now I have written thus far I feel I'm an ungenerous grumbler.... It is remarkable, my dear Parent, that I let off these things to you. I like writing to you. I couldn't possibly say the things I can write. Heinrich had a confidential friend at Breslau to whom he used to write about his Soul. I never had one of those Teutonic friendships. And I haven't got a Soul. But I have to write. One must write to some one—and in this place there is nothing else to do. And now the old lady downstairs is turning down the gas; she always does at half-past ten. She didn't ought. She gets—ninepence each. Excuse the pencil...."

That letter ended abruptly. The next two were brief and cheerful. Then suddenly came a new note.

"We've got rifles! We're real armed soldiers at last. Every blessed man has got a rifle. And they come from Japan! They are of a sort of light wood that is like new oak and art furniture, and makes one feel that one belongs to the First Garden Suburb Regiment; but I believe much can be done with linseed oil. And they are real rifles, they go bang. We are a little light-headed about them. Only our training and discipline prevent our letting fly at incautious spectators on the skyline. I saw a man yesterday about half a mile off. I was possessed by the idea that I could get him—right in the middle.... Ortheris, the little beast, has got a motor-bicycle, which he calls his 'b——y oto'—no one knows why—and only death or dishonourable conduct will save me, I gather, from becoming a corporal in the course of the next month...."

**§ 4**

A subsequent letter threw fresh light on the career of the young man with the "oto." Before the rifle and the "oto," and in spite of his fights with some person or persons

unknown, Ortheris found trouble. Hugh told the story with the unblushing *savoir-faire* of the very young.

"By the by, Ortheris, following the indications of his creator and succumbing to the universal boredom before the rifles came, forgot Lord Kitchener's advice and attempted 'seduktion.' With painful results which he insists upon confiding to the entire platoon. He has been severely smacked and scratched by the proposed victim, and warned off the premises (licensed premises) by her father and mother—both formidable persons. They did more than warn him off the premises. They had displayed neither a proper horror of Don Juan nor a proper respect for the King's uniform. Mother, we realise, got hold of him and cuffed him severely. 'What the 'ell's a chap to do?' cried Ortheris. 'You can't go 'itting a woman back.' Father had set a dog on him. A less ingenuous character would be silent about such passages—I should be too egotistical and humiliated altogether—but that is not his quality. He tells us in tones of naïve wonder. He talks about it and talks about it. 'I don't care what the old woman did,' he says, 'not—reely. What 'urts me about it is that I jest made a sort of mistake 'ow *she'd* tike it. You see, I sort of feel I've 'urt and insulted *'er*. And reely I didn't mean to. Swap me, I didn't mean to. Gawd 'elp me. I wouldn't 'ave 'ad it 'appened as it 'as 'appened, not for worlds. And now I can't get round to 'er, or anyfing, not to explain.... You chaps may laugh, but you don't know what there is *in* it.... I tell you it worries me something frightful. You think I'm just a little cad who took liberties he didn't ought to. (Note of anger drowning uncharitable grunts of assent.) 'Ow the 'ell is 'e to know *when* 'e didn't ought to? ... I *swear* she liked me....'

"This kind of thing goes on for hours—in the darkness.

"'I'd got regular sort of fond of 'er.'

"And the extraordinary thing is it makes me begin to get regular fond of Ortheris.

"I think it is because the affair has surprised him right out of acting Ortheris and Tommy Atkins for a bit, into his proper self. He's frightfully like some sort of mongrel with a lot of wiry-haired terrier and a touch of Airedale in it. A mongrel you like in spite of the flavour of all the horrid things he's been nosing into. And he's as hard as nails and, my dear daddy! he can't box for nuts."

**§ 5**

Mr. Britling, with an understanding much quickened by Hugh's letters, went about Essex in his automobile, and on one or two journeys into Berkshire and Buckinghamshire, and marked the steady conversion of the old pacific countryside into an armed camp. He was disposed to minimise Hugh's criticisms. He found in them something of the harshness of youth, which is far too keen-edged to be tolerant with half performance and our poor human evasion of perfection's overstrain. "Our poor human evasion of perfection's overstrain"; this phrase was Mr. Britling's. To Mr. Britling, looking less closely and more broadly, the new army was a pride and a marvel.

He liked to come into some quiet village and note the clusters of sturdy khaki-clad youngsters going about their business, the tethered horses, the air of subdued bustle, the occasional glimpses of guns and ammunition trains. Wherever one went now there were soldiers and still more soldiers. There was a steady flow of men into Flanders, and presently to Gallipoli, but it seemed to have no effect upon the multitude in training at home. He was pleasantly excited by the evident increase in the proportion of military material upon the railways; he liked the promise and mystery of the long lines of trucks bearing tarpaulin-covered wagons and carts and guns that he would pass on his way to Liverpool Street station. He could apprehend defeat in the silence of the night, but when he saw the men, when he went about the land, then it was impossible to believe in any end but victory....

But through the spring and summer there was no victory. The "great offensive" of May was checked and abandoned after a series of ineffective and very costly attacks between Ypres and Soissons. The Germans had developed a highly scientific defensive in which machine-guns replaced rifles and a maximum of punishment was inflicted upon an assaulting force with a minimum of human loss. The War Office had never thought much of machine-guns before, but now it thought a good deal. Moreover, the energies of Britain were being turned more and more towards the Dardanelles.

The idea of an attack upon the Dardanelles had a traditional attractiveness for the British mind. Old men had been brought up from childhood with "forcing the Dardanelles" as a familiar phrase; it had none of the flighty novelty and vulgarity about it that made an "aerial offensive" seem so unwarrantable a proceeding. Forcing the Dardanelles was historically British. It made no break with tradition. Soon after Turkey entered the war British submarines appeared in the Sea of Marmora, and in February a systematic bombardment of the Dardanelles began; this was continued intermittently for a month, the defenders profiting by their experiences and by spells of bad weather to strengthen their works. This first phase of the attack culminated in the loss of

the *Irresistible*, *Ocean*, and *Bouvet*, when on the 17th of March the attacking fleet closed in upon the Narrows. After an interlude of six weeks to allow of further preparations on the part of the defenders, who were now thoroughly alive to what was coming, the Allied armies gathered upon the scene, and a difficult and costly landing was achieved at two points upon the peninsula of Gallipoli. With that began a slow and bloody siege of the defences of the Dardanelles, clambering up to the surprise landing of a fresh British army in Suvla Bay in August, and its failure in the battle of Anafarta, through incompetent commanders and a general sloppiness of leading, to cut off and capture Maidos and the Narrows defences.... Meanwhile the Russian hosts, which had reached their high-water mark in the capture of Przemysl, were being forced back first in the south and then in the north. The Germans recaptured Lemberg, entered Warsaw, and pressed on to take Brest Litowsk. The Russian lines rolled back with an impressive effect of defeat, and the Germans thrust towards Riga and Petrograd, reaching Vilna about the middle of September....

Day after day Mr. Britling traced the swaying fortunes of the conflict, with impatience, with perplexity, but with no loss of confidence in the ultimate success of Britain. The country was still swarming with troops, and still under summer sunshine. A second hay harvest redeemed the scantiness of the first, the wheat crops were wonderful, and the great fig tree at the corner of the Dower House had never borne so bountifully nor such excellent juicy figs....

And one day in early June while those figs were still only a hope, Teddy appeared at the Dower House with Letty, to say good-bye before going to the front. He was going out in a draft to fill up various gaps and losses; he did not know where. Essex was doing well but bloodily over there. Mrs. Britling had tea set out upon the lawn under the blue cedar, and Mr. Britling found himself at a loss for appropriate sayings, and talked in his confusion almost as though Teddy's departure was of no significance at all. He was still haunted by that odd sense of responsibility for Teddy. Teddy was not nearly so animated as he had been in his pre-khaki days; there was a quiet exaltation in his manner rather than a lively excitement. He knew now what he was in for. He knew now that war was not a lark, that for him it was to be the gravest experience he had ever had or was likely to have. There were no more jokes about Letty's pension, and a general avoidance of the topics of high explosives and asphyxiating gas....

Mr. and Mrs. Britling took the young people to the gate.

"Good luck!" cried Mr. Britling as they receded.

Teddy replied with a wave of the hand.

Mr. Britling stood watching them for some moments as they walked towards the little cottage which was to be the scene of their private parting.

"I don't like his going," he said. "I hope it will be all right with him.... Teddy's so grave nowadays. It's a mean thing, I know, it has none of the Roman touch, but I am glad that this can't happen with Hugh——" He computed. "Not for a year and three months, even if they march him into it upon his very birthday....

"It may all he over by then...."

**§ 6**

In that computation he reckoned without Hugh.

Within a month Hugh was also saying "Good-bye."

"But how's this?" protested Mr. Britling, who had already guessed the answer. "You're not nineteen."

"I'm nineteen enough for this job," said Hugh. "In fact, I enlisted as nineteen."

Mr. Britling said nothing for a little while. Then he spoke with a catch in his breath. "I don't blame you," he said. "It was—the right spirit."

Drill and responsibilities of non-commissioned rank had imposed a novel manliness upon the bearing of Corporal Britling. "I always classified a little above my age at Statesminster," he said as though that cleared up everything.

He looked at a rosebud as though it interested him. Then he remarked rather casually:

"I thought," he said, "that if I was to go to war I'd better do the thing properly. It seemed—sort of half and half—not to be eligible for the trenches.... I ought to have told you...."

"Yes," Mr. Britling decided.

"I was shy about it at first.... I thought perhaps the war would be over before it was necessary to discuss anything.... Didn't want to go into it."

"Exactly," said Mr. Britling as though that was a complete explanation.

"It's been a good year for your roses," said Hugh.

**§ 7**

Hugh was to stop the night. He spent what seemed to him and every one a long, shy, inexpressive evening. Only the small boys were really natural and animated. They were much impressed and excited by his departure, and wanted to ask a hundred questions about the life in the trenches. Many of them Hugh had to promise to answer when he got there. Then he would see just exactly how things were. Mrs. Britling was motherly and intelligent about his outfit. "Will you want winter things?" she asked....

But when he was alone with his father after every one had gone to bed they found themselves able to talk.

"This sort of thing seems more to us than it would be to a French family," Hugh remarked, standing on the hearthrug.

"Yes," agreed Mr. Britling. "Their minds would be better prepared.... They'd have their appropriate things to say. They have been educated by the tradition of service—and '71."

Then he spoke—almost resentfully.

"The older men ought to go before you boys. Who is to carry on if a lot of you get killed?"

Hugh reflected. "In the stiffest battle that ever can be the odds are against getting killed," he said.

"I suppose they are."

"One in three or four in the very hottest corners."

Mr. Britling expressed no satisfaction.

"Every one is going through something of this sort."

"All the decent people, at any rate," said Mr. Britling....

"It will be an extraordinary experience. Somehow it seems out of proportion—"

"With what?"

"With life generally. As one has known it."

"It isn't in proportion," Mr. Britling admitted.

"Incommensurables," said Hugh.

He considered his phrasing. "It's not," he said, "as though one was going into another part of the same world, or turning up another side of the world one was used to. It is just as if one had been living in a room and one had been asked to step outside.... It makes me think of a queer little thing that happened when I was in London last winter. I got into Queer Company. I don't think I told you. I went to have supper with some students in Chelsea. I hadn't been to the place before, but they seemed all right—just people like me—and everybody. And after supper they took me on to some people *they* didn't know very well; people who had to do with some School of Dramatic Art. There were two or three young actresses there and a singer and people of that sort, sitting about smoking cigarettes, and we began talking plays and books and picture shows and all that stuff; and suddenly there was a knocking at the door and some one went out and found a policeman with a warrant on the landing. They took off our host's son.... It had to do with a murder...."

Hugh paused. "It was the Bedford Mansions mystery. I don't suppose you remember about it or read about it at the time. He'd killed a man.... It doesn't matter about the particulars anyhow, but what I mean is the effect. The effect of a comfortable well-lit orderly room and the sense of harmless people—and then the door opening and the policeman and the cold draught flowing in. *Murder!* A girl who seemed to know the people well explained to me in whispers what was happening. It was like the opening of a trap-door going down into some pit you have always known was there, but never really believed in."

"I know," said Mr. Britling. "I know."

"That's just how I feel about this war business. There's no real death over here. It's laid out and boxed up. And accidents are all padded about. If one got a toss from a horse here, you'd be in bed and comfortable in no time.... And there; it's like another planet. It's outside.... I'm going outside.... Instead of there being no death anywhere, it is death everywhere, outside there. We shall be using our utmost wits to kill each other. A kind of reverse to this world."

Mr. Britling nodded.

"I've never seen a dead body yet. In Dower-House land there aren't dead bodies."

"We've kept things from you—horrid things of that sort."

"I'm not complaining," said Hugh.... "But—Master Hugh—the Master Hugh you kept things from—will never come back."

He went on quickly as his father raised distressed eyes to him. "I mean that anyhow *this* Hugh will never come back. Another one may. But I shall have been outside, and it will all be different...."

He paused. Never had Mr. Britling been so little disposed to take up the discourse.

"Like a man," he said, seeking an image and doing no more than imitate his son's; "who goes out of a busy lighted room through a trap-door into a blizzard, to mend the roof...."

For some moments neither father nor son said anything more. They had a queer sense of insurmountable insufficiency. Neither was saying what he had wanted to say to the other, but it was not clear to them now what they had to say to one another....

"It's wonderful," said Mr. Britling.

Hugh could only manage: "The world has turned right over...."

"The job has to be done," said Mr. Britling.

"The job has to be done," said Hugh.

The pause lengthened.

"You'll be getting up early to-morrow," said Mr. Britling....

**§ 8**

When Mr. Britling was alone in his own room all the thoughts and feelings that had been held up downstairs began to run more and more rapidly and abundantly through his mind.

He had a feeling—every now and again in the last few years he had had the same feeling—as though he was only just beginning to discover Hugh. This perpetual rediscovery of one's children is the experience of every observant parent. He had always considered Hugh as a youth, and now a man stood over him and talked, as one man to another. And this man, this very new man, mint new and clean and clear, filled Mr. Britling with surprise and admiration.

It was as if he perceived the beauty of youth for the first time in Hugh's slender, well balanced, khaki-clad body. There was infinite delicacy in his clear complexion, his clear eyes; the delicately pencilled eyebrow that was so exactly like his mother's. And this thing of brightness and bravery talked as gravely and as wisely as any weather-worn, shop-soiled, old fellow....

The boy was wise.

Hugh thought for himself; he thought round and through his position, not egotistically but with a quality of responsibility. He wasn't just hero-worshipping and imitating, just spinning some self-centred romance. If he was a fair sample of his generation then it was a better generation than Mr. Britling's had been....

At that Mr. Britling's mind went off at a tangent to the grievance of the rejected volunteer. It was acutely shameful to him that all these fine lads should be going off to death and wounds while the men of forty and over lay snug at home. How stupid it was to fix things like that! Here were the fathers, who had done their work, shot their bolts, returned some value for the costs of their education, unable to get training, unable to be of any service, shamefully safe, doing April fool work as special constables; while their young innocents, untried, all their gathering possibilities of service unbroached, went down into the deadly trenches.... The war would leave the world a world of cripples and old men and children....

He felt himself as a cowardly brute, fat, wheezy, out of training, sheltering behind this dear one branch of Mary's life.

He writhed with impotent humiliation....

How stupidly the world is managed.

He began to fret and rage. He could not lie in peace in his bed; he got up and prowled about his room, blundering against chairs and tables in the darkness.... We were too stupid to do the most obvious things; we were sending all these boys into hardship and pitiless danger; we were sending them ill-equipped, insufficiently supported, we were sending our children through the fires to Moloch, because essentially we English were a world of indolent, pampered, sham good-humoured, old and middle-aged men. (So he distributed the intolerable load of self-accusation.) Why was he doing nothing to change things, to get them better? What was the good of an assumed modesty, an effort at tolerance for and confidence in these boozy old lawyers, these ranting platform men, these stiff-witted officers and hide-bound officials? They were butchering the youth of England. Old men sat out of danger contriving death for the lads in the trenches. That was the reality of the thing. "My son!" he cried sharply in the

darkness. His sense of our national deficiencies became tormentingly, fantastically acute. It was as if all his cherished delusions had fallen from the scheme of things.... What was the good of making believe that up there they were planning some great counter-stroke that would end in victory? It was as plain as daylight that they had neither the power of imagination nor the collective intelligence even to conceive of a counter-stroke. Any dull mass may resist, but only imagination can strike. Imagination! To the end we should not strike. We might strike through the air. We might strike across the sea. We might strike hard at Gallipoli instead of dribbling inadequate armies thither as our fathers dribbled men at the Redan.... But the old men would sit at their tables, replete and sleepy, and shake their cunning old heads. The press would chatter and make odd ambiguous sounds like a shipload of monkeys in a storm. The political harridans would get the wrong men appointed, would attack every possible leader with scandal and abuse and falsehood....

The spirit and honour and drama had gone out of this war.

Our only hope now was exhaustion. Our only strategy was to barter blood for blood—trusting that our tank would prove the deeper....

While into this tank stepped Hugh, young and smiling....

The war became a nightmare vision....