§ 9

In the morning Mr. Britling's face was white from his overnight brain storm, and Hugh's was fresh from wholesome sleep. They walked about the lawn, and Mr. Britling talked hopefully of the general outlook until it was time for them to start to the station....

The little old station-master grasped the situation at once, and presided over their last hand-clasp.

"Good luck, Hugh!" cried Mr. Britling.

"Good luck!" cried the little old station-master.

"It's not easy a-parting," he said to Mr. Britling as the train slipped down the line. "There's been many a parting hea' since this here old war began. Many. And some as won't come back again neether."

§ 10

For some days Mr. Britling could think of nothing but Hugh, and always with a dull pain at his heart. He felt as he had felt long ago while he had waited downstairs and Hugh upstairs had been under the knife of a surgeon. But this time the operation went on and still went on. At the worst his boy had but one chance in five of death or serious injury, but for a time he could think of nothing but that one chance. He felt it pressing upon his mind, pressing him down....

Then instead of breaking under that pressure, he was released by the trick of the sanguine temperament. His mind turned over, abruptly, to the four chances out of five. It was like a dislocated joint slipping back into place. It was as sudden as that. He found he had adapted himself to the prospect of Hugh in mortal danger. It had become a fact established, a usual thing. He could bear with it and go about his affairs.

He went up to London, and met other men at the club in the same emotional predicament. He realised that it was neither very wonderful nor exceptionally tragic now to have a son at the front.

"My boy is in Gallipoli," said one. "It's tough work there."

"My lad's in Flanders," said Mr. Britling. "Nothing would satisfy him but the front. He's three months short of eighteen. He misstated his age."

And they went on to talk newspaper just as if the world was where it had always been.

But until a post card came from Hugh Mr. Britling watched the postman like a lovesick girl.

Hugh wrote more frequently than his father had dared to hope, pencilled letters for the most part. It was as if he was beginning to feel an inherited need for talk, and was a little at a loss for a sympathetic ear. Park, his schoolmate, who had enlisted with him, wasn't, it seemed, a theoriser. "Park becomes a martinet," Hugh wrote. "Also he is a sergeant now, and this makes rather a gulf between us." Mr. Britling had the greatest difficulty in writing back. There were many grave deep things he wanted to say, and never did. Instead he gave elaborate details of the small affairs of the Dower House. Once or twice, with a half-unconscious imitation of his boy's style, he took a shot at the theological and philosophical hares that Hugh had started. But the exemplary letters that he composed of nights from a Father to a Son at War were never written down. It was just as well, for there are many things of that sort that are good to think and bad to say....

Hugh was not very explicit about his position or daily duties. What he wrote now had to pass through the hands of a Censor, and any sort of definite information might cause the suppression of his letter. Mr. Britling conceived him for the most part as quartered some way behind the front, but in a flat, desolated country and within hearing of great guns. He assisted his imagination with the illustrated papers. Sometimes he put him farther back into pleasant old towns after the fashion of Beauvais, and imagined loitering groups in the front of cafés; sometimes he filled in the obvious suggestions of the phrase that all the Pas de Calais was now one vast British camp. Then he crowded the picture with tethered horses and tents and grey-painted wagons, and Hugh in the foreground—-bare-armed, with a bucket....

Hugh's letters divided themselves pretty fairly between two main topics; the first was the interest of the art of war, the second the reaction against warfare. "After one has got over the emotion of it," he wrote, "and when one's mind has just accepted and forgotten (as it does) the horrors and waste of it all, then I begin to perceive that war is absolutely the best game in the world. That is the real strength of war, I submit. Not as you put it in that early pamphlet of yours; ambition, cruelty, and all those things. Those things give an excuse for war, they rush timid and base people into war, but the essential matter is the hold of the thing itself upon an active imagination. It's such a big game. Instead of being fenced into a field and tied down to one set of tools as you

are in almost every other game, you have all the world to play and you may use whatever you can use. You can use every scrap of imagination and invention that is in you. And it's wonderful.... But real soldiers aren't cruel. And war isn't cruel in its essence. Only in its consequences. Over here one gets hold of scraps of talk that light up things. Most of the barbarities were done—it is quite clear—by an excited civilian sort of men, men in a kind of inflamed state. The great part of the German army in the early stage of the war was really an army of demented civilians. Trained civilians no doubt, but civilians in soul. They were nice orderly clean law-abiding men suddenly torn up by the roots and flung into quite shocking conditions. They felt they were rushing at death, and that decency was at an end. They thought every Belgian had a gun behind the hedge and a knife in his trouser leg. They saw villages burning and dead people, and men smashed to bits. They lived in a kind of nightmare. They didn't know what they were doing. They did horrible things just as one does them sometimes in dreams...."

He flung out his conclusion with just his mother's leaping consecutiveness. "Conscript soldiers are the ruin of war.... Half the Germans and a lot of the French ought never to have been brought within ten miles of a battlefield.

"What makes all this so plain are the diaries the French and English have been finding on the dead. You know at the early state of the war every German soldier was expected to keep a diary. He was ordered to do it. The idea was to keep him interested in the war. Consequently, from the dead and wounded our people have got thousands.... It helps one to realise that the Germans aren't really soldiers at all. Not as our men are. They are obedient, law-abiding, intelligent people, who have been shoved into this. They have to see the war as something romantic and melodramatic, or as something moral, or as tragic fate. They have to bellow songs about 'Deutschland,' or drag in 'Gott.' They don't take to the game as our men take to the game....

"I confess I'm taking to the game. I wish at times I had gone into the O.T.C. with Teddy, and got a better hold of it. I was too high-browed about this war business. I dream now of getting a commission....

"That diary-hunting strategy is just the sort of thing that makes this war intellectually fascinating. Everything is being thought out and then tried over that can possibly make victory. The Germans go in for psychology much more than we do, just as they go in for war more than we do, but they don't seem to be really clever about it. So they set out to make all their men understand the war, while our chaps are singing 'Tipperary.' But what the men put down aren't the beautiful things they ought to put down; most of

them shove down lists of their meals, some of the diaries are all just lists of things eaten, and a lot of them have written the most damning stuff about outrages and looting. Which the French are translating and publishing. The Germans would give anything now to get back these silly diaries. And now they have made an order that no one shall go into battle with any written papers at all.... Our people got so keen on documenting and the value of chance writings that one of the principal things to do after a German attack had failed had been to hook in the documentary dead, and find out what they had on them.... It's a curious sport, this body fishing. You have a sort of triple hook on a rope, and you throw it and drag. They do the same. The other day one body near Hooghe was hooked by both sides, and they had a tug-of-war. With a sharpshooter or so cutting in whenever our men got too excited. Several men were hit. The Irish—it was an Irish regiment—got him—or at least they got the better part of him....

"Now that I am a sergeant, Park talks to me again about all these things, and we have a first lieutenant too keen to resist such technical details. They are purely technical details. You must take them as that. One does not think of the dead body as a man recently deceased, who had perhaps a wife and business connections and a weakness for oysters or pale brandy. Or as something that laughed and cried and didn't like getting hurt. That would spoil everything. One thinks of him merely as a uniform with marks upon it that will tell us what kind of stuff we have against us, and possibly with papers that will give us a hint of how far he and his lot are getting sick of the whole affair....

"There's a kind of hardening not only of the body but of the mind through all this life out here. One is living on a different level. You know—just before I came away—you talked of Dower-House-land—and outside. This is outside. It's different. Our men here are kind enough still to little things—kittens or birds or flowers. Behind the front, for example, everywhere there are Tommy gardens. Some are quite bright little patches. But it's just nonsense to suppose we are tender to the wounded up here—and, putting it plainly, there isn't a scrap of pity left for the enemy. Not a scrap. Not a trace of such feeling. They were tender about the wounded in the early days—men tell me—and reverent about the dead. It's all gone now. There have been atrocities, gas, unforgettable things. Everything is harder. Our people are inclined now to laugh at a man who gets hit, and to be annoyed at a man with a troublesome wound. The other day, they say, there was a big dead German outside the Essex trenches. He became a nuisance, and he was dragged in and taken behind the line and buried. After he was buried, a kindly soul was putting a board over him with 'Somebody's Fritz' on it, when a shell burst close by. It blew the man with the board a dozen yards and wounded him,

and it restored Fritz to the open air. He was lifted clean out. He flew head over heels like a windmill. This was regarded as a tremendous joke against the men who had been at the pains of burying him. For a time nobody else would touch Fritz, who was now some yards behind his original grave. Then as he got worse and worse he was buried again by some devoted sanitarians, and this time the inscription was 'Somebody's Fritz. R.I.P.' And as luck would have it, he was spun up again. In pieces. The trench howled with laughter and cries of 'Good old Fritz!' 'This isn't the Resurrection, Fritz.'...

"Another thing that appeals to the sunny humour of the trenches as a really delicious practical joke is the trick of the fuses. We have two kinds of fuse, a slow-burning fuse such as is used for hand-grenades and such-like things, a sort of yard-a-minute fuse, and a rapid fuse that goes a hundred yards a second—for firing mines and so on. The latter is carefully distinguished from the former by a conspicuous red thread. Also, as you know, it is the habit of the enemy and ourselves when the trenches are near enough, to enliven each other by the casting of homely but effective hand-grenades made out of tins. When a grenade drops in a British trench somebody seizes it instantly and throws it back. To hoist the German with his own petard is particularly sweet to the British mind. When a grenade drops into a German trench everybody runs. (At least that is what I am told happens by the men from our trenches; though possibly each side has its exceptions.) If the bomb explodes, it explodes. If it doesn't, Hans and Fritz presently come creeping back to see what has happened. Sometimes the fuse hasn't caught properly, it has been thrown by a nervous man; or it hasn't burnt properly. Then Hans or Fritz puts in a new fuse and sends it back with loving care. To hoist the Briton with his own petard is particularly sweet to the German mind.... But here it is that military genius comes in. Some gifted spirit on our side procured (probably by larceny) a length of mine fuse, the rapid sort, and spent a laborious day removing the red thread and making it into the likeness of its slow brother. Then bits of it were attached to tin-bombs and shied—unlit of course—into the German trenches. A long but happy pause followed. I can see the chaps holding themselves in. Hans and Fritz were understood to be creeping back, to be examining the unlit fuse, to be applying a light thereunto, in order to restore it to its maker after their custom....

"A loud bang in the German trenches indicated the moment of lighting, and the exit of Hans and Fritz to worlds less humorous.

"The genius in the British trenches went on with the preparation of the next surprise bomb—against the arrival of Kurt and Karl....

"Hans, Fritz, Kurt, Karl, Michael and Wilhelm; it went for quite a long time before they grew suspicious....

"You once wrote that all fighting ought to be done nowadays by metal soldiers. I perceive, my dear Daddy, that all real fighting is...."

§ 11

Not all Hugh's letters were concerned with these grim technicalities. It was not always that news and gossip came along; it was rare that a young man with a commission would condescend to talk shop to two young men without one; there were few newspapers and fewer maps, and even in France and within sound of guns, Hugh could presently find warfare almost as much a bore as it had been at times in England. But his criticism of military methods died away. "Things are done better out here," he remarked, and "We're nearer reality here. I begin to respect my Captain. Who is developing a sense of locality. Happily for our prospects." And in another place he speculated in an oddly characteristic manner whether he was getting used to the army way, whether he was beginning to see the sense of the army way, or whether it really was that the army way braced up nearer and nearer to efficiency as it got nearer to the enemy. "And here one hasn't the haunting feeling that war is after all an hallucination. It's already common sense and the business of life....

"In England I always had a sneaking idea that I had 'dressed up' in my uniform....

"I never dreamt before I came here how much war is a business of waiting about and going through duties and exercises that were only too obviously a means of preventing our discovering just how much waiting about we were doing. I suppose there is no great harm in describing the place I am in here; it's a kind of scenery that is somehow all of a piece with the life we lead day by day. It is a village that has been only partly smashed up; it has never been fought through, indeed the Germans were never within two miles of it, but it was shelled intermittently for months before we made our advance. Almost all the houses are still standing, but there is not a window left with a square foot of glass in the place. One or two houses have been burnt out, and one or two are just as though they had been kicked to pieces by a lunatic giant. We sleep in batches of four or five on the floors of the rooms; there are very few inhabitants about, but the village inn still goes on. It has one poor weary billiard-table, very small with very big balls, and the cues are without tops; it is The Amusement of the place. Ortheris does miracles at it. When he leaves the army he says he's going to be a

marker, 'a b——y marker.' The country about us is flat—featureless—desolate. How I long for hills, even for Essex mud hills. Then the road runs on towards the front, a brick road frightfully worn, lined with poplars. Just at the end of the village mechanical transport ends and there is a kind of depot from which all the stuff goes up by mules or men or bicycles to the trenches. It is the only movement in the place, and I have spent hours watching men shift grub or ammunition or lending them a hand. All day one hears guns, a kind of thud at the stomach, and now and then one sees an aeroplane, very high and small. Just beyond this point there is a group of poplars which have been punished by a German shell. They are broken off and splintered in the most astonishing way; all split and ravelled out like the end of a cane that has been broken and twisted to get the ends apart. The choice of one's leisure is to watch the A.S.C. or play football, twenty a side, or sit about indoors, or stand in the doorway, or walk down to the Estaminet and wait five or six deep for the billiard-table. Ultimately one sits. And so you get these unconscionable letters."

"Unconscionable," said Mr. Britling. "Of course—he will grow out of that sort of thing.

"And he'll write some day, sure enough. He'll write."

He went on reading the letter.

"We read, of course. But there never could be a library here big enough to keep us going. We can do with all sorts of books, but I don't think the ordinary sensational novel is quite the catch it was for a lot of them in peace time. Some break towards serious reading in the oddest fashion. Old Park, for example, says he wants books you can chew; he is reading a cheap edition of 'The Origin of Species.' He used to regard Florence Warden and William le Queux as the supreme delights of print. I wish you could send him Metchnikoff's 'Nature of Man' or Pearson's 'Ethics of Freethought.' I feel I am building up his tender mind. Not for me though, Daddy. Nothing of that sort for me. These things take people differently. What I want here is literary opium. I want something about fauns and nymphs in broad low glades. I would like to read Spenser's 'Faerie Queen.' I don't think I have read it, and yet I have a very distinct impression of knights and dragons and sorcerers and wicked magic ladies moving through a sort of Pre-Raphaelite tapestry scenery—only with a light on them. I could do with some Hewlett of the 'Forest Lovers' kind. Or with Joseph Conrad in his Kew Palm-house mood. And there is a book, I once looked into it at a man's room in London; I don't know the title, but it was by Richard Garnett, and it was all about gods who were in reduced circumstances but amidst sunny picturesque scenery. Scenery without steel or poles or wire. A thing after the manner of Heine's 'Florentine Nights.' Any book about Greek gods would be welcome, anything about temples of ivory-coloured stone and

purple seas, red caps, chests of jewels, and lizards in the sun. I wish there was another 'Thais.' The men here are getting a kind of newspaper sheet of literature scraps called *The Times* Broadsheets. Snippets, but mostly from good stuff. They're small enough to stir the appetite, but not to satisfy it. Rather an irritant—and one wants no irritant.... I used to imagine reading was meant to be a stimulant. Out here it has to be an anodyne....

"Have you heard of a book called 'Tom Cringle's Log'?

"War is an exciting game—that I never wanted to play. It excites once in a couple of months. And the rest of it is dirt and muddle and boredom, and smashed houses and spoilt roads and muddy scenery and boredom, and the lumbering along of supplies and the lumbering back of the wounded and weary—and boredom, and continual vague guessing of how it will end and boredom and boredom and boredom, and thinking of the work you were going to do and the travel you were going to have, and the waste of life and the waste of days and boredom, and splintered poplars and stink, everywhere stink and dirt and boredom.... And all because these accursed Prussians were too stupid to understand what a boredom they were getting ready when they pranced and stuck their chests out and earnt the praises of Mr. Thomas Carlyle.... *Gott strafe Deutschland*.... So send me some books, books of dreams, books about China and the willow-pattern plate and the golden age and fairyland. And send them soon and address them very carefully...."

§ 12

Teddy's misadventure happened while figs were still ripening on Mr. Britling's big tree. It was Cissie brought the news to Mr. Britling. She came up to the Dower House with a white, scared face.

"I've come up for the letters," she said. "There's bad news of Teddy, and Letty's rather in a state."

"He's not——?" Mr. Britling left the word unsaid.

"He's wounded and missing," said Cissie.

"A prisoner!" said Mr. Britling.

"And wounded. *How*, we don't know."

She added: "Letty has gone to telegraph."

"Telegraph to whom?"

"To the War Office, to know what sort of wound he has. They tell nothing. It's disgraceful."

"It doesn't say *severely*?"

"It says just nothing. Wounded and missing! Surely they ought to give us particulars."

Mr. Britling thought. His first thought was that now news might come at any time that Hugh was wounded and missing. Then he set himself to persuade Cissie that the absence of "seriously" meant that Teddy was only quite bearably wounded, and that if he was also "missing" it might be difficult for the War Office to ascertain at once just exactly what she wanted to know. But Cissie said merely that "Letty was in an awful state," and after Mr. Britling had given her a few instructions for his typing, he went down to the cottage to repeat these mitigatory considerations to Letty. He found her much whiter than her sister, and in a state of cold indignation with the War Office. It was clear she thought that organisation ought to have taken better care of Teddy. She had a curious effect of feeling that something was being kept back from her. It was manifest too that she was disposed to regard Mr. Britling as biased in favour of the authorities.

"At any rate," she said, "they could have answered my telegram promptly. I sent it at eight. Two hours of scornful silence."

This fierce, strained, unjust Letty was a new aspect to Mr. Britling. Her treatment of his proffered consolations made him feel slightly henpecked.

"And just fancy!" she said. "They have no means of knowing if he has arrived safely on the German side. How can they know he is a prisoner without knowing that?"

"But the word is 'missing.'"

"That *means* a prisoner," said Letty uncivilly....

§ 13

Mr. Britling returned to the Dower House perplexed and profoundly disturbed. He had a distressful sense that things were far more serious with Teddy than he had tried to

persuade Letty they were; that "wounded and missing" meant indeed a man abandoned to very sinister probabilities. He was distressed for Teddy, and still more acutely distressed for Mrs. Teddy, whose every note and gesture betrayed suppositions even more sinister than his own. And that preposterous sense of liability, because he had helped Teddy to get his commission, was more distressful than it had ever been. He was surprised that Letty had not assailed him with railing accusations.

And this event had wiped off at one sweep all the protective scab of habituation that had gathered over the wound of Hugh's departure. He was back face to face with the one evil chance in five....

In the hall there was lying a letter from Hugh that had come by the second post. It was a relief even to see it....

Hugh had had his first spell in the trenches.

Before his departure he had promised his half brothers a long and circumstantial account of what the trenches were really like. Here he redeemed his promise. He had evidently written with the idea that the letter would be handed over to them.

"Tell the bruddykinses I'm glad they're going to Brinsmead school. Later on, I suppose, they will go on to Statesminster. I suppose that you don't care to send them so far in these troubled times....

"And now about those trenches—as I promised. The great thing to grasp is that they are narrow. They are a sort of negative wall. They are more like giant cracks in the ground than anything else.... But perhaps I had better begin by telling how we got there. We started about one in the morning ladened up with everything you can possibly imagine on a soldier, and in addition I had a kettle—filled with water—most of the chaps had bundles of firewood, and some had extra bread. We marched out of our quarters along the road for a mile or more, and then we took the fields, and presently came to a crest and dropped into a sort of maze of zigzag trenches going up to the front trench. These trenches, you know, are much deeper than one's height; you don't see anything. It's like walking along a mud-walled passage. You just trudge along them in single file. Every now and then some one stumbles into a soakaway for rainwater or swears at a soft place, or somebody blunders into the man in front of him. This seems to go on for hours and hours. It certainly went on for an hour; so I suppose we did two or three miles of it. At one place we crossed a dip in the ground and a ditch, and the trench was built up with sandbags up to the ditch and there was a plank. Overhead there were stars, and now and then a sort of blaze thing they send up lit up the edges of the trench and gave one a glimpse of a treetop or a factory roof far away. Then for a

time it was more difficult to go on because you were blinded. Suddenly just when you were believing that this sort of trudge was going on forever, we were in the support trenches behind the firing line, and found the men we were relieving ready to come back.

"And the firing line itself? Just the same sort of ditch with a parapet of sandbags, but with dug-outs, queer big holes helped out with sleepers from a nearby railway track, opening into it from behind. Dug-outs vary a good deal. Many are rather like the cubby-house we made at the end of the orchard last summer; only the walls are thick enough to stand a high explosive shell. The best dug-out in our company's bit of front was quite a dressy affair with some woodwork and a door got from the ruins of a house twenty or thirty yards behind us. It had a stove in it too, and a chimbley, and pans to keep water in. It was the best dug-out for miles. This house had a well, and there was a special trench ran back to that, and all day long there was a coming and going for water. There had once been a pump over the well, but a shell had smashed that....

"And now you expect me to tell of Germans and the fight and shelling and all sorts of things. *I haven't seen a live German*; I haven't been within two hundred yards of a shell burst, there has been no attack and I haven't got the V.C. I have made myself muddy beyond describing; I've been working all the time, but I've not fired a shot or fought a ha'porth. We were busy all the time—just at work, repairing the parapet, which had to be done gingerly because of snipers, bringing our food in from the rear in big carriers, getting water, pushing our trench out from an angle slantingways forward. Getting meals, clearing up and so on takes a lot of time. We make tea in big kettles in the big dug-out, which two whole companies use for their cooking, and carry them with a pole through the handles to our platoons. We wash up and wash and shave. Dinner preparation (and consumption) takes two or three hours. Tea too uses up time. It's like camping out and picnicking in the park. This first time (and next too) we have been mixed with some Sussex men who have been here longer and know the business.... It works out that we do most of the fatigue. Afterwards we shall go up alone to a pitch of our own....

"But all the time you want to know about the Germans. They are a quarter of a mile away at this part, or nearly a quarter of a mile. When you snatch a peep at them it is like a low parti-coloured stone wall—only the stones are sandbags. The Germans have them black and white, so that you cannot tell which are loopholes and which are black bags. Our people haven't been so clever—and the War Office love of uniformity has given us only white bags. No doubt it looks neater. But it makes our loopholes plain. For a time black sandbags were refused. The Germans sniped at us, but not very much. Only one of our lot was hit, by a chance shot that came through the sandbag at

the top of the parapet. He just had a cut in the neck which didn't prevent his walking back. They shelled the trenches half a mile to the left of us though, and it looked pretty hot. The sandbags flew about. But the men lie low, and it looks worse than it is. The weather was fine and pleasant, as General French always says. And after three days and nights of cramped existence and petty chores, one in the foremost trench and two a little way back, and then two days in support, we came back—and here we are again waiting for our second Go.

"The night time is perhaps a little more nervy than the day. You get your head up and look about, and see the flat dim country with its ruined houses and its lumps of stuff that are dead bodies and its long vague lines of sandbags, and the searchlights going like white windmill arms and an occasional flare or star shell. And you have a nasty feeling of people creeping and creeping all night between the trenches....

"Some of us went out to strengthen a place in the parapet that was only one sandbag thick, where a man had been hit during the day. We made it four bags thick right up to the top. All the while you were doing it, you dreaded to find yourself in the white glare of a searchlight, and you had a feeling that something would hit you suddenly from behind. I had to make up my mind not to look round, or I should have kept on looking round.... Also our chaps kept shooting over us, within a foot of one's head. Just to persuade the Germans that we were not out of the trench....

"Nothing happened to us. We got back all right. It was silly to have left that parapet only one bag thick. There's the truth, and all of my first time in the trenches.

"And the Germans?

"I tell you there was no actual fighting at all. I never saw the head of one.

"But now see what a good bruddykins I am. I have seen a fight, a real exciting fight, and I have kept it to the last to tell you about.... It was a fight in the air. And the British won. It began with a German machine appearing, very minute and high, sailing towards our lines a long way to the left. We could tell it was a German because of the black cross; they decorate every aeroplane with a black Iron Cross on its wings and tail; that our officer could see with his glasses. (He let me look.) Suddenly whack, whack, whack, came a line of little puffs of smoke behind it, and then one in front of it, which meant that our anti-aircraft guns were having a go at it. Then, as suddenly, Archibald stopped, and we could see the British machine buzzing across the path of the German. It was just like two birds circling in the air. Or wasps. They buzzed like wasps. There was a little crackling—like brushing your hair in frosty weather. They were shooting at each other. Then our lieutenant called out, 'Hit, by Jove!' and handed the

glasses to Park and instantly wanted them back. He says he saw bits of the machine flying off.

"When he said that you could fancy you saw it too, up there in the blue.

"Anyhow the little machine cocked itself up on end. Rather slowly.... Then down it came like dropping a knife....

"It made you say 'Ooooo!' to see that dive. It came down, seemed to get a little bit under control, and then dive down again. You could hear the engine roar louder and louder as it came down. I never saw anything fall so fast. We saw it hit the ground among a lot of smashed-up buildings on the crest behind us. It went right over and flew to pieces, all to smithereens....

"It hurt your nose to see it hit the ground....

"Somehow—I was sort of overcome by the thought of the men in that dive. I was trying to imagine how they felt it. From the moment when they realised they were going.

"What on earth must it have seemed like at last?

"They fell seven thousand feet, the men say; some say nine thousand feet. A mile and a half!

"But all the chaps were cheering.... And there was our machine hanging in the sky. You wanted to reach up and pat it on the back. It went up higher and away towards the German lines, as though it was looking for another German. It seemed to go now quite slowly. It was an English machine, though for a time we weren't sure; our machines are done in tri-colour just as though they were French. But everybody says it was English. It was one of our crack fighting machines, and from first to last it has put down seven Germans.... And that's really all the fighting there was. There has been fighting here; a month ago. There are perhaps a dozen dead Germans lying out still in front of the lines. Little twisted figures, like overthrown scarecrows, about a hundred yards away. But that is all.

"No, the trenches have disappointed me. They are a scene of tiresome domesticity. They aren't a patch on our quarters in the rear. There isn't the traffic. I've not found a single excuse for firing my rifle. I don't believe I shall ever fire my rifle at an enemy—ever....

"You've seen Rendezvous' fresh promotion, I suppose? He's one of the men the young officers talk about. Everybody believes in him. Do you remember how Manning used to hide from him?..."

§ 14

Mr. Britling read this through, and then his thoughts went back to Teddy's disappearance and then returned to Hugh. The youngster was right in the front now, and one had to steel oneself to the possibilities of the case. Somehow Mr. Britling had not expected to find Hugh so speedily in the firing line, though he would have been puzzled to find a reason why this should not have happened. But he found he had to begin the lesson of stoicism all over again.

He read the letter twice, and then he searched for some indication of its date. He suspected that letters were sometimes held back....

Four days later this suspicion was confirmed by the arrival of another letter from Hugh in which he told of his second spell in the trenches. This time things had been much more lively. They had been heavily shelled and there had been a German attack. And this time he was writing to his father, and wrote more freely. He had scribbled in pencil.

"Things are much livelier here than they were. Our guns are getting to work. They are firing in spells of an hour or so, three or four times a day, and just when they seem to be leaving off they begin again. The Germans suddenly got the range of our trenches the day before yesterday, and begun to pound us with high explosive.... Well, it's trying. You never seem quite to know when the next bang is coming, and that keeps your nerves hung up; it seems to tighten your muscles and tire you. We've done nothing but lie low all day, and I feel as weary as if I had marched twenty miles. Then 'whop,' one's near you, and there is a flash and everything flies. It's a mad sort of smash-about. One came much too close to be pleasant; as near as the old oil jars are from the barn court door. It bowled me clean over and sent a lot of gravel over me. When I got up there was twenty yards of trench smashed into a mere hole, and men lying about, and some of them groaning and one three-quarters buried. We had to turn to and get them out as well as we could....

"I felt stunned and insensitive; it was well to have something to do....

"Our guns behind felt for the German guns. It was the damnest racket. Like giant lunatics smashing about amidst colossal pots and pans. They fired different sorts of shells; stink shells as well as Jack Johnsons, and though we didn't get much of that at our corner there was a sting of chlorine in the air all through the afternoon. Most of the

stink shells fell short. We hadn't masks, but we rigged up a sort of protection with our handkerchiefs. And it didn't amount to very much. It was rather like the chemistry room after Heinrich and the kids had been mixing things. Most of the time I was busy helping with the men who had got hurt. Suddenly there came a lull. Then some one said the Germans were coming, and I had a glimpse of them.

"You don't look at anything steadily while the guns are going. When a big gun goes off or a shell bursts anywhere near you, you seem neither to see nor hear for a moment. You keep on being intermittently stunned. One sees in a kind of flicker in between the impacts....

"Well, there they were. This time I saw them. They were coming out and running a little way and dropping, and our shell was bursting among them and behind them. A lot of it was going too far. I watched what our men were doing, and poured out a lot of cartridges ready to my hand and began to blaze away. Half the German attack never came out of their trench. If they really intended business against us, which I doubt, they were half-hearted in carrying it out. They didn't show for five minutes, and they left two or three score men on the ground. Whenever we saw a man wriggle we were told to fire at him; it might be an unwounded man trying to crawl back. For a time our guns gave them beans. Then it was practically over, but about sunset their guns got back at us again, and the artillery fight went on until it was moonlight. The chaps in our third company caught it rather badly, and then our guns seemed to find something and get the upper hand....

"In the night some of our men went out to repair the wire entanglements, and one man crawled halfway to the enemy trenches to listen. But I had done my bit for the day, and I was supposed to sleep in the dug-out. I was far too excited to sleep. All my nerves were jumping about, and my mind was like a lot of flying fragments flying about very fast....

"They shelled us again next day and our tea dixy was hit; so that we didn't get any tea....

"I slept thirty hours after I got back here. And now I am slowly digesting these experiences. Most of our fellows are. My mind and nerves have been rather bumped and bruised by the shelling, but not so much as you might think. I feel as though I'd presently not think very much of it. Some of our men have got the stun of it a lot more than I have. It gets at the older men more. Everybody says that. The men of over thirty-five don't recover from a shelling for weeks. They go about—sort of hesitatingly....

"Life is very primitive here—which doesn't mean that one is getting down to anything fundamental, but only going back to something immediate and simple. It's fetching and carrying and getting water and getting food and going up to the firing line and coming back. One goes on for weeks, and then one day one finds oneself crying out, 'What is all this for? When is it to end?' I seemed to have something ahead of me before this war began, education, science, work, discoveries; all sorts of things; but it is hard to feel that there is anything ahead of us here....

"Somehow the last spell in the fire trench has shaken up my mind a lot. I was getting used to the war before, but now I've got back to my original amazement at the whole business. I find myself wondering what we are really up to, why the war began, why we were caught into this amazing routine. It looks, it feels orderly, methodical, purposeful. Our officers give us orders and get their orders, and the men back there get their orders. Everybody is getting orders. Back, I suppose, to Lord Kitchener. It goes on for weeks with the effect of being quite sane and intended and the right thing, and then, then suddenly it comes whacking into one's head, 'But this—this is utterly *mad*!' This going to and fro and to and fro and to and fro; this monotony which breaks ever and again into violence—violence that never gets anywhere—is exactly the life that a lunatic leads. Melancholia and mania.... It's just a collective obsession—by war. The world is really quite mad. I happen to be having just one gleam of sanity, that won't last after I have finished this letter. I suppose when an individual man goes mad and gets out of the window because he imagines the door is magically impossible, and dances about in the street without his trousers jabbing at passers-by with a toasting-fork, he has just the same sombre sense of unavoidable necessity that we have, all of us, when we go off with our packs into the trenches....

"It's only by an effort that I can recall how life felt in the spring of 1914. Do you remember Heinrich and his attempt to make a table chart of the roses, so that we could sit outside the barn and read the names of all the roses in the barn court? Like the mountain charts they have on tables in Switzerland. What an inconceivable thing that is now! For all I know I shot Heinrich the other night. For all I know he is one of the lumps that we counted after the attack went back.

"It's a queer thing, Daddy, but I have a sort of *seditious* feeling in writing things like this. One gets to feel that it is wrong to think. It's the effect of discipline. Of being part of a machine. Still, I doubt if I ought to think. If one really looks into things in this spirit, where is it going to take us? Ortheris—his real name by the by is Arthur Jewell—hasn't any of these troubles. 'The b——y Germans butted into Belgium,' he says. 'We've got to 'oof 'em out again. That's all abart it. Leastways it's all *I* know.... I don't know nothing

about Serbia, I don't know nothing about anything, except that the Germans got to stop this sort of gime for Everlasting, Amen.'...

"Sometimes I think he's righter than I am. Sometimes I think he is only madder."

§ 15

These letters weighed heavily upon Mr. Britling's mind. He perceived that this precociously wise, subtle youngster of his was now close up to the line of injury and death, going to and fro from it, in a perpetual, fluctuating danger. At any time now in the day or night the evil thing might wing its way to him. If Mr. Britling could have prayed, he would have prayed for Hugh. He began and never finished some ineffectual prayers.

He tried to persuade himself of a Roman stoicism; that he would be sternly proud, sternly satisfied, if this last sacrifice for his country was demanded from him. He perceived he was merely humbugging himself....

This war had no longer the simple greatness that would make any such stern happiness possible....

The disaster to Teddy and Mrs. Teddy hit him hard. He winced at the thought of Mrs. Teddy's white face; the unspoken accusation in her eyes. He felt he could never bring himself to say his one excuse to her: "I did not keep Hugh back. If I had done that, then you might have the right to blame."

If he had overcome every other difficulty in the way to an heroic pose there was still Hugh's unconquerable lucidity of outlook. War *was* a madness....

But what else was to be done? What else could be done? We could not give in to Germany. If a lunatic struggles, sane men must struggle too....

Mr. Britling had ceased to write about the war at all. All his later writings about it had been abandoned unfinished. He could not imagine them counting, affecting any one, producing any effect. Indeed he was writing now very intermittently. His contributions to *The Times* had fallen away. He was perpetually thinking now about the war, about life and death, about the religious problems that had seemed so remote in the days of the peace; but none of his thinking would become clear and definite enough for writing. All the clear stars of his mind were hidden by the stormy clouds of excitement that the daily newspaper perpetually renewed and by the daily developments of life.

And just as his professional income shrank before his mental confusion and impotence, the private income that came from his and his wife's investments became uncertain. She had had two thousand pounds in the Constantinople loan, seven hundred in debentures of the Ottoman railway; he had held similar sums in two Hungarian and one Bulgarian loan, in a linoleum factory at Rouen and in a Swiss Hotel company. All these stopped payments, and the dividends from their other investments shrank. There seemed no limit set to the possibilities of shrinkage of capital and income. Income tax had leapt to colossal dimensions, the cost of most things had risen, and the tangle of life was now increased by the need for retrenchments and economies. He decided that Gladys, the facetiously named automobile, was a luxury, and sold her for a couple of hundred pounds. He lost his gardener, who had gone to higher priced work with a miller, and he had great trouble to replace him, so that the garden became disagreeably unkempt and unsatisfactory. He had to give up his frequent trips to London. He was obliged to defer Statesminster for the boys. For a time at any rate they must go as day boys to Brinsmead. At every point he met this uncongenial consideration of ways and means. For years now he had gone easy, lived with a certain self-indulgence. It was extraordinarily vexatious to have one's greater troubles for one's country and one's son and one's faith crossed and complicated by these little troubles of the extra sixpence and the untimely bill.

What worried his mind perhaps more than anything else was his gradual loss of touch with the essential issues of the war. At first the militarism, the aggression of Germany, had seemed so bad that he could not see the action of Britain and her allies as anything but entirely righteous. He had seen the war plainly and simply in the phrase, "Now this militarism must end." He had seen Germany as a system, as imperialism and junkerism, as a callous materialist aggression, as the spirit that makes war, and the Allies as the protest of humanity against all these evil things.

Insensibly, in spite of himself, this first version of the war was giving place to another. The tawdry, rhetorical German Emperor, who had been the great antagonist at the outset, the last upholder of Cæsarism, God's anointed with the withered arm and the mailed fist, had receded from the foreground of the picture; that truer Germany which is thought and system, which is the will to do things thoroughly, the Germany of Ostwald and the once rejected Hindenburg, was coming to the fore. It made no apology for the errors and crimes that had been imposed upon it by its Hohenzollern leadership, but it fought now to save itself from the destruction and division that would be its inevitable lot if it accepted defeat too easily; fought to hold out, fought for a second chance, with discipline, with skill and patience, with a steadfast will. It

fought with science, it fought with economy, with machines and thought against all too human antagonists. It necessitated an implacable resistance, but also it commanded respect. Against it fought three great peoples with as fine a will; but they had neither the unity, the habitual discipline, nor the science of Germany, and it was the latter defect that became more and more the distressful matter of Mr. Britling's thoughts. France after her initial experiences, after her first reeling month, had risen from the very verge of defeat to a steely splendour of resolution, but England and Russia, those twin slack giants, still wasted force, were careless, negligent, uncertain. Everywhere up and down the scale, from the stupidity of the uniform sandbags and Hugh's young officer who would not use a map, to the general conception and direction of the war, Mr. Britling's inflamed and oversensitised intelligence perceived the same bad qualities for which he had so often railed upon his countrymen in the days of the peace, that impatience, that indolence, that wastefulness and inconclusiveness, that failure to grip issues and do obviously necessary things. The same lax qualities that had brought England so close to the supreme imbecility of a civil war in Ireland in July, 1914, were now muddling and prolonging the war, and postponing, it might be for ever, the victory that had seemed so certain only a year ago. The politician still intrigued, the ineffectives still directed. Against brains used to the utmost their fight was a stupid thrusting forth of men and men and yet more men, men badly trained, under-equipped, stupidly led. A press clamour for invention and scientific initiative was stifled under a committee of elderly celebrities and eminent dufferdom; from the outset, the Ministry of Munitions seemed under the influence of the "business man."...

It is true that righteousness should triumph over the tyrant and the robber, but have carelessness and incapacity any right to triumph over capacity and foresight?
Men were coming now to dark questionings between this intricate choice. And, indeed, was our cause all righteousness?

There surely is the worst doubt of all for a man whose son is facing death.

Were we indeed standing against tyranny for freedom?

There came drifting to Mr. Britling's ears a confusion of voices, voices that told of reaction, of the schemes of employers to best the trade unions, of greedy shippers and greedy house landlords reaping their harvest, of waste and treason in the very households of the Ministry, of religious cant and intolerance at large, of self-advertisement written in letters of blood, of forestalling and jobbery, of irrational and exasperating oppressions in India and Egypt.... It came with a shock to him, too, that Hugh should see so little else than madness in the war, and have so pitiless a

realisation of its essential futility. The boy forced his father to see—what indeed all along he had been seeing more and more clearly. The war, even by the standards of adventure and conquest, had long since become a monstrous absurdity. Some way there must be out of this bloody entanglement that was yielding victory to neither side, that was yielding nothing but waste and death beyond all precedent. The vast majority of people everywhere must be desiring peace, willing to buy peace at any reasonable price, and in all the world it seemed there was insufficient capacity to end the daily butchery and achieve the peace that was so universally desired, the peace that would be anything better than a breathing space for further warfare.... Every day came the papers with the balanced story of battles, losses, destructions, ships sunk, towns smashed. And never a decision, never a sign of decision.

One Saturday afternoon Mr. Britling found himself with Mrs. Britling at Claverings. Lady Homartyn was in mourning for her two nephews, the Glassington boys, who had both been killed, one in Flanders, the other in Gallipoli. Raeburn was there too, despondent and tired-looking. There were three young men in khaki, one with the red of a staff officer; there were two or three women whom Mr. Britling had not met before, and Miss Sharsper the novelist, fresh from nursing experience among the convalescents in the south of France. But he was disgusted to find that the gathering was dominated by his old antagonist, Lady Frensham, unsubdued, unaltered, rampant over them all, arrogant, impudent, insulting. She was in mourning, she had the most splendid black furs Mr. Britling had ever seen; her large triumphant profile came out of them like the head of a vulture out of its ruff; her elder brother was a wounded prisoner in Germany, her second was dead; it would seem that hers were the only sacrifices the war had yet extorted from any one. She spoke as though it gave her the sole right to criticise the war or claim compensation for the war.

Her incurable propensity to split the country, to make mischievous accusations against classes and districts and public servants, was having full play. She did her best to provoke Mr. Britling into a dispute, and throw some sort of imputation upon his patriotism as distinguished from her own noisy and intolerant conceptions of "loyalty."

She tried him first with conscription. She threw out insults at the shirkers and the "funk classes." All the middle-class people clung on to their wretched little businesses, made any sort of excuse....

Mr. Britling was stung to defend them. "A business," he said acidly, "isn't like land, which waits and grows rich for its owner. And these people can't leave ferrety little agents behind them when they go off to serve. Tens of thousands of middle-class men

have ruined themselves and flung away every prospect they had in the world to go to this war."

"And scores of thousands haven't!" said Lady Frensham. "They are the men I'm thinking of."...

Mr. Britling ran through a little list of aristocratic stay-at-homes that began with a duke.

"And not a soul speaks to them in consequence," she said.

She shifted her attack to the Labour people. They would rather see the country defeated than submit to a little discipline.

"Because they have no faith in the house of lawyers or the house of landlords," said Mr. Britling. "Who can blame them?"

She proceeded to tell everybody what she would do with strikers. She would give them "short shrift." She would give them a taste of the Prussian way—homoeopathic treatment. "But of course old vote-catching Asquith daren't—he daren't!" Mr. Britling opened his mouth and said nothing; he was silenced. The men in khaki listened respectfully but ambiguously; one of the younger ladies it seemed was entirely of Lady Frensham's way of thinking, and anxious to show it. The good lady having now got her hands upon the Cabinet proceeded to deal faithfully with its two-and-twenty members. Winston Churchill had overridden Lord Fisher upon the question of Gallipoli, and incurred terrible responsibilities. Lord Haldane—she called him "Tubby Haldane"—was a convicted traitor. "The man's a German out and out. Oh! what if he hasn't a drop of German blood in his veins? He's a German by choice—which is worse."

"I thought he had a certain capacity for organisation," said Mr. Britling.

"We don't want his organisation, and we don't want *him*," said Lady Frensham.

Mr. Britling pleaded for particulars of the late Lord Chancellor's treasons. There were no particulars. It was just an idea the good lady had got into her head, that had got into a number of accessible heads. There was only one strong man in all the country now, Lady Frensham insisted. That was Sir Edward Carson.

Mr. Britling jumped in his chair.

"But has he ever done anything?" he cried, "except embitter Ireland?"

Lady Frensham did not hear that question. She pursued her glorious theme. Lloyd George, who had once been worthy only of the gallows, was now the sole minister fit

to put beside her hero. He had won her heart by his condemnation of the working man. He was the one man who was not afraid to speak out, to tell them they drank, to tell them they shirked and loafed, to tell them plainly that if defeat came to this country the blame would fall upon *them*!

"*No!*" cried Mr. Britling.

"Yes," said Lady Frensham. "Upon them and those who have flattered and misled them...."

And so on....

It presently became necessary for Lady Homartyn to rescue Mr. Britling from the great lady's patriotic tramplings. He found himself drifting into the autumnal garden—the show of dahlias had never been so wonderful—in the company of Raeburn and the staff officer and a small woman who was presently discovered to be remarkably well-informed. They were all despondent. "I think all this promiscuous blaming of people is quite the worst—and most ominous—thing about us just now," said Mr. Britling after the restful pause that followed the departure from the presence of Lady Frensham.

"It goes on everywhere," said the staff officer.

"Is it really—honest?" said Mr. Britling.

Raeburn, after reflection, decided to answer. "As far as it is stupid, yes. There's a lot of blame coming; there's bound to be a day of reckoning, and I suppose we've all got an instinctive disposition to find a scapegoat for our common sins. The Tory press is pretty rotten, and there's a strong element of mere personal spite—in the Churchill attacks for example. Personal jealousy probably. Our 'old families' seem to have got vulgar-spirited imperceptibly—in a generation or so. They quarrel and shirk and lay blame exactly as bad servants do—and things are still far too much in their hands. Things are getting muffed, there can be no doubt about that—not fatally, but still rather seriously. And the government—it was human before the war, and we've added no archangels. There's muddle. There's mutual suspicion. You never know what newspaper office Lloyd George won't be in touch with next. He's honest and patriotic and energetic, but he's mortally afraid of old women and class intrigues. He doesn't know where to get his backing. He's got all a labour member's terror of the dagger at his back. There's a lack of nerve, too, in getting rid of prominent officers—who have friends."

The staff officer nodded.

"Northcliffe seems to me to have a case," said Mr. Britling. "Every one abuses him."

"I'd stop his *Daily Mail*," said Raeburn. "I'd leave *The Times*, but I'd stop the *Daily Mail* on the score of its placards alone. It overdoes Northcliffe. It translates him into the shrieks and yells of underlings. The plain fact is that Northcliffe is scared out of his wits by German efficiency—and in war time when a man is scared out of his wits, whether he is honest or not, you put his head in a bag or hold a pistol to it to calm him.... What is the good of all this clamouring for a change of government? We haven't a change of government. It's like telling a tramp to get a change of linen. Our men, all our public men, are second-rate men, with the habits of advocates. There is nothing masterful in their minds. How can you expect the system to produce anything else? But they are doing as well as they can, and there is no way of putting in any one else now, and there you are."

"Meanwhile," said Mr. Britling, "our boys—get killed."

"They'd get killed all the more if you had—let us say—Carson and Lloyd George and Northcliffe and Lady Frensham, with, I suppose, Austin Harrison and Horatio Bottomley thrown in—as a Strong Silent Government.... I'd rather have Northcliffe as dictator than that.... We can't suddenly go back on the past and alter our type. We didn't listen to Matthew Arnold. We've never thoroughly turned out and cleaned up our higher schools. We've resisted instruction. We've preferred to maintain our national luxuries of a bench of bishops and party politics. And compulsory Greek and the university sneer. And Lady Frensham. And all that sort of thing. And here we are!... Well, damn it, we're in for it now; we've got to plough through with it—with what we have—as what we are."

The young staff officer nodded. He thought that was "about it."

"You've got no sons," said Mr. Britling.

"I'm not even married," said Raeburn, as though he thanked God.

The little well-informed lady remarked abruptly that she had two sons; one was just home wounded from Suvla Bay. What her son told her made her feel very grave. She said that the public was still quite in the dark about the battle of Anafarta. It had been a hideous muddle, and we had been badly beaten. The staff work had been awful. Nothing joined up, nothing was on the spot and in time. The water supply, for example, had gone wrong; the men had been mad with thirst. One regiment which she named had not been supported by another; when at last the first came back the two battalions fought in the trenches regardless of the enemy. There had been no leading, no correlation, no plan. Some of the guns, she declared, had been left behind in Egypt. Some of the train was untraceable to this day. It was mislaid somewhere in the

Levant. At the beginning Sir Ian Hamilton had not even been present. He had failed to get there in time. It had been the reckless throwing away of an army. And so hopeful an army! Her son declared it meant the complete failure of the Dardanelles project....

"And when one hears how near we came to victory!" she cried, and left it at that.

"Three times this year," said Raeburn, "we have missed victories because of the badness of our staff work. It's no good picking out scapegoats. It's a question of national habit. It's because the sort of man we turn out from our public schools has never learnt how to catch trains, get to an office on the minute, pack a knapsack properly, or do anything smartly and quickly—anything whatever that he can possibly get done for him. You can't expect men who are habitually easy-going to keep bucked up to a high pitch of efficiency for any length of time. All their training is against it. All their tradition. They hate being prigs. An Englishman will be any sort of stupid failure rather than appear a prig. That's why we've lost three good fights that we ought to have won—and thousands and thousands of men—and material and time, precious beyond reckoning. We've lost a year. We've dashed the spirit of our people."

"My boy in Flanders," said Mr. Britling, "says about the same thing. He says our officers have never learnt to count beyond ten, and that they are scared at the sight of a map...."

"And the war goes on," said the little woman.

"How long, oh Lord! how long?" cried Mr. Britling.

"I'd give them another year," said the staff officer. "Just going as we are going. Then something *must* give way. There will be no money anywhere. There'll be no more men.... I suppose they'll feel that shortage first anyhow. Russia alone has over twenty millions."

"That's about the size of it," said Raeburn....

"Do you think, sir, there'll be civil war?" asked the young staff officer abruptly after a pause.

There was a little interval before any one answered this surprising question.

"After the peace, I mean," said the young officer.

"There'll be just the devil to pay," said Raeburn.

"One thing after another in the country is being pulled up by its roots," reflected Mr. Britling.

"We've never produced a plan for the war, and it isn't likely we shall have one for the peace," said Raeburn, and added: "and Lady Frensham's little lot will be doing their level best to sit on the safety-valve.... They'll rake up Ireland and Ulster from the very start. But I doubt if Ulster will save 'em."

"We shall squabble. What else do we ever do?"

No one seemed able to see more than that. A silence fell on the little party.

"Well, thank heaven for these dahlias," said Raeburn, affecting the philosopher.

The young staff officer regarded the dahlias without enthusiasm....

§ 16

Mr. Britling sat one September afternoon with Captain Lawrence Carmine in the sunshine of the barn court, and smoked with him and sometimes talked and sometimes sat still.

"When it began I did not believe that this war could be like other wars," he said. "I did not dream it. I thought that we had grown wiser at last. It seemed to me like the dawn of a great clearing up. I thought the common sense of mankind would break out like a flame, an indignant flame, and consume all this obsolete foolery of empires and banners and militarism directly it made its attack upon human happiness. A score of things that I see now were preposterous, I thought must happen—naturally. I thought America would declare herself against the Belgian outrage; that she would not tolerate the smashing of the great sister republic—if only for the memory of Lafayette. Well—I gather America is chiefly concerned about our making cotton contraband. I thought the Balkan States were capable of a reasonable give and take; of a common care for their common freedom. I see now three German royalties trading in peasants, and no men in their lands to gainsay them. I saw this war, as so many Frenchmen have seen it, as something that might legitimately command a splendid enthusiasm of indignation.... It was all a dream, the dream of a prosperous comfortable man who had never come to the cutting edge of life. Everywhere cunning, everywhere small feuds and hatreds, distrusts, dishonesties, timidities, feebleness of purpose, dwarfish imaginations, swarm over the great and simple issues.... It is a war now like any other of the mobbing, many-aimed cataclysms that have shattered empires and devastated the world; it is a war without point, a war that has lost its soul, it has become mere

incoherent fighting and destruction, a demonstration in vast and tragic forms of the stupidity and ineffectiveness of our species...."

He stopped, and there was a little interval of silence.

Captain Carmine tossed the fag end of his cigar very neatly into a tub of hydrangeas. "Three thousand years ago in China," he said, "there were men as sad as we are, for the same cause."

"Three thousand years ahead perhaps," said Mr. Britling, "there will still be men with the same sadness.... And yet—and yet.... No. Just now I have no elasticity. It is not in my nature to despair, but things are pressing me down. I don't recover as I used to recover. I tell myself still that though the way is long and hard the spirit of hope, the spirit of creation, the generosities and gallantries in the heart of man, must end in victory. But I say that over as one repeats a worn-out prayer. The light is out of the sky for me. Sometimes I doubt if it will ever come back. Let younger men take heart and go on with the world. If I could die for the right thing now—instead of just having to live on in this world of ineffective struggle—I would be glad to die now, Carmine...."

§ 17

In these days also Mr. Direck was very unhappy.

For Cissie, at any rate, had not lost touch with the essential issues of the war. She was as clear as ever that German militarism and the German attack on Belgium and France was the primary subject of the war. And she dismissed all secondary issues. She continued to demand why America did not fight. "We fight for Belgium. Won't you fight for the Dutch and Norwegian ships? Won't you even fight for your own ships that the Germans are sinking?"

Mr. Direck attempted explanations that were ill received.

"You were ready enough to fight the Spaniards when they blew up the *Maine*. But the Germans can sink the *Lusitania*! That's—as you say—a different proposition."

His mind was shot by an extraordinary suspicion that she thought the *Lusitania* an American vessel. But Mr. Direck was learning his Cissie, and he did not dare to challenge her on this score.

"You haven't got hold of the American proposition," he said. "We're thinking beyond wars."

"That's what we have been trying to do," said Cissie. "Do you think we came into it for the fun of the thing?"

"Haven't I shown in a hundred ways that I sympathise?"

"Oh—sympathy!..."

He fared little better at Mr. Britling's hands. Mr. Britling talked darkly, but pointed all the time only too plainly at America. "There's two sorts of liberalism," said Mr. Britling, "that pretend to be the same thing; there's the liberalism of great aims and the liberalism of defective moral energy...."

§ 18

It was not until Teddy had been missing for three weeks that Hugh wrote about him. The two Essex battalions on the Flanders front were apparently wide apart, and it was only from home that Hugh learnt what had happened.

"You can't imagine how things narrow down when one is close up against them. One does not know what is happening even within a few miles of us, until we get the newspapers. Then, with a little reading between the lines and some bold guessing, we fit our little bit of experience with a general shape. Of course I've wondered at times about Teddy. But oddly enough I've never thought of him very much as being out here. It's queer, I know, but I haven't. I can't imagine why....

"I don't know about 'missing.' We've had nothing going on here that has led to any missing. All our men have been accounted for. But every few miles along the front conditions alter. His lot may have been closer up to the enemy, and there may have been a rush and a fight for a bit of trench either way. In some parts the German trenches are not thirty yards away, and there is mining, bomb throwing, and perpetual creeping up and give and take. Here we've been getting a bit forward. But I'll tell you about that presently. And, anyhow, I don't understand about 'missing.' There's very few prisoners taken now. But don't tell Letty that. I try to imagine old Teddy in it....

"Missing's a queer thing. It isn't tragic—or pitiful. Or partly reassuring like 'prisoner.' It just sends one speculating and speculating. I can't find any one who knows where the 14th Essex are. Things move about here so mysteriously that for all I know we may find

them in the next trench next time we go up. But there *is* a chance for Teddy. It's worth while bucking Letty all you can. And at the same time there's odds against him. There plainly and unfeelingly is how things stand in my mind. I think chiefly of Letty. I'm glad Cissie is with her, and I'm glad she's got the boy. Keep her busy. She was frightfully fond of him. I've seen all sorts of things between them, and I know that.... I'll try and write to her soon, and I'll find something hopeful to tell her.

"Meanwhile I've got something to tell you. I've been through a fight, a big fight, and I haven't got a scratch. I've taken two prisoners with my lily hand. Men were shot close to me. I didn't mind that a bit. It was as exciting as one of those bitter fights we used to have round the hockey goal. I didn't mind anything till afterwards. Then when I was in the trench in the evening I trod on something slippery—pah! And after it was all over one of my chums got it—sort of unfairly. And I keep on thinking of those two things so much that all the early part is just dreamlike. It's more like something I've read in a book, or seen in the *Illustrated London News* than actually been through. One had been thinking so often, how will it feel? how shall I behave? that when it came it had an effect of being flat and ordinary.

"They say we hadn't got enough guns in the spring or enough ammunition. That's all right now—anyhow. They started in plastering the Germans overnight, and right on until it was just daylight. I never heard such a row, and their trenches—we could stand up and look at them without getting a single shot at us—were flying about like the crater of a volcano. We were not in our firing trench. We had gone back into some new trenches, at the rear—I think to get out of the way of the counter fire. But this morning they weren't doing very much. For once our guns were on top. There was a feeling of anticipation—very like waiting for an examination paper to be given out; then we were at it. Getting out of a trench to attack gives you an odd feeling of being just hatched. Suddenly the world is big. I don't remember our gun fire stopping. And then you rush. 'Come on! Come on!' say the officers. Everybody gives a sort of howl and rushes. When you see men dropping, you rush the faster. The only thing that checks you at all is the wire twisted about everywhere. You don't want to trip over that. The frightening thing is the exposure. After being in the trenches so long you feel naked. You run like a scared child for the German trench ahead. I can't understand the iron nerve of a man who can expose his back by turning to run away. And there's a thirsty feeling with one's bayonet. But they didn't wait. They dropped rifles and ran. But we ran so fast after them that we caught one or two in the second trench. I got down into that, heard a voice behind me, and found my two prisoners lying artful in a dug-out. They held up their hands as I turned. If they hadn't I doubt if I should have done anything to them. I didn't feel like it. I felt *friendly*.

"Not all the Germans ran. Three or four stuck to their machine-guns until they got bayoneted. Both the trenches were frightfully smashed about, and in the first one there were little knots and groups of dead. We got to work at once shying the sandbags over from the old front of the trench to the parados. Our guns had never stopped all the time; they were now plastering the third line trenches. And almost at once the German shells began dropping into us. Of course they had the range to an inch. One didn't have any time to feel and think; one just set oneself with all one's energy to turn the trench over....

"I don't remember that I helped or cared for a wounded man all the time, or felt anything about the dead except to step over them and not on them. I was just possessed by the idea that we had to get the trench into a sheltering state before they tried to come back. And then stick there. I just wanted to win, and there was nothing else in my mind....

"They did try to come back, but not very much....

"Then when I began to feel sure of having got hold of the trench for good, I began to realise just how tired I was and how high the sun had got. I began to look about me, and found most of the other men working just as hard as I had been doing. 'We've done it!' I said, and that was the first word I'd spoken since I told my two Germans to come out of it, and stuck a man with a wounded leg to watch them. 'It's a bit of All Right,' said Ortheris, knocking off also, and lighting a half-consumed cigarette. He had been wearing it behind his ear, I believe, ever since the charge. Against this occasion. He'd kept close up to me all the time, I realised. And then old Park turned up very cheerful with a weak bayonet jab in his forearm that he wanted me to rebandage. It was good to see him practically all right too.

"'I took two prisoners,' I said, and everybody I spoke to I told that. I was fearfully proud of it.

"I thought that if I could take two prisoners in my first charge I was going to be some soldier.

"I had stood it all admirably. I didn't feel a bit shaken. I was as tough as anything. I'd seen death and killing, and it was all just hockey.

"And then that confounded Ortheris must needs go and get killed.

"The shell knocked me over, and didn't hurt me a bit. I was a little stunned, and some dirt was thrown over me, and when I got up on my knees I saw Jewell lying about six yards off—and his legs were all smashed about. Ugh! Pulped!

"He looked amazed. 'Bloody,' he said, 'bloody.' He fixed his eyes on me, and suddenly grinned. You know we'd once had two fights about his saying 'bloody,' I think I told you at the time, a fight and a return match, he couldn't box for nuts, but he stood up like a Briton, and it appealed now to his sense of humour that I should be standing there too dazed to protest at the old offence. 'I thought *you* was done in,' he said. 'I'm in a mess—a bloody mess, ain't I? Like a stuck pig. Bloody—right enough. Bloody! I didn't know I 'ad it *in* me.'

"He looked at me and grinned with a sort of pale satisfaction in keeping up to the last—dying good Ortheris to the finish. I just stood up helpless in front of him, still rather dazed.

"He said something about having a thundering thirst on him.

"I really don't believe he felt any pain. He would have done if he had lived.

"And then while I was fumbling with my water-bottle, he collapsed. He forgot all about Ortheris. Suddenly he said something that cut me all to ribbons. His face puckered up just like the face of a fretful child which refuses to go to bed. 'I didn't want to be aut of it,' he said petulantly. 'And I'm done!' And then—then he just looked discontented and miserable and died—right off. Turned his head a little way over. As if he was impatient at everything. Fainted—and fluttered out.

"For a time I kept trying to get him to drink....

"I couldn't believe he was dead....

"And suddenly it was all different. I began to cry. Like a baby. I kept on with the water-bottle at his teeth long after I was convinced he was dead. I didn't want him to be aut of it! God knows how I didn't. I wanted my dear little Cockney cad back. Oh! most frightfully I wanted him back.

"I shook him. I was like a scared child. I blubbered and howled things.... It's all different since he died.

"My dear, dear Father, I am grieving and grieving—and it's altogether nonsense. And it's all mixed up in my mind with the mess I trod on. And it gets worse and worse. So that I don't seem to feel anything really, even for Teddy.

"It's been just the last straw of all this hellish foolery....

"If ever there was a bigger lie, my dear Daddy, than any other, it is that man is a reasonable creature....

"War is just foolery—lunatic foolery—hell's foolery....

"But, anyhow, your son is sound and well—if sorrowful and angry. We were relieved that night. And there are rumours that very soon we are to have a holiday and a refit. We lost rather heavily. We have been praised. But all along, Essex has done well. I can't reckon to get back yet, but there are such things as leave for eight-and-forty hours or so in England....

"I shall be glad of that sort of turning round....

"I'm tired. Oh! I'm tired....

"I wanted to write all about Jewell to his mother or his sweetheart or some one; I wanted to wallow in his praises, to say all the things I really find now that I thought about him, but I haven't even had that satisfaction. He was a Poor Law child; he was raised in one of those awful places between Sutton and Banstead in Surrey. I've told you of all the sweethearting he had. 'Soldiers Three' was his Bible; he was always singing 'Tipperary,' and he never got the tune right nor learnt more than three lines of it. He laced all his talk with 'b——y'; it was his jewel, his ruby. But he had the pluck of a robin or a squirrel; I never knew him scared or anything but cheerful. Misfortunes, humiliations, only made him chatty. And he'd starve to have something to give away.

"Well, well, this is the way of war, Daddy. This is what war is. Damn the Kaiser! Damn all fools.... Give my love to the Mother and the bruddykins and every one...."

§ 19

It was just a day or so over three weeks after this last letter from Hugh that Mr. Direck reappeared at Matching's Easy. He had had a trip to Holland—a trip that was as much a flight from Cissie's reproaches as a mission of inquiry. He had intended to go on into Belgium, where he had already been doing useful relief work under Mr. Hoover, but the confusion of his own feelings had checked him and brought him back.

Mr. Direck's mind was in a perplexity only too common during the stresses of that tragic year. He was entangled in a paradox; like a large majority of Americans at that time his feelings were quite definitely pro-Ally, and like so many in that majority he had a very clear conviction that it would be wrong and impossible for the United States to take part in the war. His sympathies were intensely with the Dower House and its dependent cottage; he would have wept with generous emotion to see the Stars and

Stripes interwoven with the three other great banners of red, white and blue that led the world against German imperialism and militarism, but for all that his mind would not march to that tune. Against all these impulses fought something very fundamental in Mr. Direck's composition, a preconception of America that had grown almost insensibly in his mind, the idea of America as a polity aloof from the Old World system, as a fresh start for humanity, as something altogether too fine and precious to be dragged into even the noblest of European conflicts. America was to be the beginning of the fusion of mankind, neither German nor British nor French nor in any way national. She was to be the great experiment in peace and reasonableness. She had to hold civilisation and social order out of this fray, to be a refuge for all those finer things that die under stress and turmoil; it was her task to maintain the standards of life and the claims of humanitarianism in the conquered province and the prisoners' compound, she had to be the healer and arbitrator, the remonstrance and not the smiting hand. Surely there were enough smiting hands.

But this idea of an America judicial, remonstrating, and aloof, led him to a conclusion that scandalised him. If America will not, and should not use force in the ends of justice, he argued, then America has no right to make and export munitions of war. She must not trade in what she disavows. He had a quite exaggerated idea of the amount of munitions that America was sending to the Allies, he was inclined to believe that they were entirely dependent upon their transatlantic supplies, and so he found himself persuaded that the victory of the Allies and the honour of America were incompatible things. And—in spite of his ethical aloofness—he loved the Allies. He wanted them to win, and he wanted America to abandon a course that he believed was vitally necessary to their victory. It was an intellectual dilemma. He hid this self-contradiction from Matching's Easy with much the same feelings that a curate might hide a poisoned dagger at a tea-party....

It was entirely against his habits of mind to hide anything—more particularly an entanglement with a difficult proposition—but he perceived quite clearly that neither Cecily nor Mr. Britling were really to be trusted to listen calmly to what, under happier circumstances, might be a profoundly interesting moral complication. Yet it was not in his nature to conceal; it was in his nature to state.

And Cecily made things much more difficult. She was pitiless with him. She kept him aloof. "How can I let you make love to me," she said, "when our English men are all going to the war, when Teddy is a prisoner and Hugh is in the trenches. If I were a man—!"

She couldn't be induced to see any case for America. England was fighting for freedom, and America ought to be beside her. "All the world ought to unite against this German wickedness," she said.

"I'm doing all I can to help in Belgium," he protested. "Aren't I working? We've fed four million people."

He had backbone, and he would not let her, he was resolved, bully him into a falsehood about his country. America was aloof. She was right to be aloof.... At the same time, Cecily's reproaches were unendurable. And he could feel he was drifting apart from her....

He couldn't make America go to war.

In the quiet of his London hotel he thought it all out. He sat at a writing-table making notes of a perfectly lucid statement of the reasonable, balanced liberal American opinion. An instinct of caution determined him to test it first on Mr. Britling.

But Mr. Britling realised his worst expectations. He was beyond listening.

"I've not heard from my boy for more than three weeks," said Mr. Britling in the place of any salutation. "This morning makes three-and-twenty days without a letter."

It seemed to Mr. Direck that Mr. Britling had suddenly grown ten years older. His face was more deeply lined; the colour and texture of his complexion had gone grey. He moved restlessly and badly; his nerves were manifestly unstrung.

"It's intolerable that one should be subjected to this ghastly suspense. The boy isn't three hundred miles away."

Mr. Direck made obvious inquiries.

"Always before he's written—generally once a fortnight."

They talked of Hugh for a time, but Mr. Britling was fitful and irritable and quite prepared to hold Mr. Direck accountable for the laxity of the War Office, the treachery of Bulgaria, the ambiguity of Roumania or any other barb that chanced to be sticking into his sensibilities. They lunched precariously. Then they went into the study to smoke.

There Mr. Direck was unfortunate enough to notice a copy of that innocent American publication *The New Republic*, lying close to two or three numbers of *The Fatherland*, a pro-German periodical which at that time inflicted itself upon English writers with the utmost determination. Mr. Direck remarked that *The New Republic* was an

interesting effort on the part of "*la Jeunesse Américaine*." Mr. Britling regarded the interesting effort with a jaded, unloving eye.

"You Americans," he said, "are the most extraordinary people in the world."

"Our conditions are exceptional," said Mr. Direck.

"You think they are," said Mr. Britling, and paused, and then began to deliver his soul about America in a discourse of accumulating bitterness. At first he reasoned and explained, but as he went on he lost self-control; he became dogmatic, he became denunciatory, he became abusive. He identified Mr. Direck more and more with his subject; he thrust the uncivil "You" more and more directly at him. He let his cigar go out, and flung it impatiently into the fire. As though America was responsible for its going out....

Like many Britons Mr. Britling had that touch of patriotic feeling towards America which takes the form of impatient criticism. No one in Britain ever calls an American a foreigner. To see faults in Germany or Spain is to tap boundless fountains of charity; but the faults of America rankle in an English mind almost as much as the faults of England. Mr. Britling could explain away the faults of England readily enough; our Hanoverian monarchy, our Established Church and its deadening effect on education, our imperial obligations and the strain they made upon our supplies of administrative talent were all very serviceable for that purpose. But there in America was the old race, without Crown or Church or international embarrassment, and it was still falling short of splendid. His speech to Mr. Direck had the rancour of a family quarrel. Let me only give a few sentences that were to stick in Mr. Direck's memory.

"You think you are out of it for good and all. So did we think. We were as smug as you are when France went down in '71.... Yours is only one further degree of insularity. You think this vacuous aloofness of yours is some sort of moral superiority. So did we, so did we....

"It won't last you ten years if we go down....

"Do you think that our disaster will leave the Atlantic for you? Do you fancy there is any Freedom of the Seas possible beyond such freedom as we maintain, except the freedom to attack you? For forty years the British fleet has guarded all America from European attack. Your Monroe doctrine skulks behind it now....

"I'm sick of this high thin talk of yours about the war.... You are a nation of ungenerous onlookers—watching us throttle or be throttled. You gamble on our winning. And we shall win; we shall win. And you will profit. And when we have won a victory only one

shade less terrible than defeat, then you think you will come in and tinker with our peace. Bleed us a little more to please your hyphenated patriots...."

He came to his last shaft. "You talk of your New Ideals of Peace. You say that you are too proud to fight. But your business men in New York give the show away. There's a little printed card now in half the offices in New York that tells of the real pacificism of America. They're busy, you know. Trade's real good. And so as not to interrupt it they stick up this card: 'Nix on the war!' Think of it!—'Nix on the war!' Here is the whole fate of mankind at stake, and America's contribution is a little grumbling when the Germans sank the *Lusitania*, and no end of grumbling when we hold up a ship or two and some fool of a harbour-master makes an overcharge. Otherwise—'Nix on the war!'...

"Well, let it be Nix on the war! Don't come here and talk to me! You who were searching registers a year ago to find your Essex kin. Let it be Nix! Explanations! What do I want with explanations? And"—he mocked his guest's accent and his guest's mode of thought—"dif'cult prap'sitions."

He got up and stood irresolute. He knew he was being preposterously unfair to America, and outrageously uncivil to a trusting guest; he knew he had no business now to end the talk in this violent fashion. But it was an enormous relief. And to mend matters—*No!* He was glad he'd said these things....

He swung a shoulder to Mr. Direck, and walked out of the room....

Mr. Direck heard him cross the hall and slam the door of the little parlour....

Mr. Direck had been stirred deeply by the tragic indignation of this explosion, and the ring of torment in Mr. Britling's voice. He had stood up also, but he did not follow his host.

"It's his boy," said Mr. Direck at last, confidentially to the writing-desk. "How can one argue with him? It's just hell for him...."

§ 20

Mr. Direck took his leave of Mrs. Britling, and went very slowly towards the little cottage. But he did not go to the cottage. He felt he would only find another soul in torment there.

"What's the good of hanging round talking?" said Mr. Direck.

He stopped at the stile in the lane, and sat thinking deeply. "Only one thing will convince her," he said.

He held out his fingers. "First this," he whispered, "and then that. Yes."

He went on as far as the bend from which one sees the cottage, and stood for a little time regarding it.

He returned still more sorrowfully to the junction, and with every step he took it seemed to him that he would rather see Cecily angry and insulting than not see her at all.

At the post office he stopped and wrote a letter-card.

"Dear Cissie," he wrote. "I came down to-day to see you—and thought better of it. I'm going right off to find out about Teddy. Somehow I'll get that settled. I'll fly around and do that somehow if I have to go up to the German front to do it. And when I've got that settled I've got something else in my mind—well, it will wipe out all this little trouble that's got so big between us about neutrality. And I love you dearly, Cissie."

That was all the card would hold.

§ 21

And then as if it were something that every one in the Dower House had been waiting for, came the message that Hugh had been killed.

The telegram was brought up by a girl in a pinafore instead of the boy of the old dispensation, for boys now were doing the work of youths and youths the work of the men who had gone to the war.

Mr. Britling was standing at the front door; he had been surveying the late October foliage, touched by the warm light of the afternoon, when the messenger appeared. He opened the telegram, hoping as he had hoped when he opened any telegram since Hugh had gone to the front that it would not contain the exact words he read; that it would say wounded, that at the worst it would say "missing," that perhaps it might even tell of some pleasant surprise, a brief return to home such as the last letter had foreshadowed. He read the final, unqualified statement, the terse regrets. He stood quite still for a moment or so, staring at the words....

It was a mile and a quarter from the post office to the Dower House, and it was always his custom to give telegraph messengers who came to his house twopence, and he wanted very much to get rid of the telegraph girl, who stood expectantly before him holding her red bicycle. He felt now very sick and strained; he had a conviction that if he did not by an effort maintain his bearing cool and dry he would howl aloud. He felt in his pocket for money; there were some coppers and a shilling. He pulled it all out together and stared at it.

He had an absurd conviction that this ought to be a sixpenny telegram. The thing worried him. He wanted to give the brat sixpence, and he had only threepence and a shilling, and he didn't know what to do and his brain couldn't think. It would be a shocking thing to give her a shilling, and he couldn't somehow give just coppers for so important a thing as Hugh's death. Then all this problem vanished and he handed the child the shilling. She stared at him, inquiring, incredulous. "Is there a reply, Sir, please?"

"No," he said, "that's for you. All of it.... This is a peculiar sort of telegram.... It's news of importance...."

As he said this he met her eyes, and had a sudden persuasion that she knew exactly what it was the telegram had told him, and that she was shocked at this gala-like treatment of such terrible news. He hesitated, feeling that he had to say something else, that he was socially inadequate, and then he decided that at any cost he must get his face away from her staring eyes. She made no movement to turn away. She seemed to be taking him in, recording him, for repetition, greedily, with every fibre of her being.

He stepped past her into the garden, and instantly forgot about her existence....

§ 22

He had been thinking of this possibility for the last few weeks almost continuously, and yet now that it had come to him he felt that he had never thought about it before, that he must go off alone by himself to envisage this monstrous and terrible fact, without distraction or interruption.

He saw his wife coming down the alley between the roses.

He was wrenched by emotions as odd and unaccountable as the emotions of adolescence. He had exactly the same feeling now that he had had when in his boyhood some unpleasant admission had to be made to his parents. He felt he could not go through a scene with her yet, that he could not endure the task of telling her, of being observed. He turned abruptly to his left. He walked away as if he had not seen her, across his lawn towards the little summer-house upon a knoll that commanded the high road. She called to him, but he did not answer....

He would not look towards her, but for a time all his senses were alert to hear whether she followed him. Safe in the summer-house he could glance back.

It was all right. She was going into the house.

He drew the telegram from his pocket again furtively, almost guiltily, and re-read it. He turned it over and read it again....

Killed.

Then his own voice, hoarse and strange to his ears, spoke his thought.

"My God! how unutterably silly.... Why did I let him go? Why did I let him go?"

§ 23

Mrs. Britling did not learn of the blow that had struck them until after dinner that night. She was so accustomed to ignore his incomprehensible moods that she did not perceive that there was anything tragic about him until they sat at table together. He seemed heavy and sulky and disposed to avoid her, but that sort of moodiness was nothing very strange to her. She knew that things that seemed to her utterly trivial, the reading of political speeches in *The Times*, little comments on life made in the most casual way, mere movements, could so avert him. She had cultivated a certain disregard of such fitful darknesses. But at the dinner-table she looked up, and was stabbed to the heart to see a haggard white face and eyes of deep despair regarding her ambiguously.

"Hugh!" she said, and then with a chill intimation, "*What is it?*"

They looked at each other. His face softened and winced.

"My Hugh," he whispered, and neither spoke for some seconds.

"*Killed*," he said, and suddenly stood up whimpering, and fumbled with his pocket.

It seemed he would never find what he sought. It came at last, a crumpled telegram. He threw it down before her, and then thrust his chair back clumsily and went hastily out of the room. She heard him sob. She had not dared to look at his face again.

"Oh!" she cried, realising that an impossible task had been thrust upon her.

"But what can I *say* to him?" she said, with the telegram in her hand.

The parlourmaid came into the room.

"Clear the dinner away!" said Mrs. Britling, standing at her place. "Master Hugh is killed...." And then wailing: "Oh! what can I *say*? What can I *say*?"

§ 24

That night Mrs. Britling made the supreme effort of her life to burst the prison of self-consciousness and inhibition in which she was confined. Never before in all her life had she so desired to be spontaneous and unrestrained; never before had she so felt herself hampered by her timidity, her self-criticism, her deeply ingrained habit of never letting herself go. She was rent by reflected distress. It seemed to her that she would be ready to give her life and the whole world to be able to comfort her husband now. And she could conceive no gesture of comfort. She went out of the dining-room into the hall and listened. She went very softly upstairs until she came to the door of her husband's room. There she stood still. She could hear no sound from within. She put out her hand and turned the handle of the door a little way, and then she was startled by the loudness of the sound it made and at her own boldness. She withdrew her hand, and then with a gesture of despair, with a face of white agony, she flitted along the corridor to her own room.

Her mind was beaten to the ground by this catastrophe, of which to this moment she had never allowed herself to think. She had never allowed herself to think of it. The figure of her husband, like some pitiful beast, wounded and bleeding, filled her mind. She gave scarcely a thought to Hugh. "Oh, what can I *do* for him?" she asked herself, sitting down before her unlit bedroom fire.... "What can I say or do?"

She brooded until she shivered, and then she lit her fire....

It was late that night and after an eternity of resolutions and doubts and indecisions that Mrs. Britling went to her husband. He was sitting close up to the fire with his chin upon his hands, waiting for her; he felt that she would come to him, and he was thinking meanwhile of Hugh with a slow unprogressive movement of the mind. He showed by a movement that he heard her enter the room, but he did not turn to look at her. He shrank a little from her approach.

She came and stood beside him. She ventured to touch him very softly, and to stroke his head. "My dear," she said. "My poor dear!

"It is so dreadful for you," she said, "it is so dreadful for you. I know how you loved him...."

He spread his hands over his face and became very still.

"My poor dear!" she said, still stroking his hair, "my poor dear!"

And then she went on saying "poor dear," saying it presently because there was nothing more had come into her mind. She desired supremely to be his comfort, and in a little while she was acting comfort so poorly that she perceived her own failure. And that increased her failure, and that increased her paralysing sense of failure....

And suddenly her stroking hand ceased. Suddenly the real woman cried out from her.

"I can't *reach* you!" she cried aloud. "I can't reach you. I would do anything.... You! You with your heart half broken...."

She turned towards the door. She moved clumsily, she was blinded by her tears.

Mr. Britling uncovered his face. He stood up astonished, and then pity and pitiful understanding came storming across his grief. He made a step and took her in his arms. "My dear," he said, "don't go from me...."

She turned to him weeping, and put her arms about his neck, and he too was weeping.

"My poor wife!" he said, "my dear wife. If it were not for you—I think I could kill myself to-night. Don't cry, my dear. Don't, don't cry. You do not know how you comfort me. You do not know how you help me."

He drew her to him; he put her cheek against his own....

His heart was so sore and wounded that he could not endure that another human being should go wretched. He sat down in his chair and drew her upon his knees, and said everything he could think of to console her and reassure her and make her feel that she was of value to him. He spoke of every pleasant aspect of their lives, of every

aspect, except that he never named that dear pale youth who waited now.... He could wait a little longer....

At last she went from him.

"Good night," said Mr. Britling, and took her to the door. "It was very dear of you to come and comfort me," he said....

§ 25

He closed the door softly behind her.

The door had hardly shut upon her before he forgot her. Instantly he was alone again, utterly alone. He was alone in an empty world....

Loneliness struck him like a blow. He had dependents, he had cares. He had never a soul to whom he might weep....

For a time he stood beside his open window. He looked at the bed—but no sleep he knew would come that night—until the sleep of exhaustion came. He looked at the bureau at which he had so often written. But the writing there was a shrivelled thing....

This room was unendurable. He must go out. He turned to the window, and outside was a troublesome noise of night-jars and a distant roaring of stags, black trees, blacknesses, the sky clear and remote with a great company of stars.... The stars seemed attentive. They stirred and yet were still. It was as if they were the eyes of watchers. He would go out to them....

Very softly he went towards the passage door, and still more softly felt his way across the landing and down the staircase. Once or twice he paused to listen.

He let himself out with elaborate precautions....

Across the dark he went, and suddenly his boy was all about him, playing, climbing the cedars, twisting miraculously about the lawn on a bicycle, discoursing gravely upon his future, lying on the grass, breathing very hard and drawing preposterous caricatures. Once again they walked side by side up and down—it was athwart this very spot—talking gravely but rather shyly....

And here they had stood a little awkwardly, before the boy went in to say good-bye to his stepmother and go off with his father to the station....

"I will work to-morrow again," whispered Mr. Britling, "but to-night—to-night.... To-night is yours.... Can you hear me, can you hear? Your father ... who had counted on you...."

§ 26

He went into the far corner of the hockey paddock, and there he moved about for a while and then stood for a long time holding the fence with both hands and staring blankly into the darkness. At last he turned away, and went stumbling and blundering towards the rose garden. A spray of creeper tore his face and distressed him. He thrust it aside fretfully, and it scratched his hand. He made his way to the seat in the arbour, and sat down and whispered a little to himself, and then became very still with his arm upon the back of the seat and his head upon his arm.

BOOK III

THE TESTAMENT OF MATCHING'S EASY

CHAPTER THE FIRST

MRS. TEDDY GOES FOR A WALK

§ 1

All over England now, where the livery of mourning had been a rare thing to see, women and children went about in the October sunshine in new black clothes. Everywhere one met these fresh griefs, mothers who had lost their sons, women who had lost their men, lives shattered and hopes destroyed. The dyers had a great time turning coloured garments to black. And there was also a growing multitude of crippled and disabled men. It was so in England, much more was it so in France and Russia, in all the countries of the Allies, and in Germany and Austria; away into Asia Minor and Egypt, in India and Japan and Italy there was mourning, the world was filled with loss and mourning and impoverishment and distress.

And still the mysterious powers that required these things of mankind were unappeased, and each day added its quota of heart-stabbing messages and called for new mourning, and sent home fresh consignments of broken and tormented men.

Some clung to hopes that became at last almost more terrible than black certainties....

Mrs. Teddy went about the village in a coloured dress bearing herself confidently. Teddy had been listed now as "missing, since reported killed," and she had had two letters from his comrades. They said Teddy had been left behind in the ruins of a farm with one or two other wounded, and that when the Canadians retook the place these wounded had all been found butchered. None had been found alive. Afterwards the Canadians had had to fall back. Mr. Direck had been at great pains to hunt up wounded men from Teddy's company, and also any likely Canadians both at the base hospital in France and in London, and to get what he could from them. He had made it a service to Cissie. Only one of his witnesses was quite clear about Teddy, but he, alas! was dreadfully clear. There had been only one lieutenant among the men left behind, he said, and obviously that must have been Teddy. "He had been prodded in half-a-dozen places. His head was nearly severed from his body."

Direck came down and told the story to Cissie. "Shall I tell it to her?" he asked.

Cissie thought. "Not yet," she said....

Letty's face changed in those pitiful weeks when she was denying death. She lost her pretty colour, she became white; her mouth grew hard and her eyes had a hard brightness. She never wept, she never gave a sign of sorrow, and she insisted upon talking about Teddy, in a dry offhand voice. Constantly she referred to his final return. "Teddy," she said, "will be surprised at this," or "Teddy will feel sold when he sees how I have altered that."

"Presently we shall see his name in a list of prisoners," she said. "He is a wounded prisoner in Germany."

She adopted that story. She had no justification for it, but she would hear no doubts upon it. She presently began to prepare parcels to send him. "They want almost everything," she told people. "They are treated abominably. He has not been able to write to me yet, but I do not think I ought to wait until he asks me."

Cissie was afraid to interfere with this.

After a time Letty grew impatient at the delay in getting any address and took her first parcel to the post office.

"Unless you know what prison he is at," said the postmistress.

"Pity!" said Letty. "I don't know that. Must it wait for that? I thought the Germans were so systematic that it didn't matter."

The postmistress made tedious explanations that Letty did not seem to hear. She stared straight in front of her at nothing. Then in a pause in the conversation she picked up her parcel.

"It's tiresome for him to have to wait," she said. "But it can't be long before I know."

She took the parcel back to the cottage.

"After all," she said, "it gives us time to get the better sort of throat lozenges for him—the sort the syndicate shop doesn't keep."

She put the parcel conspicuously upon the dresser in the kitchen where it was most in the way, and set herself to make a jersey for Teddy against the coming of the cold weather.

But one night the white mask fell for a moment from her face.

Cissie and she had been sitting in silence before the fire. She had been knitting—she knitted very badly—and Cissie had been pretending to read, and had been watching her furtively. Cissie eyed the slow, toilsome growth of the slack woolwork for a time, and the touch of angry effort in every stroke of the knitting needles. Then she was stirred to remonstrance.

"Poor Letty!" she said very softly. "Suppose after all, he is dead?"

Letty met her with a pitiless stare.

"He is a prisoner," she said. "Isn't that enough? Why do you jab at me by saying that? A wounded prisoner. Isn't that enough despicable trickery for God even to play on Teddy—our Teddy? To the very last moment he shall not be dead. Until the war is over. Until six months after the war....

"I will tell you why, Cissie...."

She leant across the table and pointed her remarks with her knitting needles, speaking in a tone of reasonable remonstrance. "You see," she said, "if people like Teddy are to be killed, then all our ideas that life is meant for, honesty and sweetness and happiness, are wrong, and this world is just a place of devils; just a dirty cruel hell. Getting born would be getting damned. And so one must not give way to that idea, however much it may seem likely that he is dead....

"You see, if he *is* dead, then Cruelty is the Law, and some one must pay me for his death.... Some one must pay me.... I shall wait for six months after the war, dear, and then I shall go off to Germany and learn my way about there. And I will murder some German. Not just a common German, but a German who belongs to the guilty kind. A sacrifice. It ought, for instance, to be comparatively easy to kill some of the children of the Crown Prince or some of the Bavarian princes. I shall prefer German children. I shall sacrifice them to Teddy. It ought not to be difficult to find people who can be made directly responsible, the people who invented the poison gas, for instance, and kill them, or to kill people who are dear to them. Or necessary to them.... Women can do that so much more easily than men....

"That perhaps is the only way in which wars of this kind will ever be brought to an end. By women insisting on killing the kind of people who make them. Rooting them out. By a campaign of pursuit and assassination that will go on for years and years after the war itself is over.... Murder is such a little gentle punishment for the crime of war.... It would be hardly more than a reproach for what has happened. Falling like snow. Death after death. Flake by flake. This prince. That statesman. The count who writes so fiercely for war.... That is what I am going to do. If Teddy is really dead.... We women were ready enough a year or so ago to starve and die for the Vote, and that was quite a little thing in comparison with this business.... Don't you see what I mean? It's so plain and sensible, Cissie. Whenever a man sits and thinks whether he will make a war or not, then he will think too of women, women with daggers, bombs; of a vengeance that will never tire nor rest; of consecrated patient women ready to start out upon a pilgrimage that will only end with his death.... I wouldn't hurt these war makers. No. In spite of the poison gas. In spite of trench feet and the men who have been made blind and the wounded who have lain for days, dying slowly in the wet. Women ought not to hurt. But I would kill. Like killing dangerous vermin. It would go on year by year. Balkan kings, German princes, chancellors, they would have schemed for so much—and come to just a rattle in the throat.... And if presently other kings and emperors began to prance about and review armies, they too would go....

"Until all the world understood that women would not stand war any more forever....

"Of course I shall do something of the sort. What else is there to do now for me?"

Letty's eyes were bright and intense, but her voice was soft and subdued. She went on after a pause in the same casual voice. "You see now, Cissie, why I cling to the idea that Teddy is alive. If Teddy is alive, then even if he is wounded, he will get some happiness out of it—and all this won't be—just rot. If he is dead then everything is so desperately silly and cruel from top to bottom—"

She smiled wanly to finish her sentence.

"But, Letty!" said Cissie, "there is the boy!"

"I shall leave the boy to you. Compared with Teddy I don't care *that* for the boy. I never did. What is the good of pretending? Some women are made like that."

She surveyed her knitting. "Poor stitches," she said....

"I'm hard stuff, Cissie. I take after mother more than father. Teddy is my darling. All the tenderness of my life is Teddy. If it goes, it goes.... I won't crawl about the world like all these other snivelling widows. If they've killed my man I shall kill. Blood for blood and loss for loss. I shall get just as close to the particular Germans who made this war as I can, and I shall kill them and theirs....

"The Women's Association for the Extirpation of the whole breed of War Lords," she threw out. "If I *do* happen to hurt—does it matter?"

She looked at her sister's shocked face and smiled again.

"You think I go about staring at nothing," she remarked.... "Not a bit of it! I have been planning all sorts of things.... I have been thinking how I could get to Germany.... Or one might catch them in Switzerland.... I've had all sorts of plans. They can't go guarded for ever....

"Oh, it makes me despise humanity to see how many soldiers and how few assassins there are in the world.... After the things we have seen. If people did their duty by the dagger there wouldn't be such a thing as a War Lord in the world. Not one.... The Kaiser and his sons and his sons' sons would know nothing but fear now for all their lives. Fear would only cease to pursue as the coffin went down into the grave. Fear by sea, fear by land, for the vessel he sailed in, the train he travelled in, fear when he slept for the death in his dreams, fear when he waked for the death in every shadow; fear in every crowd, fear whenever he was alone. Fear would stalk him through the trees, hide in the corner of the staircase; make all his food taste perplexingly, so that he would want to spit it out...."

She sat very still brooding on that idea for a time, and then stood up.

"What nonsense one talks!" she cried, and yawned. "I wonder why poor Teddy doesn't send me a post card or something to tell me his address. I tell you what I *am* afraid of sometimes about him, Cissie."

"Yes?" said Cissie.

"Loss of memory. Suppose a beastly lump of shell or something whacked him on the head.... I had a dream of him looking strange about the eyes and not knowing me. That, you know, really *may* have happened.... It would be beastly, of course...."

Cissie's eyes were critical, but she had nothing ready to say.

There were some moments of silence.

"Oh! bed," said Letty. "Though I shall just lie scheming."

§ 2

Cissie lay awake that night thinking about her sister as if she had never thought about her before.

She began to weigh the concentrated impressions of a thousand memories. She and her sister were near in age; they knew each other with an extreme intimacy, and yet it seemed to Cissie that night as though she did not know Letty at all. A year ago she would have been certain she knew everything about her. But the old familiar Letty, with the bright complexion, and the wicked eye, with her rebellious schoolgirl insistence upon the beautifulness of "Boof'l young men," and her frank and glowing passion for Teddy, with her delight in humorous mystifications and open-air exercise and all the sunshine and laughter of life, this sister Letty, who had been so satisfactory and complete and final, had been thrust aside like a mask. Cissie no longer knew her sister's eyes. Letty's hand had become thin and unfamiliar and a little wrinkled; she was sharp-featured and thin-lipped; her acts, which had once been predictable, were incomprehensible, and Cissie was thrown back upon speculations. In their schooldays Letty had had a streak of intense sensibility; she had been easily moved to tears. But never once had she wept or given any sign of weeping since Teddy's name had appeared in the casualty list.... What was the strength of this tragic tension? How far would it carry her? Was Letty really capable of becoming a Charlotte Corday? Of carrying out a scheme of far-seeing vengeance, of making her way through long months and years nearer and nearer to revenge?

Were such revenges possible?

Would people presently begin to murder the makers of the Great War? What a strange thing it would be in history if so there came a punishment and end to the folly of kings!

Only a little while ago Cissie's imagination might have been captured by so romantic a dream. She was still but a year or so out of the stage of melodrama. But she was out of it. She was growing up now to a subtler wisdom. People, she was beginning to realise, do not do these simple things. They make vows of devotion and they are not real vows of devotion; they love—quite honestly—and qualify. There are no great revenges but only little mean ones; no life-long vindications except the unrelenting vengeance of the law. There is no real concentration of people's lives anywhere such as romance demands. There is change, there is forgetfulness. Everywhere there is dispersal. Even to the tragic story of Teddy would come the modifications of time. Even to the wickedness of the German princes would presently be added some conflicting aspects. Could Letty keep things for years in her mind, hard and terrible, as they were now? Surely they would soften; other things would overlay them....

There came a rush of memories of Letty in a dozen schoolgirl adventures, times when she had ventured, and times when she had failed; Letty frightened, Letty vexed, Letty launching out to great enterprises, going high and hard and well for a time, and then failing. She had seen Letty snivelling and dirty; Letty shamed and humiliated. She knew her Letty to the soul. Poor Letty! Poor dear Letty! With a sudden clearness of vision Cissie realised what was happening in her sister's mind. All this tense scheming of revenges was the imaginative play with which Letty warded off the black alternative to her hope; it was not strength, it was weakness. It was a form of giving way. She could not face starkly the simple fact of Teddy's death. That was too much for her. So she was building up this dream of a mission of judgment against the day when she could resist the facts no longer. She was already persuaded, only she would not be persuaded until her dream was ready. If this state of suspense went on she might establish her dream so firmly that it would at last take complete possession of her mind. And by that time also she would have squared her existence at Matching's Easy with the elaboration of her reverie.

She would go about the place then, fancying herself preparing for this tremendous task she would never really do; she would study German maps; she would read the papers about German statesmen and rulers; perhaps she would even make weak attempts to obtain a situation in Switzerland or in Germany. Perhaps she would buy a knife or a revolver. Perhaps presently she would begin to hover about Windsor or Sandringham when peace was made, and the German cousins came visiting again....

Into Cissie's mind came the image of the thing that might be; Letty, shabby, draggled, with her sharp bright prettiness become haggard, an assassin dreamer, still dependent on Mr. Britling, doing his work rather badly, in a distraught unpunctual fashion.

She must be told, she must be convinced soon, or assuredly she would become an eccentric, a strange character, a Matching's Easy Miss Flite....

§ 3

Cissie could think more clearly of Letty's mind than of her own.

She herself was in a tangle. She had grown to be very fond of Mr. Direck, and to have a profound trust and confidence in him, and her fondness seemed able to find no expression at all except a constant girding at his and America's avoidance of war. She had fallen in love with him when he was wearing fancy dress; she was a young woman with a stronger taste for body and colour than she supposed; what indeed she resented about him, though she did not know it, was that he seemed never disposed to carry the spirit of fancy dress into everyday life. To begin with he had touched both her imagination and senses, and she wanted him to go on doing that. Instead of which he seemed lapsing more and more into reiterated assurances of devotion and the flat competent discharge of humanitarian duties. Always nowadays he was trying to persuade her that what he was doing was the right and honourable thing for him to do; what he did not realise, what indeed she did not realise, was the exasperation his rightness and reasonableness produced in her. When he saw he exasperated her he sought very earnestly to be righter and reasonabler and more plainly and demonstrably right and reasonable than ever.

Withal, as she felt and perceived, he was such a good thing, such a very good thing; so kind, so trustworthy, with a sort of slow strength, with a careful honesty, a big good childishness, a passion for fairness. And so helpless in her hands. She could lash him and distress him. Yet she could not shake his slowly formed convictions.

When Cissie had dreamt of the lover that fate had in store for her in her old romantic days, he was to be *perfect* always, he and she were always to be absolutely in the right (and, if the story needed it, the world in the wrong). She had never expected to find herself tied by her affections to a man with whom she disagreed, and who went contrary to her standards, very much as if she was lashed on the back of a very nice elephant that would wince to but not obey the goad....

So she nagged him and taunted him, and would hear no word of his case. And he wanted dreadfully to discuss his case. He felt that the point of conscience about the munitions was particularly fine and difficult. He wished she would listen and enter

into it more. But she thought with that more rapid English flash which is not so much thinking as feeling. He loved that flash in her in spite of his persuasion of its injustice.

Her thought that he ought to go to the war made him feel like a renegade; but her claim that he was somehow still English held him in spite of his reason. In the midst of such perplexities he was glad to find one neutral task wherein he could find himself whole-heartedly with and for Cissie.

He hunted up the evidence of Teddy's fate with a devoted pertinacity.

And in the meanwhile the other riddle resolved itself. He had had a certain idea in his mind for some time. He discovered one day that it was an inspiration. He could keep his conscientious objection about America, and still take a line that would satisfy Cissie. He took it.

When he came down to Matching's Easy at her summons to bear his convincing witness of Teddy's fate, he came in an unwonted costume. It was a costume so wonderful in his imagination that it seemed to cry aloud, to sound like a trumpet as he went through London to Liverpool Street station; it was a costume like an international event; it was a costume that he felt would blare right away to Berlin. And yet it was a costume so commonplace, so much the usual wear now, that Cissie, meeting him at the station and full of the thought of Letty's trouble, did not remark it, felt indeed rather than observed that he was looking more strong and handsome than he had ever done since he struck upon her imagination in the fantastic wrap that Teddy had found for him in the merry days when there was no death in the world. And Letty too, resistant, incalculable, found no wonder in the wonderful suit.

He bore his testimony. It was the queer halting telling of a patched-together tale....

"I suppose," said Letty, "if I tell you now that I don't believe that that officer was Teddy you will think I am cracked.... But I don't."

She sat staring straight before her for a time after saying this. Then suddenly she got up and began taking down her hat and coat from the peg behind the kitchen door. The hanging strap of the coat was twisted and she struggled with it petulantly until she tore it.

"Where are you going?" cried Cissie.

Letty's voice over her shoulder was the harsh voice of a scolding woman.

"I'm going out—anywhere." She turned, coat in hand. "Can't I go out if I like?" she asked. "It's a beautiful day.... Mustn't I go out?... I suppose you think I ought to take in

what you have told me in a moment. Just smile and say '*Indeed!*' ... Abandoned!—while his men retreated! How jolly! And then not think of it any more.... Besides, I must go out. You two want to be left together. You want to canoodle. Do it while you can!"

Then she put on coat and hat, jamming her hat down on her head, and said something that Cissie did not immediately understand.

"*He'll* have his turn in the trenches soon enough. Now that he's made up his mind.... He might have done it sooner...."

She turned her back as though she had forgotten them. She stood for a moment as though her feet were wooden, not putting her feet as she usually put her feet. She took slow, wide, unsure steps. She went out—like something that is mortally injured and still walks—into the autumnal sunshine. She left the door wide open behind her.

§ 4

And Cissie, with eyes full of distress for her sister, had still to grasp the fact that Direck was wearing a Canadian uniform....

He stood behind her, ashamed that in such a moment this fact and its neglect by every one could be so vivid in his mind.

§ 5

Cissie's estimate of her sister's psychology had been just. The reverie of revenge had not yet taken a grip upon Letty's mind sufficiently strong to meet the challenge of this conclusive evidence of Teddy's death. She walked out into a world of sunshine now almost completely convinced that Teddy was dead, and she knew quite well that her dream of some dramatic and terrible vindication had gone from her. She knew that in truth she could do nothing of that sort....

She walked out with a set face and eyes that seemed unseeing, and yet it was as if some heavy weight had been lifted from her shoulders. It was over; there was no more to hope for and there was nothing more to fear. She would have been shocked to realise that her mind was relieved.

She wanted to be alone. She wanted to be away from every eye. She was like some creature that after a long nightmare incubation is at last born into a clear, bleak day. She had to feel herself; she had to stretch her mind in this cheerless sunshine, this new world, where there was to be no more Teddy and no real revenge nor compensation for Teddy. Teddy was past....

Hitherto she had had an angry sense of being deprived of Teddy—almost as though he were keeping away from her. Now, there was no more Teddy to be deprived of....

She went through the straggling village, and across the fields to the hillside that looks away towards Mertonsome and its steeple. And where the hill begins to fall away she threw herself down under the hedge by the path, near by the stile into the lane, and lay still. She did not so much think as remain blank, waiting for the beginning of impressions....

It was as it were a blank stare at the world....

She did not know if it was five minutes or half an hour later that she became aware that some one was looking at her. She turned with a start, and discovered the Reverend Dimple with one foot on the stile, and an expression of perplexity and consternation upon his chubby visage.

Instantly she understood. Already on four different occasions since Teddy's disappearance she had seen the good man coming towards her, always with a manifest decision, always with the same faltering doubt as now. Often in their happy days had she and Teddy discussed him and derided him and rejoiced over him. They had agreed he was as good as Jane Austen's Mr. Collins. He really was very like Mr. Collins, except that he was plumper. And now, it was as if he was transparent to her hard defensive scrutiny. She knew he was impelled by his tradition, by his sense of fitness, by his respect for his calling, to offer her his ministrations and consolations, to say his large flat amiabilities over her and pat her kindly with his hands. And she knew too that he dreaded her. She knew that the dear old humbug knew at the bottom of his heart quite certainly that he was a poor old humbug, and that she was in his secret. And at the bottom of his heart he found himself too honest to force his poor platitudes upon any who would not be glad of them. If she could have been glad of them he would have had no compunction. He was a man divided against himself; failing to carry through his rich pretences, dismayed.

He had been taking his afternoon "constitutional." He had discovered her beyond the stile just in time to pull up. Then had come a fatal, a preposterous hesitation. She stared at him now, with hard, expressionless eyes.

He stared back at her, until his plump pink face was all consternation. He was extraordinarily distressed. It was as if a thousand unspoken things had been said between them.

"No wish," he said, "intrude."

If he had had the certain balm, how gladly would he have given it!

He broke the spell by stepping back into the lane. He made a gesture with his hands, as if he would have wrung them. And then he had fled down the lane—almost at a run.

"Po' girl," he shouted. "Po' girl," and left her staring.

Staring—and then she laughed.

This was good. This was the sort of thing one could tell Teddy, when at last he came back and she could tell him anything. And then she realised again; there was no more Teddy, there would be no telling. And suddenly she fell weeping.

"Oh, Teddy, Teddy," she cried through her streaming tears. "How could you leave me? How can I bear it?"

Never a tear had she shed since the news first came, and now she could weep, she could weep her grief out. She abandoned herself unreservedly to this blessed relief....

§ 6

There comes an end to weeping at last, and Letty lay still, in the red light of the sinking sun.

She lay so still that presently a little foraging robin came dirting down to the grass not ten yards away and stopped and looked at her. And then it came a hop or so nearer.

She had been lying in a state of passive abandonment, her swollen wet eyes open, regardless of everything. But those quick movements caught her back to attention. She began to watch the robin, and to note how it glanced sidelong at her and appeared to meditate further approaches. She made an almost imperceptible movement, and straightway the little creature was in a projecting spray of berried hawthorn overhead.

Her tear-washed mind became vaguely friendly. With an unconscious comfort it focussed down to the robin. She rolled over, sat up, and imitated his friendly "cheep."

§ 7

Presently she became aware of footsteps rustling through the grass towards her.

She looked over her shoulder and discovered Mr. Britling approaching by the field path. He looked white and tired and listless, even his bristling hair and moustache conveyed his depression; he was dressed in an old tweed knickerbocker suit and carrying a big atlas and some papers. He had an effect of hesitation in his approach. It was as if he wanted to talk to her and doubted her reception for him.

He spoke without any preface. "Direck has told you?" he said, standing over her.

She answered with a sob.

"I was afraid it was so, and yet I did not believe it," said Mr. Britling. "Until now."

He hesitated as if he would go on, and then he knelt down on the grass a little way from her and seated himself. There was an interval of silence.

"At first it hurts like the devil," he said at last, looking away at Mertonsome spire and speaking as if he spoke to no one in particular. "And then it hurts. It goes on hurting.... And one can't say much to any one...."

He said no more for a time. But the two of them comforted one another, and knew that they comforted each other. They had a common feeling of fellowship and ease. They had been stricken by the same thing; they understood how it was with each other. It was not like the attempted comfort they got from those who had not loved and dreaded....

She took up a little broken twig and dug small holes in the ground with it.

"It's strange," she said, "but I'm glad I know for sure."

"I can understand that," said Mr. Britling.

"It stops the nightmares.... It isn't hopes I've had so much as fears.... I wouldn't admit he was dead or hurt. Because—I couldn't think it without thinking it—horrible. *Now*—"

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

"It's definite," she said after a pause. "It's like thinking he's asleep—for good."

But that did not satisfy her. There was more than this in her mind. "It does away with the half and half," she said. "He's dead or he is alive...."

She looked up at Mr. Britling as if she measured his understanding.

"You don't still doubt?" he said.

"I'm content now in my mind—in a way. He wasn't anyhow there—unless he was dead. But if I saw Teddy coming over the hedge there to me—It would be just natural.... No, don't stare at me. I know really he is dead. And it is a comfort. It is peace.... All the thoughts of him being crushed dreadfully or being mutilated or lying and screaming—or things like that—they've gone. He's out of his spoilt body. He's my unbroken Teddy again.... Out of sight somewhere.... Unbroken.... Sleeping."

She resumed her excavation with the little stick, with the tears running down her face.

Mr. Britling presently went on with the talk. "For me it came all at once, without a doubt or a hope. I hoped until the last that nothing would touch Hugh. And then it was like a black shutter falling—in an instant...."

He considered. "Hugh, too, seems just round the corner at times. But at times, it's a blank place....

"At times," said Mr. Britling, "I feel nothing but astonishment. The whole thing becomes incredible. Just as for weeks after the war began I couldn't believe that a big modern nation could really go to war—seriously—with its whole heart.... And they have killed Teddy and Hugh....

"They have killed millions. Millions—who had fathers and mothers and wives and sweethearts...."

§ 8

"Somehow I can't talk about this to Edith. It is ridiculous, I know. But in some way I can't.... It isn't fair to her. If I could, I would.... Quite soon after we were married I ceased to talk to her. I mean talking really and simply—as I do to you. And it's never come back. I don't know why.... And particularly I can't talk to her of Hugh.... Little things, little shadows of criticism, but enough to make it impossible.... And I go about thinking about Hugh, and what has happened to him sometimes... as though I was stifling."

Letty compared her case.

"I don't want to talk about Teddy—not a word."

"That's queer.... But perhaps—a son is different. Now I come to think of it—I've never talked of Mary.... Not to any one ever. I've never thought of that before. But I haven't. I couldn't. No. Losing a lover, that's a thing for oneself. I've been through that, you see. But a son's more outside you. Altogether. And more your own making. It's not losing a thing *in* you; it's losing a hope and a pride.... Once when I was a little boy I did a drawing very carefully. It took me a long time.... And a big boy tore it up. For no particular reason. Just out of cruelty.... That—that was exactly like losing Hugh...."

Letty reflected.

"No," she confessed, "I'm more selfish than that."

"It isn't selfish," said Mr. Britling. "But it's a different thing. It's less intimate, and more personally important."

"I have just thought, 'He's gone. He's gone.' Sometimes, do you know, I have felt quite angry with him. Why need he have gone—so soon?"

Mr. Britling nodded understandingly.

"I'm not angry. I'm not depressed. I'm just bitterly hurt by the ending of something I had hoped to watch—always—all my life," he said. "I don't know how it is between most fathers and sons, but I admired Hugh. I found exquisite things in him. I doubt if other people saw them. He was quiet. He seemed clumsy. But he had an extraordinary fineness. He was a creature of the most delicate and rapid responses.... These aren't my fond delusions. It was so.... You know, when he was only a few days old, he would start suddenly at any strange sound. He was alive like an Æolian harp from the very beginning.... And his hair when he was born—he had a lot of hair—was like the down on the breast of a bird. I remember that now very vividly—and how I used to like to pass my hand over it. It was silk, spun silk. Before he was two he could talk—whole sentences. He had the subtlest ear. He loved long words.... And then," he said with tears in his voice, "all this beautiful fine structure, this brain, this fresh life as nimble as water—as elastic as a steel spring, it is destroyed....

"I don't make out he wasn't human. Often and often I have been angry with him, and disappointed in him. There were all sorts of weaknesses in him. We all knew them. And we didn't mind them. We loved him the better. And his odd queer cleverness!.... And his profound wisdom. And then all this beautiful and delicate fabric, all those clear memories in his dear brain, all his whims, his sudden inventions....

"You know, I have had a letter from his chum Park. He was shot through a loophole. The bullet went through his eye and brow.... Think of it!

"An amazement ... a blow ... a splattering of blood. Rags of tormented skin and brain stuff.... In a moment. What had taken eighteen years—love and care...."

He sat thinking for an interval, and then went on, "The reading and writing alone! I taught him to read myself—because his first governess, you see, wasn't very clever. She was a very good methodical sort, but she had no inspiration. So I got up all sorts of methods for teaching him to read. But it wasn't necessary. He seemed to leap all sorts of difficulties. He leapt to what one was trying to teach him. It was as quick as the movement of some wild animal....

"He came into life as bright and quick as this robin looking for food....

"And he's broken up and thrown away.... Like a cartridge case by the side of a covert...."

He choked and stopped speaking. His elbows were on his knees, and he put his face between his hands and shuddered and became still. His hair was troubled. The end of his stumpy moustache and a little roll of flesh stood out at the side of his hand, and made him somehow twice as pitiful. His big atlas, from which papers projected, seemed forgotten by his side. So he sat for a long time, and neither he nor Letty moved or spoke. But they were in the same shadow. They found great comfort in one another. They had not been so comforted before since their losses came upon them.

§ 9

It was Mr. Britling who broke silence. And when he drew his hands down from his face and spoke, he said one of the most amazing and unexpected things she had ever heard in her life.

"The only possible government in Albania," he said, looking steadfastly before him down the hill-side, "is a group of republican cantons after the Swiss pattern. I can see no other solution that is not offensive to God. It does not matter in the least what we owe to Serbia or what we owe to Italy. We have got to set this world on a different footing. We have got to set up the world at last—on justice and reason."

Then, after a pause, "The Treaty of Bucharest was an evil treaty. It must be undone. Whatever this German King of Bulgaria does, that treaty must be undone and the

Bulgarians united again into one people. They must have themselves, whatever punishment they deserve, they must have nothing more, whatever reward they win."

She could not believe her ears.

"After this precious blood, after this precious blood, if we leave one plot of wickedness or cruelty in the world—"

And therewith he began to lecture Letty on the importance of international politics—to every one. How he and she and every one must understand, however hard it was to understand.

"No life is safe, no happiness is safe, there is no chance of bettering life until we have made an end to all that causes war....

"We have to put an end to the folly and vanity of kings, and to any people ruling any people but themselves. There is no convenience, there is no justice in any people ruling any people but themselves; the ruling of men by others, who have not their creeds and their languages and their ignorances and prejudices, that is the fundamental folly that has killed Teddy and Hugh—and these millions. To end that folly is as much our duty and business as telling the truth or earning a living...."

"But how can you alter it?"

He held out a finger at her. "Men may alter anything if they have motive enough and faith enough."

He indicated the atlas beside him.

"Here I am planning the real map of the world," he said. "Every sort of district that has a character of its own must have its own rule; and the great republic of the united states of the world must keep the federal peace between them all. That's the plain sense of life; the federal world-republic. Why do we bother ourselves with loyalties to any other government but that? It needs only that sufficient men should say it, and that republic would be here now. Why have we loitered so long—until these tragic punishments come? We have to map the world out into its states, and plan its government and the way of its tolerations."

"And you think it will come?"

"It will come."

"And you believe that men will listen to such schemes?" said Letty.

Mr. Britling, with his eyes far away over the hills, seemed to think. "Yes," he said. "Not perhaps to-day—not steadily. But kings and empires die; great ideas, once they are born, can never die again. In the end this world-republic, this sane government of the world, is as certain as the sunset. Only...."

He sighed, and turned over a page of his atlas blindly.

"Only we want it soon. The world is weary of this bloodshed, weary of all this weeping, of this wasting of substance and this killing of sons and lovers. We want it soon, and to have it soon we must work to bring it about. We must give our lives. What is left of our lives....

"That is what you and I must do, Letty. What else is there left for us to do?... I will write of nothing else, I will think of nothing else now but of safety and order. So that all these dear dead—not one of them but will have brought the great days of peace and man's real beginning nearer, and these cruel things that make men whimper like children, that break down bright lives into despair and kill youth at the very moment when it puts out its clean hands to take hold of life—these cruelties, these abominations of confusion, shall cease from the earth forever."

§ 10

Letty regarded him, frowning, and with her chin between her fists....

"But do you really believe," said Letty, "that things can be better than they are?"

"But—*Yes!*" said Mr. Britling.

"I don't," said Letty. "The world is cruel. It is just cruel. So it will always be."

"It need not be cruel," said Mr. Britling.

"It is just a place of cruel things. It is all set with knives. It is full of diseases and accidents. As for God—either there is no God or he is an idiot. He is a slobbering idiot. He is like some idiot who pulls off the wings of flies."

"No," said Mr. Britling.

"There is no progress. Nothing gets better. How can *you* believe in God after Hugh? *Do* you believe in God?"

"Yes," said Mr. Britling after a long pause; "I do believe in God."

"Who lets these things happen!" She raised herself on her arm and thrust her argument at him with her hand. "Who kills my Teddy and your Hugh—and millions."

"No," said Mr. Britling.

"But he *must* let these things happen. Or why do they happen?"

"No," said Mr. Britling. "It is the theologians who must answer that. They have been extravagant about God. They have had silly absolute ideas—that He is all powerful. That He's omni-everything. But the common sense of men knows better. Every real religious thought denies it. After all, the real God of the Christians is Christ, not God Almighty; a poor mocked and wounded God nailed on a cross of matter.... Some day He will triumph.... But it is not fair to say that He causes all things now. It is not fair to make out a case against him. You have been misled. It is a theologian's folly. God is not absolute; God is finite.... A finite God who struggles in his great and comprehensive way as we struggle in our weak and silly way—who is *with* us—that is the essence of all real religion.... I agree with you so—Why! if I thought there was an omnipotent God who looked down on battles and deaths and all the waste and horror of this war—able to prevent these things—doing them to amuse Himself—I would spit in his empty face...."

"Any one would...."

"But it's your teachers and catechisms have set you against God.... They want to make out He owns all Nature. And all sorts of silly claims. Like the heralds in the Middle Ages who insisted that Christ was certainly a great gentleman entitled to bear arms. But God is within Nature and necessity. Necessity is a thing beyond God—beyond good and ill, beyond space and time, a mystery everlastingly impenetrable. God is nearer than that. Necessity is the uttermost thing, but God is the innermost thing. Closer He is than breathing and nearer than hands and feet. He is the Other Thing than this world. Greater than Nature or Necessity, for he is a spirit and they are blind, but not controlling them.... Not yet...."

"They always told me He was the maker of Heaven and Earth."

"That's the Jew God the Christians took over. It's a Quack God, a Panacea. It's not my God."

Letty considered these strange ideas.

"I never thought of Him like that," she said at last. "It makes it all seem different."

"Nor did I. But I do now.... I have suddenly found it and seen it plain. I see it so plain that I am amazed that I have not always seen it.... It is, you see, so easy to understand that there is a God, and how complex and wonderful and brotherly He is, when one thinks of those dear boys who by the thousand, by the hundred thousand, have laid down their lives.... Ay, and there were German boys too who did the same.... The cruelties, the injustice, the brute aggression—they saw it differently. They laid down their lives—they laid down their lives.... Those dear lives, those lives of hope and sunshine....

"Don't you see that it must be like that, Letty? Don't you see that it must be like that?"

"No," she said, "I've seen things differently from that."

"But it's so plain to me," said Mr. Britling. "If there was nothing else in all the world but our kindness for each other, or the love that made you weep in this kind October sunshine, or the love I bear Hugh—if there was nothing else at all—if everything else was cruelty and mockery and filthiness and bitterness, it would still be certain that there was a God of love and righteousness. If there were no signs of God in all the world but the godliness we have seen in those two boys of ours; if we had no other light but the love we have between us....

"You don't mind if I talk like this?" said Mr. Britling. "It's all I can think of now—this God, this God who struggles, who was in Hugh and Teddy, clear and plain, and how He must become the ruler of the world...."

"This God who struggles," she repeated. "I have never thought of Him like that."

"Of course He must be like that," said Mr. Britling. "How can God be a Person; how can He be anything that matters to man, unless He is limited and defined and—human like ourselves.... With things outside Him and beyond Him."

§ 11

Letty walked back slowly through the fields of stubble to her cottage.

She had been talking to Mr. Britling for an hour, and her mind was full of the thought of this changed and simplified man, who talked of God as he might have done of a bird he had seen or of a tree he had sheltered under. And all mixed up with this thought of Mr. Britling was this strange idea of God who was also a limited person, who could come as close as Teddy, whispering love in the darkness. She had a ridiculous feeling

that God really struggled like Mr. Britling, and that with only some indefinable inferiority of outlook Mr. Britling loved like God. She loved him for his maps and his dreams and the bareness of his talk to her. It was strange how the straining thought of the dead Teddy had passed now out of her mind. She was possessed by a sense of ending and beginning, as though a page had turned over in her life and everything was new. She had never given religion any thought but contemptuous thought for some years, since indeed her growing intelligence had dismissed it as a scheme of inexcusable restraints and empty pretences, a thing of discords where there were no discords except of its making. She had been a happy Atheist. She had played in the sunshine, a natural creature with the completest confidence in the essential goodness of the world in which she found herself. She had refused all thought of painful and disagreeable things. Until the bloody paw of war had wiped out all her assurance. Teddy, the playmate, was over, the love game was ended for ever; the fresh happy acceptance of life as life; and in the place of Teddy was the sorrow of life, the pity of life, and this coming of God out of utter remoteness into a conceivable relation to her own existence.

She had left Mr. Britling to his atlas. He lay prone under the hedge with it spread before him. His occupation would have seemed to her only a little while ago the absurdest imaginable. He was drawing boundaries on his maps very carefully in red ink, with a fountain pen. But now she understood.

She knew that those red ink lines of Mr. Britling's might in the end prove wiser and stronger than the bargains of the diplomats....

In the last hour he had come very near to her. She found herself full of an unwonted affection for him. She had never troubled her head about her relations with any one except Teddy before. Now suddenly she seemed to be opening out to all the world for kindness. This new idea of a friendly God, who had a struggle of his own, who could be thought of as kindred to Mr. Britling, as kindred to Teddy—had gripped her imagination. He was behind the autumnal sunshine; he was in the little bird that had seemed so confident and friendly. Whatever was kind, whatever was tender; there was God. And a thousand old phrases she had read and heard and given little heed to, that had lain like dry bones in her memory, suddenly were clothed in flesh and became alive. This God—if this was God—then indeed it was not nonsense to say that God was love, that he was a friend and companion.... With him it might be possible to face a world in which Teddy and she would never walk side by side again nor plan any more happiness for ever. After all she had been very happy; she had had wonderful happiness. She had had far more happiness, far more love, in her short years or so than most people had in their whole lives. And so in the reaction of her

emotions, Letty, who had gone out with her head full of murder and revenge, came back through the sunset thinking of pity, of the thousand kindnesses and tendernesses of Teddy that were, after all, perhaps only an intimation of the limitless kindnesses and tendernesses of God.... What right had she to a white and bitter grief, self-centred and vindictive, while old Britling could still plan an age of mercy in the earth and a red-gold sunlight that was warm as a smile from Teddy lay on all the world....

She must go into the cottage and kiss Cissie, and put away that parcel out of sight until she could find some poor soldier to whom she could send it. She had been pitiless towards Cissie in her grief. She had, in the egotism of her sorrow, treated Cissie as she might have treated a chair or a table, with no thought that Cissie might be weary, might dream of happiness still to come. Cissie had still to play the lover, and her man was already in khaki. There would be no such year as Letty had had in the days before the war darkened the world. Before Cissie's marrying the peace must come, and the peace was still far away. And Direck too would have to take his chances....

Letty came through the little wood and over the stile that brought her into sight of the cottage. The windows of the cottage as she saw it under the bough of the big walnut tree, were afire from the sun. The crimson rambler over the porch that she and Teddy had planted was still bearing roses. The door was open and people were moving in the porch.

Some one was coming out of the cottage, a stranger, in an unfamiliar costume, and behind him was a man in khaki—but that was Mr. Direck! And behind him again was Cissie.

But the stranger!

He came out of the frame of the porch towards the garden gate....

Who—who was this stranger?

It was a man in queer-looking foreign clothes, baggy trousers of some soft-looking blue stuff and a blouse, and he had a white-bandaged left arm. He had a hat stuck at the back of his head, and a beard....

He was entirely a stranger, a foreigner. Was she going insane? Of course he was a stranger!

And then he moved a step, he made a queer sideways pace, a caper, on the path, and instantly he ceased to be strange and foreign. He became amazingly, incredibly, familiar by virtue of that step....

No!

Her breath stopped. All Letty's being seemed to stop. And this stranger who was also incredibly familiar, after he had stared at her motionless form for a moment, waved his hat with a gesture—a gesture that crowned and scaled the effect of familiarity. She gave no sign in reply.

No, that familiarity was just a mad freakishness in things.

This strange man came from Belgium perhaps, to tell something about Teddy....

And then she surprised herself by making a groaning noise, an absurd silly noise, just like the noise when one imitates a cow to a child. She said "Mooo-oo."

And she began to run forward, with legs that seemed misfits, waving her hands about, and as she ran she saw more and more certainly that this wounded man in strange clothing was Teddy. She ran faster and still faster, stumbling and nearly falling. If she did not get to him speedily the world would burst.

To hold him, to hold close to him!...

"Letty! Letty! Just one arm...."

She was clinging to him and he was holding her....

It was all right. She had always known it was all right. (Hold close to him.) Except just for a little while. But that had been foolishness. Hadn't she always known he was alive? And here he was alive! (Hold close to him.) Only it was so good to be sure—after all her torment; to hold him, to hang about him, to feel the solid man, kissing her, weeping too, weeping together with her. "Teddy my love!"

§ 12

Letty was in the cottage struggling to hear and understand things too complicated for her emotion-crowded mind. There was something that Mr. Direck was trying to explain about a delayed telegram that had come soon after she had gone out. There was much indeed that Mr. Direck was trying to explain. What did any explanation really

matter when you had Teddy, with nothing but a strange beard and a bandaged arm between him and yourself? She had an absurd persuasion at first that those two strangenesses would also presently be set aside, so that Teddy would become just exactly what Teddy had always been.

Teddy had been shot through the upper arm....

"My hand has gone, dear little Letty. It's my left hand, luckily. I shall have to wear a hook like some old pirate...."

There was something about his being taken prisoner. "That other officer"—that was Mr. Direck's officer—"had been lying there for days." Teddy had been shot through the upper arm, and stunned by a falling beam. When he came to he was disarmed, with a German standing over him....

Then afterwards he had escaped. In quite a little time he had escaped. He had been in a railway station somewhere in Belgium; locked in a waiting-room with three or four French prisoners, and the junction had been bombed by French and British aeroplanes. Their guard and two of the prisoners had been killed. In the confusion the others had got away into the town. There were trucks of hay on fire, and a store of petrol was in danger. "After that one was bound to escape. One would have been shot if one had been found wandering about."

The bomb had driven some splinters of glass and corrugated iron into Teddy's wrist; it seemed a small place at first; it didn't trouble him for weeks. But then some dirt got into it.

In the narrow cobbled street beyond the station he had happened upon a woman who knew no English, but who took him to a priest, and the priest had hidden him.

Letty did not piece together the whole story at first. She did not want the story very much; she wanted to know about this hand and arm.

There would be queer things in the story when it came to be told. There was an old peasant who had made Teddy work in his fields in spite of his smashed and aching arm, and who had pointed to a passing German when Teddy demurred; there were the people called "they" who had at that time organised the escape of stragglers into Holland. There was the night watch, those long nights in succession before the dash for liberty. But Letty's concern was all with the hand. Inside the sling there was something that hurt the imagination, something bandaged, a stump. She could not think of it. She could not get away from the thought of it.

"But why did you lose your hand?"

It was only a little place at first, and then it got painful....

"But I didn't go into a hospital because I was afraid they would intern me, and so I wouldn't be able to come home. And I was dying to come home. I was—homesick. No one was ever so homesick. I've thought of this place and the garden, and how one looked out of the window at the passers-by, a thousand times. I seemed always to be seeing them. Old Dimple with his benevolent smile, and Mrs. Wolker at the end cottage, and how she used to fetch her beer and wink when she caught us looking at her, and little Charlie Slobberface sniffing on his way to the pigs and all the rest of them. And you, Letty. Particularly you. And how we used to lean on the window-sill with our shoulders touching, and your cheek just in front of my eyes.... And nothing aching at all in one....

"How I thought of that and longed for that!...

"And so, you see, I didn't go to the hospital. I kept hoping to get to England first. And I left it too long...."

"Life's come back to me with you!" said Letty. "Until just to-day I've believed you'd come back. And to-day—I doubted.... I thought it was all over—all the real life, love and the dear fun of things, and that there was nothing before me, nothing before me but just holding out—and keeping your memory.... Poor arm. Poor arm. And being kind to people. And pretending you were alive somewhere.... I'll not care about the arm. In a little while.... I'm glad you've gone, but I'm gladder you're back and can never go again.... And I will be your right hand, dear, and your left hand and all your hands. Both my hands for your dear lost left one. You shall have three hands instead of two...."

§ 13

Letty stood by the window as close as she could to Teddy in a world that seemed wholly made up of unexpected things. She could not heed the others, it was only when Teddy spoke to the others, or when they spoke to Teddy, that they existed for her.

For instance, Teddy was presently talking to Mr. Direck.

They had spoken about the Canadians who had come up and relieved the Essex men after the fight in which Teddy had been captured. And then it was manifest that Mr. Direck was talking of his regiment. "I'm not the only American who has gone Canadian—for the duration of the war."

He had got to his explanation at last.

"I've told a lie," he said triumphantly. "I've shifted my birthplace six hundred miles.

"Mind you, I don't admit a thing that Cissie has ever said about America—not one thing. You don't understand the sort of proposition America is up against. America is the New World, where there are no races and nations any more; she is the Melting Pot, from which we will cast the better state. I've believed that always—in spite of a thousand little things I believe it now. I go back on nothing. I'm not fighting as an American either. I'm fighting simply as myself.... I'm not going fighting for England, mind you. Don't you fancy that. I don't know I'm so particularly in love with a lot of English ways as to do that. I don't see how any one can be very much in love with your Empire, with its dead-alive Court, its artful politicians, its lords and ladies and snobs, its way with the Irish and its way with India, and everybody shifting responsibility and telling lies about your common people. I'm not going fighting for England. I'm going fighting for Cissie—and justice and Belgium and all that—but more particularly for Cissie. And anyhow I can't look Pa Britling in the face any more.... And I want to see those trenches—close. I reckon they're a thing it will be interesting to talk about some day.... So I'm going," said Mr. Direck. "But chiefly—it's Cissie. See?"

Cissie had come and stood by the side of him.

She looked from poor broken Teddy to him and back again.

"Up to now," she said, "I've wanted you to go...."

Tears came into her eyes.

"I suppose I must let you go," she said. "Oh! I'd hate you not to go...."

§ 14

"Good God! how old the Master looks!" cried Teddy suddenly.

He was standing at the window, and as Mr. Direck came forward inquiringly he pointed to the figure of Mr. Britling passing along the road towards the Dower House.

"He does look old. I hadn't noticed," said Mr. Direck.

"Why, he's gone grey!" cried Teddy, peering. "He wasn't grey when I left."

They watched the knickerbockered figure of Mr. Britling receding up the hill, atlas and papers in his hands behind his back.

"I must go out to him," said Teddy, disengaging himself from Letty.

"No," she said, arresting him with her hand.

"But he will be glad—"

She stood in her husband's way. She had a vision of Mr. Britling suddenly called out of his dreams of God ruling the united states of the world, to rejoice at Teddy's restoration....

"No," she said; "it will only make him think again of Hugh—and how he died. Don't go out, Teddy. Not now. What does he care for *you*?... Let him rest from such things.... Leave him to dream over his atlas.... He isn't so desolate—if you knew.... I will tell you, Teddy—when I can....

"But just now—No, he will think of Hugh again.... Let him go.... He has God and his atlas there.... They're more than you think."

CHAPTER THE SECOND

MR. BRITLING WRITES UNTIL SUNRISE

§ 1

It was some weeks later. It was now the middle of November, and Mr. Britling, very warmly wrapped in his thick dressing-gown and his thick llama wool pyjamas, was sitting at his night desk, and working ever and again at an essay, an essay of preposterous ambitions, for the title of it was "The Better Government of the World."

Latterly he had had much sleepless misery. In the day life was tolerable, but in the night—unless he defended himself by working, the losses and cruelties of the war came and grimaced at him, insufferably. Now he would be haunted by long processions of refugees, now he would think of the dead lying stiff and twisted in a thousand dreadful attitudes. Then again he would be overwhelmed with anticipations of the frightful economic and social dissolution that might lie ahead.... At other times he thought of wounds and the deformities of body and spirit produced by injuries. And

sometimes he would think of the triumph of evil. Stupid and triumphant persons went about a world that stupidity had desolated, with swaggering gestures, with a smiling consciousness of enhanced importance, with their scornful hatred of all measured and temperate and kindly things turned now to scornful contempt. And mingling with the soil they walked on lay the dead body of Hugh, face downward. At the back of the boy's head, rimmed by blood-stiffened hair—the hair that had once been "as soft as the down of a bird"—was a big red hole. That hole was always pitilessly distinct. They stepped on him—heedlessly. They heeled the scattered stuff of his exquisite brain into the clay....

From all such moods of horror Mr. Britling's circle of lamplight was his sole refuge. His work could conjure up visions, like opium visions, of a world of order and justice. Amidst the gloom of world bankruptcy he stuck to the prospectus of a braver enterprise—reckless of his chances of subscribers....

§ 2

But this night even this circle of lamplight would not hold his mind. Doubt had crept into this last fastness. He pulled the papers towards him, and turned over the portion he had planned.

His purpose in the book he was beginning to write was to reason out the possible methods of government that would give a stabler, saner control to the world. He believed still in democracy, but he was realising more and more that democracy had yet to discover its method. It had to take hold of the consciences of men, it had to equip itself with still unformed organisations. Endless years of patient thinking, of experimenting, of discussion lay before mankind ere this great idea could become reality, and right, the proven right thing, could rule the earth.

Meanwhile the world must still remain a scene of blood-stained melodrama, of deafening noise, contagious follies, vast irrational destructions. One fine life after another went down from study and university and laboratory to be slain and silenced....

Was it conceivable that this mad monster of mankind would ever be caught and held in the thin-spun webs of thought?

Was it, after all, anything but pretension and folly for a man to work out plans for the better government of the world?—was it any better than the ambitious scheming of some fly upon the wheel of the romantic gods?

Man has come, floundering and wounding and suffering, out of the breeding darknesses of Time, that will presently crush and consume him again. Why not flounder with the rest, why not eat, drink, fight, scream, weep and pray, forget Hugh, stop brooding upon Hugh, banish all these priggish dreams of "The Better Government of the World," and turn to the brighter aspects, the funny and adventurous aspects of the war, the Chestertonian jolliness, *Punch* side of things? Think you because your sons are dead that there will be no more cakes and ale? Let mankind blunder out of the mud and blood as mankind has blundered in....

Let us at any rate keep our precious Sense of Humour....

He pulled his manuscript towards him. For a time he sat decorating the lettering of his title, "The Better Government of the World," with little grinning gnomes' heads and waggish tails....

§ 3

On the top of Mr. Britling's desk, beside the clock, lay a letter, written in clumsy English and with its envelope resealed by a label which testified that it had been "OPENED BY CENSOR."

The friendly go-between in Norway had written to tell Mr. Britling that Herr Heinrich also was dead; he had died a wounded prisoner in Russia some months ago. He had been wounded and captured, after undergoing great hardships, during the great Russian attack upon the passes of the Carpathians in the early spring, and his wound had mortified. He had recovered partially for a time, and then he had been beaten and injured again in some struggle between German and Croatian prisoners, and he had sickened and died. Before he died he had written to his parents, and once again he had asked that the fiddle he had left in Mr. Britling's care should if possible be returned to them. It was manifest that both for him and them now it had become a symbol with many associations.

The substance of this letter invaded the orange circle of the lamp; it would have to be answered, and the potentialities of the answer were running through Mr. Britling's brain to the exclusion of any impersonal composition. He thought of the old parents

away there in Pomerania—he believed but he was not quite sure, that Heinrich had been an only son—and of the pleasant spectacled figure that had now become a broken and decaying thing in a prisoner's shallow grave....

Another son had gone—all the world was losing its sons....

He found himself thinking of young Heinrich in the very manner, if with a lesser intensity, in which he thought about his own son, as of hopes senselessly destroyed. His mind took no note of the fact that Heinrich was an enemy, that by the reckoning of a "war of attrition" his death was balance and compensation for the death of Hugh. He went straight to the root fact that they had been gallant and kindly beings, and that the same thing had killed them both....

By no conceivable mental gymnastics could he think of the two as antagonists. Between them there was no imaginable issue. They had both very much the same scientific disposition; with perhaps more dash and inspiration in the quality of Hugh; more docility and method in the case of Karl. Until war had smashed them one against the other....

He recalled his first sight of Heinrich at the junction, and how he had laughed at the sight of his excessive Teutonism. The close-cropped shining fair head surmounted by a yellowish-white corps cap had appeared dodging about among the people upon the platform, and manifestly asking questions. The face had been very pink with the effort of an unaccustomed tongue. The young man had been clad in a suit of white flannel refined by a purple line; his boots were of that greenish yellow leather that only a German student could esteem "chic"; his rucksack was upon his back, and the precious fiddle in its case was carried very carefully in one hand; this same dead fiddle. The other hand held a stick with a carved knob and a pointed end. He had been too German for belief. "Herr Heinrich!" Mr. Britling had said, and straightway the heels had clashed together for a bow, a bow from the waist, a bow that a heedless old lady much burthened with garden produce had greatly disarranged. From first to last amidst our off-hand English ways Herr Heinrich had kept his bow—and always it had been getting disarranged.

That had been his constant effect; a little stiff, a little absurd, and always clean and pink and methodical. The boys had liked him without reserve, Mrs. Britling had liked him; everybody had found him a likeable creature. He never complained of anything except picnics. But he did object to picnics; to the sudden departure of the family to wild surroundings for the consumption of cold, knifeless and forkless meals in the serious middle hours of the day. He protested to Mr. Britling, respectfully but very firmly. It was, he held, implicit in their understanding that he should have a cooked

meal in the middle of the day. Otherwise his Magen was perplexed and disordered. In the evening he could not eat with any gravity or profit....

Their disposition towards under-feeding and a certain lack of fine sentiment were the only flaws in the English scheme that Herr Heinrich admitted. He certainly found the English unfeeling. His heart went even less satisfied than his Magen. He was a being of expressive affections; he wanted great friendships, mysterious relationships, love. He tried very bravely to revere and to understand and be occultly understood by Mr. Britling; he sought long walks and deep talks with Hugh and the small boys; he tried to fill his heart with Cissie; he found at last marvels of innocence and sweetness in the Hickson girl. She wore her hair in a pigtail when first he met her, and it made her almost Marguerite. This young man had cried aloud for love, warm and filling, like the Mittagsessen that was implicit in their understanding. And all these Essex people failed to satisfy him; they were silent, they were subtle, they slipped through the fat yet eager fingers of his heart, so that he fell back at last upon himself and his German correspondents and the idealisation of Maud Hickson and the moral education of Billy. Billy. Mr. Britling's memories came back at last to the figure of young Heinrich with the squirrel on his shoulder, that had so often stood in the way of the utter condemnation of Germany. That, seen closely, was the stuff of one brutal Prussian. What quarrel had we with him?...

Other memories of Heinrich flitted across Mr. Britling's reverie. Heinrich at hockey, running with extreme swiftness and little skill, tricked and baffled by Letty, dodged by Hugh, going headlong forward and headlong back, and then with a cry flinging himself flat on the ground exhausted.... Or again Heinrich very grave and very pink, peering through his glasses at his cards at Skat.... Or Heinrich in the boats upon the great pond, or Heinrich swimming, or Heinrich hiding very, very artfully from the boys about the garden on a theory of his own, or Heinrich in strange postures, stalking the deer in Claverings Park. For a time he had had a great ambition to creep quite close to a deer and *touch* it.... Or Heinrich indexing. He had a passion for listing and indexing books, music, any loose classifiable thing. His favourite amusement was devising schemes for the indentation of dictionary leaves, so that one could turn instantly to the needed word. He had bought and cut the edges of three dictionaries; each in succession improved upon the other; he had had great hopes of patents and wealth arising therefrom.... And his room had been a source of strange sounds; his search for music upon the violin. He had hoped when he came to Matching's Easy to join "some string quartette." But Matching's Easy produced no string quartette. He had to fall back upon the pianola, and try to play duets with that. Only the pianola did all the duet itself, and

in the hands of a small Britling was apt to betray a facetious moodiness; sudden alternations between extreme haste and extreme lassitude....

Then there came a memory of Heinrich talking very seriously; his glasses magnifying his round blue eyes, talking of his ideas about life, of his beliefs and disbeliefs, of his ambitions and prospects in life.

He confessed two principal ambitions. They varied perhaps in their absolute dimensions, but they were of equal importance in his mind. The first of these was, so soon as he had taken his doctorate in philology, to give himself to the perfecting of an International Language; it was to combine all the virtues of Esperanto and Ido. "And then," said Herr Heinrich, "I do not think there will be any more wars—ever." The second ambition, which was important first because Herr Heinrich found much delight in working at it, and secondly because he thought it would give him great wealth and opportunity for propagating the perfect speech, was the elaboration of his system of marginal indentations for dictionaries and alphabetical books of reference of all sorts. It was to be so complete that one would just stand over the book to be consulted, run hand and eye over its edges and open the book—"at the very exact spot." He proposed to follow this business up with a quite Germanic thoroughness. "Presently," he said, "I must study the machinery by which the edges of books are cut. It is possible I may have to invent these also." This was the double-barrelled scheme of Herr Heinrich's career. And along it he was to go, and incidentally develop his large vague heart that was at present so manifestly unsatisfied....

Such was the brief story of Herr Heinrich.

That story was over—just as Hugh's story was over. That first volume would never now have a second and a third. It ended in some hasty grave in Russia. The great scheme for marginal indices would never be patented, the duets with the pianola would never be played again.

Imagination glimpsed a little figure toiling manfully through the slush and snow of the Carpathians; saw it staggering under its first experience of shell fire; set it amidst attacks and flights and fatigue and hunger and a rush perhaps in the darkness; guessed at the wounding blow. Then came the pitiful pilgrimage of the prisoners into captivity, captivity in a land desolated, impoverished and embittered. Came wounds wrapped in filthy rags, pain and want of occupation, and a poor little bent and broken Heinrich sitting aloof in a crowded compound nursing a mortifying wound....

He used always to sit in a peculiar attitude with his arms crossed on his crossed legs, looking slantingly through his glasses....

So he must have sat, and presently he lay on some rough bedding and suffered, untended, in infinite discomfort; lay motionless and thought at times, it may be, of Matching's Easy and wondered what Hugh and Teddy were doing. Then he became fevered, and the world grew bright-coloured and fantastic and ugly for him. Until one day an infinite weakness laid hold of him, and his pain grew faint and all his thoughts and memories grew faint—and still fainter....

The violin had been brought into Mr. Britling's study that afternoon, and lay upon the further window-seat. Poor little broken sherd, poor little fragment of a shattered life! It looked in its case like a baby in a coffin.

"I must write a letter to the old father and mother," Mr. Britling thought. "I can't just send the poor little fiddle—without a word. In all this pitiful storm of witless hate—surely there may be one greeting—not hateful.

"From my blackness to yours," said Mr. Britling aloud. He would have to write it in English. But even if they knew no English some one would be found to translate it to them. He would have to write very plainly.

§ 4

He pushed aside the manuscript of "The Better Government of the World," and began to write rather slowly, shaping his letters roundly and distinctly:

Dear Sir,

I am writing this letter to you to tell you I am sending back the few little things I had kept for your son at his request when the war broke out. I am sending them—

Mr. Britling left that blank for the time until he could arrange the method of sending to the Norwegian intermediary.

Especially I am sending his violin, which he had asked me thrice to convey to you. Either it is a gift from you or it symbolised many things for him that he connected with home and you. I will have it packed with particular care, and I will do all in my power to ensure its safe arrival.

I want to tell you that all the stress and passion of this war has not made us here in Matching's Easy forget our friend your son. He was one of us, he had our affection, he had friends here who are still his friends. We found him honourable and

companionable, and we share something of your loss. I have got together for you a few snapshots I chance to possess in which you will see him in the sunshine, and which will enable you perhaps to picture a little more definitely than you would otherwise do the life he led here. There is one particularly that I have marked. Our family is lunching out-of-doors, and you will see that next to your son is a youngster, a year or so his junior, who is touching glasses with him. I have put a cross over his head. He is my eldest son, he was very dear to me, and he too has been, killed in this war. They are, you see, smiling very pleasantly at each other.

While writing this Mr. Britling had been struck by the thought of the photographs, and he had taken them out of the little drawer into which he was accustomed to thrust them. He picked out the ones that showed the young German, but there were others, bright with sunshine, that were now charged with acquired significances; there were two showing the children and Teddy and Hugh and Cissie and Letty doing the goose step, and there was one of Mr. Van der Pant, smiling at the front door, in Heinrich's abandoned slippers. There were endless pictures of Teddy also. It is the happy instinct of the Kodak to refuse those days that are overcast, and the photographic record of a life is a chain of all its kindlier aspects. In the drawer above these snapshots there were Hugh's letters and a miscellany of trivial documents touching on his life.

Mr. Britling discontinued writing and turned these papers over and mused. Heinrich's letters and postcards had got in among them, and so had a letter of Teddy's....

The letters reinforced the photographs in their reminder how kind and pleasant a race mankind can be. Until the wild asses of nationalism came kicking and slaying amidst them, until suspicion and jostling greed and malignity poison their minds, until the fools with the high explosives blow that elemental goodness into shrieks of hate and splashes of blood. How kindly men are—up to the very instant of their cruelties! His mind teemed suddenly with little anecdotes and histories of the goodwill of men breaking through the ill-will of war, of the mutual help of sorely wounded Germans and English lying together in the mud and darkness between the trenches, of the fellowship of captors and prisoners, of the Saxons at Christmas fraternising with the English.... Of that he had seen photographs in one of the daily papers....

His mind came back presently from these wanderings to the task before him.

He tried to picture these Heinrich parents. He supposed they were kindly, civilised people. It was manifest the youngster had come to him from a well-ordered and gentle-spirited home. But he imagined them—he could not tell why—as people much older than himself. Perhaps young Heinrich had on some occasion said they were old people—he could not remember. And he had a curious impulse too to write to them in

phrases of consolation; as if their loss was more pitiable than his own. He doubted whether they had the consolation of his sanguine temperament, whether they could resort as readily as he could to his faith, whether in Pomerania there was the same consoling possibility of an essay on the Better Government of the World. He did not think this very clearly, but that was what was at the back of his mind. He went on writing.

If you think that these two boys have both perished, not in some noble common cause but one against the other in a struggle of dynasties and boundaries and trade routes and tyrannous ascendancies, then it seems to me that you must feel as I feel that this war is the most tragic and dreadful thing that has ever happened to mankind.

He sat thinking for some minutes after he had written that, and when presently he resumed his writing, a fresh strain of thought was traceable even in his opening sentence.

If you count dead and wounds this is the most dreadful war in history; for you as for me, it has been almost the extremity of personal tragedy.... Black sorrow.... But is it the most dreadful war?

I do not think it is. I can write to you and tell you that I do indeed believe that our two sons have died not altogether in vain. Our pain and anguish may not be wasted—may be necessary. Indeed they may be necessary. Here am I bereaved and wretched—and I hope. Never was the fabric of war so black; that I admit. But never was the black fabric of war so threadbare. At a thousand points the light is shining through.

Mr. Britling's pen stopped.

There was perfect stillness in the study bedroom.

"The tinpot style," said Mr. Britling at last in a voice of extreme bitterness.

He fell into an extraordinary quarrel with his style. He forgot about those Pomeranian parents altogether in his exasperation at his own inexpressiveness, at his incomplete control of these rebel words and phrases that came trailing each its own associations and suggestions to hamper his purpose with it. He read over the offending sentence.

"The point is that it is true," he whispered. "It is exactly what I want to say."...

Exactly?...

His mind stuck on that "exactly."... When one has much to say style is troublesome. It is as if one fussed with one's uniform before a battle.... But that is just what one ought to do before a battle.... One ought to have everything in order....

He took a fresh sheet and made three trial beginnings.

"War is like a black fabric."...

"War is a curtain of black fabric across the pathway."

"War is a curtain of dense black fabric across all the hopes and kindliness of mankind. Yet always it has let through some gleams of light, and now—I am not dreaming—it grows threadbare, and here and there and at a thousand points the light is breaking through. We owe it to all these dear youths—"

His pen stopped again.

"I must work on a rough draft," said Mr. Britling.

§ 5

Three hours later Mr. Britling was working by daylight, though his study lamp was still burning, and his letter to old Heinrich was still no better than a collection of material for a letter. But the material was falling roughly into shape, and Mr. Britling's intentions were finding themselves. It was clear to him now that he was no longer writing as his limited personal self to those two personal selves grieving, in the old, large, high-walled, steep-roofed household amidst pine woods, of which Heinrich had once shown him a picture. He knew them too little for any such personal address. He was writing, he perceived, not as Mr. Britling but as an Englishman—that was all he could be to them—and he was writing to them as Germans; he could apprehend them as nothing more. He was just England bereaved to Germany bereaved....

He was no longer writing to the particular parents of one particular boy, but to all that mass of suffering, regret, bitterness and fatigue that lay behind the veil of the "front." Slowly, steadily, the manhood of Germany was being wiped out. As he sat there in the stillness he could think that at least two million men of the Central Powers were dead, and an equal number maimed and disabled. Compared with that our British losses, immense and universal as they were by the standard of any previous experience, were still slight; our larger armies had still to suffer, and we had lost irrevocably not very much more than a quarter of a million. But the tragedy gathered against us. We knew enough already to know what must be the reality of the German homes to which those dead men would nevermore return....

If England had still the longer account to pay, the French had paid already nearly to the limits of endurance. They must have lost well over a million of their mankind, and still they bled and bled. Russia too in the East had paid far more than man for man in this vast swapping off of lives. In a little while no Censorship would hold the voice of the peoples. There would be no more talk of honour and annexations, hegemonies and trade routes, but only Europe lamenting for her dead....

The Germany to which he wrote would be a nation of widows and children, rather pinched boys and girls, crippled men, old men, deprived men, men who had lost brothers and cousins and friends and ambitions. No triumph now on land or sea could save Germany from becoming that. France too would be that, Russia, and lastly Britain, each in their degree. Before the war there had been no Germany to which an Englishman could appeal; Germany had been a threat, a menace, a terrible trampling of armed men. It was as little possible then to think of talking to Germany as it would have been to have stopped the Kaiser in mid career in his hooting car down the Unter den Linden and demand a quiet talk with him. But the Germany that had watched those rushes with a slightly doubting pride had her eyes now full of tears and blood. She had believed, she had obeyed, and no real victory had come. Still she fought on, bleeding, agonising, wasting her substance and the substance of the whole world, to no conceivable end but exhaustion, so capable she was, so devoted, so proud and utterly foolish. And the mind of Germany, whatever it was before the war, would now be something residual, something left over and sitting beside a reading-lamp as he was sitting beside a reading-lamp, thinking, sorrowing, counting the cost, looking into the dark future....

And to that he wrote, to that dimly apprehended figure outside a circle of the light like his own circle of light—which was the father of Heinrich, which was great Germany, Germany which lived before and which will yet outlive the flapping of the eagles....

Our boys, he wrote, *have died, fighting one against the other. They have been fighting upon an issue so obscure that your German press is still busy discussing what it was. For us it was that Belgium was invaded and France in danger of destruction. Nothing else could have brought the English into the field against you. But why you invaded Belgium and France and whether that might have been averted we do not know to this day. And still this war goes on and still more boys die, and these men who do not fight, these men in the newspaper offices and in the ministries plan campaigns and strokes and counter-strokes that belong to no conceivable plan at all. Except that now for them there is something more terrible than war. And that is the day of reckoning with their own people.*

What have we been fighting for? What are we fighting for? Do you know? Does any one know? Why am I spending what is left of my substance and you what is left of yours to keep on this war against each other? What have we to gain from hurting one another still further? Why should we be puppets any longer in the hands of crowned fools and witless diplomatists? Even if we were dumb and acquiescent before, does not the blood of our sons now cry out to us that this foolery should cease? We have let these people send our sons to death.

It is you and I who must stop these wars, these massacres of boys.

Massacres of boys! That indeed is the essence of modern war. The killing off of the young. It is the destruction of the human inheritance, it is the spending of all the life and material of the future upon present-day hate and greed. Fools and knaves, politicians, tricksters, and those who trade on the suspicions and thoughtless, generous angers of men, make wars; the indolence and modesty of the mass of men permit them. Are you and I to suffer such things until the whole fabric of our civilisation, that has been so slowly and so laboriously built up, is altogether destroyed?

When I sat down to write to you I had meant only to write to you of your son and mine. But I feel that what can be said in particular of our loss, need not be said; it can be understood without saying. What needs to be said and written about is this, that war must be put an end to and that nobody else but you and me and all of us can do it. We have to do that for the love of our sons and our race and all that is human. War is no longer human; the chemist and the metallurgist have changed all that. My boy was shot through the eye; his brain was blown to pieces by some man who never knew what he had done. Think what that means!... It is plain to me, surely it is plain to you and all the world, that war is now a mere putting of the torch to explosives that flare out to universal ruin. There is nothing for one sane man to write to another about in these days but the salvation of mankind from war.

Now I want you to be patient with me and hear me out. There was a time in the earlier part of this war when it was hard to be patient because there hung over us the dread of losses and disaster. Now we need dread no longer. The dreaded thing has happened. Sitting together as we do in spirit beside the mangled bodies of our dead, surely we can be as patient as the hills.

I want to tell you quite plainly and simply that I think that Germany which is chief and central in this war is most to blame for this war. Writing to you as an Englishman to a German and with war still being waged, there must be no mistake between us upon this point. I am persuaded that in the decade that ended with your overthrow of France

in 1871, Germany turned her face towards evil, and that her refusal to treat France generously and to make friends with any other great power in the world, is the essential cause of this war. Germany triumphed—and she trampled on the loser. She inflicted intolerable indignities. She set herself to prepare for further aggressions; long before this killing began she was making war upon land and sea, launching warships, building strategic railways, setting up a vast establishment of war material, threatening, straining all the world to keep pace with her threats.... At last there was no choice before any European nation but submission to the German will, or war. And it was no will to which righteous men could possibly submit. It came as an illiberal and ungracious will. It was the will of Zabern. It is not as if you had set yourselves to be an imperial people and embrace and unify the world. You did not want to unify the world. You wanted to set the foot of an intensely national Germany, a sentimental and illiberal Germany, a Germany that treasured the portraits of your ridiculous Kaiser and his litter of sons, a Germany wearing uniform, reading black letter, and despising every kultur but her own, upon the neck of a divided and humiliated mankind. It was an intolerable prospect. I had rather the whole world died.

Forgive me for writing "you." You are as little responsible for that Germany as I am for—Sir Edward Grey. But this happened over you; you did not do your utmost to prevent it—even as England has happened, and I have let it happen over me....

"It is so dry; so general," whispered Mr. Britling. "And yet—it is this that has killed our sons."

He sat still for a time, and then went on reading a fresh sheet of his manuscript.

When I bring these charges against Germany I have little disposition to claim any righteousness for Britain. There has been small splendour in this war for either Germany or Britain or Russia; we three have chanced to be the biggest of the combatants, but the glory lies with invincible France. It is France and Belgium and Serbia who shine as the heroic lands. They have fought defensively and beyond all expectation, for dear land and freedom. This war for them has been a war of simple, definite issues, to which they have risen with an entire nobility. Englishman and German alike may well envy them that simplicity. I look to you, as an honest man schooled by the fierce lessons of this war, to meet me in my passionate desire to see France, Belgium and Serbia emerge restored from all this blood and struggle, enlarged to the limits of their nationality, vindicated and secure. Russia I will not write about here; let me go on at once to tell you about my own country; remarking only that between England and Russia there are endless parallelisms. We have similar complexities, kindred difficulties. We have for instance an imported dynasty, we have

a soul-destroying State Church which cramps and poisons the education of our ruling class, we have a people out of touch with a secretive government, and the same traditional contempt for science. We have our Irelands and Polands. Even our kings bear a curious likeness....

At this point there was a break in the writing, and Mr. Britling made, as it were, a fresh beginning.

Politically the British Empire is a clumsy collection of strange accidents. It is a thing as little to be proud of as the outline of a flint or the shape of a potato. For the mass of English people India and Egypt and all that side of our system mean less than nothing; our trade is something they do not understand, our imperial wealth something they do not share. Britain has been a group of four democracies caught in the net of a vast yet casual imperialism; the common man here is in a state of political perplexity from the cradle to the grave. None the less there is a great people here even as there is a great people in Russia, a people with a soul and character of its own, a people of unconquerable kindliness and with a peculiar genius, which still struggle towards will and expression. We have been beginning that same great experiment that France and America and Switzerland and China are making, the experiment of democracy. It is the newest form of human association, and we are still but half awake to its needs and necessary conditions. For it is idle to pretend that the little city democracies of ancient times were comparable to the great essays in practical republicanism that mankind is making to-day. This age of the democratic republics that dawn is a new age. It has not yet lasted for a century, not for a paltry hundred years.... All new things are weak things; a rat can kill a man-child with ease; the greater the destiny, the weaker the immediate self-protection may be. And to me it seems that your complete and perfect imperialism, ruled by Germans for Germans, is in its scope and outlook a more antiquated and smaller and less noble thing than these sprawling emergent giant democracies of the West that struggle so confusedly against it....

But that we do struggle confusedly, with pitiful leaders and infinite waste and endless delay; that it is to our indisciplines and to the dishonesties and tricks our incompleteness provokes, that the prolongation of this war is to be ascribed, I readily admit. At the outbreak of this war I had hoped to see militarism felled within a year....

§ 6

From this point onward Mr. Britling's notes became more fragmentary. They had a consecutiveness, but they were discontinuous. His thought had leapt across gaps that his pen had had no time to fill. And he had begun to realise that his letter to the old people in Pomerania was becoming impossible. It had broken away into dissertation.

"Yet there must be dissertations," he said. "Unless such men as we are take these things in hand, always we shall be misgoverned, always the sons will die...."

§ 7

I do not think you Germans realise how steadily you were conquering the world before this war began. Had you given half the energy and intelligence you have spent upon this war to the peaceful conquest of men's minds and spirits, I believe that you would have taken the leadership of the world tranquilly—no man disputing. Your science was five years, your social and economic organisation was a quarter of a century in front of ours.... Never has it so lain in the power of a great people to lead and direct mankind towards the world republic and universal peace. It needed but a certain generosity of the imagination....

But your Junkers, your Imperial court, your foolish vicious Princes; what were such dreams to them?... With an envious satisfaction they hurled all the accomplishment of Germany into the fires of war....

§ 8

Your boy, as no doubt you know, dreamt constantly of such a world peace as this that I foreshadow; he was more generous than his country. He could envisage war and hostility only as misunderstanding. He thought that a world that could explain itself clearly would surely be at peace. He was scheming always therefore for the perfection and propagation of Esperanto or Ido, or some such universal link. My youngster too was full of a kindred and yet larger dream, the dream of human science, which knows neither king nor country nor race....

These boys, these hopes, this war has killed....

That fragment ended so. Mr. Britling ceased to read for a time. "But has it killed them?" he whispered....

"If you had lived, my dear, you and your England would have talked with a younger Germany—better than I can ever do...."

He turned the pages back, and read here and there with an accumulating discontent.

§ 9

"Dissertations," said Mr. Britling.

Never had it been so plain to Mr. Britling that he was a weak, silly, ill-informed and hasty-minded writer, and never had he felt so invincible a conviction that the Spirit of God was in him, and that it fell to him to take some part in the establishment of a new order of living upon the earth; it might be the most trivial part by the scale of the task, but for him it was to be now his supreme concern. And it was an almost intolerable grief to him that his services should be, for all his desire, so poor in quality, so weak in conception. Always he seemed to be on the verge of some illuminating and beautiful statement of his cause; always he was finding his writing inadequate, a thin treachery to the impulse of his heart, always he was finding his effort weak and ineffective. In this instance, at the outset he seemed to see with a golden clearness the message of brotherhood, or forgiveness, of a common call. To whom could such a message be better addressed than to those sorrowing parents; from whom could it come with a better effect than from himself? And now he read what he had made of this message. It seemed to his jaded mind a pitifully jaded effort. It had no light, it had no depth. It was like the disquisition of a debating society.

He was distressed by a fancy of an old German couple, spectacled and peering, puzzled by his letter. Perhaps they would be obscurely hurt by his perplexing generalisations. Why, they would ask, should this Englishman preach to them?

He sat back in his chair wearily, with his chin sunk upon his chest. For a time he did not think, and then, he read again the sentence in front of his eyes.

"These boys, these hopes, this war has killed."

The words hung for a time in his mind.

"No!" said Mr. Britling stoutly. "They live!"

And suddenly it was borne in upon his mind that he was not alone. There were thousands and tens of thousands of men and women like himself, desiring with all

their hearts to say, as he desired to say, the reconciling word. It was not only his hand that thrust against the obstacles.... Frenchmen and Russians sat in the same stillness, facing the same perplexities; there were Germans seeking a way through to him. Even as he sat and wrote. And for the first time clearly he felt a Presence of which he had thought very many times in the last few weeks, a Presence so close to him that it was behind his eyes and in his brain and hands. It was no trick of his vision; it was a feeling of immediate reality. And it was Hugh, Hugh that he had thought was dead, it was young Heinrich living also, it was himself, it was those others that sought, it was all these and it was more, it was the Master, the Captain of Mankind, it was God, there present with him, and he knew that it was God. It was as if he had been groping all this time in the darkness, thinking himself alone amidst rocks and pitfalls and pitiless things, and suddenly a hand, a firm strong hand, had touched his own. And a voice within him bade him be of good courage. There was no magic trickery in that moment; he was still weak and weary, a discouraged rhetorician, a good intention ill-equipped; but he was no longer lonely and wretched, no longer in the same world with despair. God was beside him and within him and about him.... It was the crucial moment of Mr. Britling's life. It was a thing as light as the passing of a cloud on an April morning; it was a thing as great as the first day of creation. For some moments he still sat back with his chin upon his chest and his hands dropping from the arms of his chair. Then he sat up and drew a deep breath....

This had come almost as a matter of course.

For weeks his mind had been playing about this idea. He had talked to Letty of this Finite God, who is the king of man's adventure in space and time. But hitherto God had been for him a thing of the intelligence, a theory, a report, something told about but not realised.... Mr. Britling's thinking about God hitherto had been like some one who has found an empty house, very beautiful and pleasant, full of the promise of a fine personality. And then as the discoverer makes his lonely, curious explorations, he hears downstairs, dear and friendly, the voice of the Master coming in....

There was no need to despair because he himself was one of the feeble folk. God was with him indeed, and he was with God. The King was coming to his own. Amidst the darknesses and confusions, the nightmare cruelties and the hideous stupidities of the great war, God, the Captain of the World Republic, fought his way to empire. So long as one did one's best and utmost in a cause so mighty, did it matter though the thing one did was little and poor?

"I have thought too much of myself," said Mr. Britling, "and of what I would do by myself. I have forgotten *that which was with me*...."

§ 10

He turned over the rest of the night's writing presently, and read it now as though it was the work of another man.

These later notes were fragmentary, and written in a sprawling hand.

"Let us make ourselves watchers and guardians of the order of the world....

"If only for love of our dead....

"Let us pledge ourselves to service. Let us set ourselves with all our minds and all our hearts to the perfecting and working out of the methods of democracy and the ending for ever of the kings and emperors and priestcrafts and the bands of adventurers, the traders and owners and forestallers who have betrayed mankind into this morass of hate and blood—in which our sons are lost—in which we flounder still...."

How feeble was this squeak of exhortation! It broke into a scolding note.

"Who have betrayed," read Mr. Britling, and judged the phrase.

"Who have fallen with us," he amended....

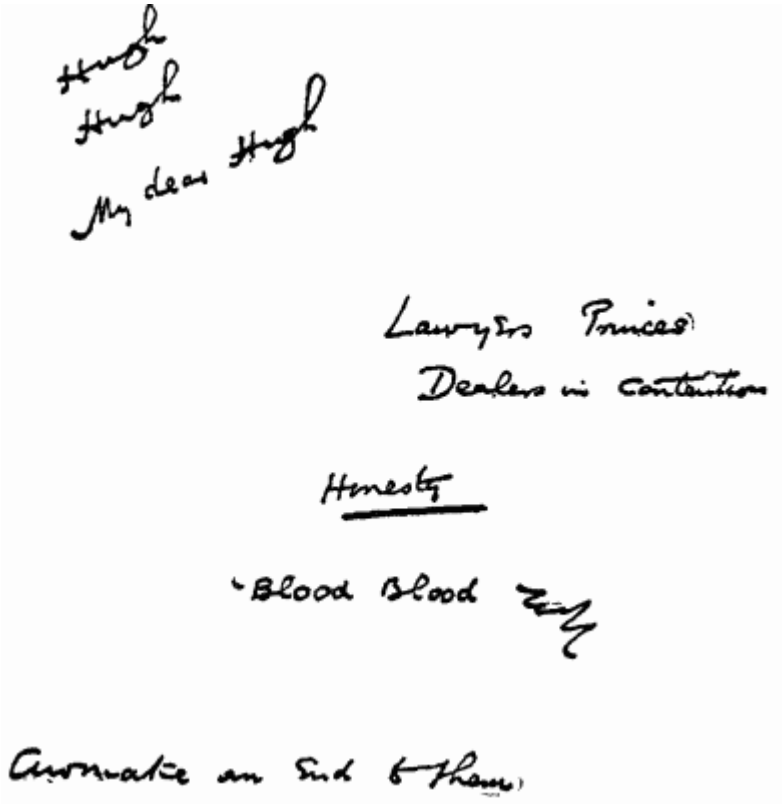
"One gets so angry and bitter—because one feels alone, I suppose. Because one feels that for them one's reason is no reason. One is enraged by the sense of their silent and regardless contradiction, and one forgets the Power of which one is a part...."

The sheet that bore the sentence he criticised was otherwise blank except that written across it obliquely in a very careful hand were the words "Hugh," and "Hugh Philip Britling."...

On the next sheet he had written: "Let us set up the peace of the World Republic amidst these ruins. Let it be our religion, our calling."

There he had stopped.

The last sheet of Mr. Britling's manuscript may be more conveniently given in fac-simile than described.



§ 11

He sighed.

He looked at the scattered papers, and thought of the letter they were to have made.

His fatigue spoke first.

"Perhaps after all I'd better just send the fiddle...."

He rested his cheeks between his hands, and remained so for a long time. His eyes stared unseeingly. His thoughts wandered and spread and faded. At length he recalled his mind to that last idea. "Just send the fiddle—without a word."

"No. I must write to them plainly.

"About God as I have found Him.

"As He has found me...."

He forgot the Pomeranians for a time. He murmured to himself. He turned over the conviction that had suddenly become clear and absolute in his mind.

"Religion is the first thing and the last thing, and until a man has found God and been found by God, he begins at no beginning, he works to no end. He may have his friendships, his partial loyalties, his scraps of honour. But all these things fall into place and life falls into place only with God. Only with God. God, who fights through men against Blind Force and Night and Non-Existence; who is the end, who is the meaning. He is the only King.... Of course I must write about Him. I must tell all my world of Him. And before the coming of the true King, the inevitable King, the King who is present whenever just men foregather, this blood-stained rubbish of the ancient world, these puny kings and tawdry emperors, these wily politicians and artful lawyers, these men who claim and grab and trick and compel, these war makers and oppressors, will presently shrivel and pass—like paper thrust into a flame...."

Then after a time he said:

"Our sons who have shown us God...."

§ 12

He rubbed his open hands over his eyes and forehead.

The night of effort had tired his brain, and he was no longer thinking actively. He had a little interval of blankness, sitting at his desk with his hands pressed over his eyes....

He got up presently, and stood quite motionless at the window, looking out.

His lamp was still burning, but for some time he had not been writing by the light of his lamp. Insensibly the day had come and abolished his need for that individual circle of yellow light. Colour had returned to the world, clean pearly colour, clear and definite like the glance of a child or the voice of a girl, and a golden wisp of cloud hung in the sky over the tower of the church. There was a mist upon the pond, a soft grey mist not a yard high. A covey of partridges ran and halted and ran again in the dewy grass outside his garden railings. The partridges were very numerous this year because there had been so little shooting. Beyond in the meadow a hare sat up as still as a stone. A horse neighed.... Wave after wave of warmth and light came sweeping before the sunrise across the world of Matching's Easy. It was as if there was nothing but morning and sunrise in the world.

From away towards the church came the sound of some early worker whetting a scythe.

THE END