MATCHING'S EASY AT WAR

CHAPTER THE FIRST

ONLOOKERS

Section 1

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

He woke to find his morning tea beside him and the housemaid going out of the room. He knew that something stupendous had happened to the world, but for a few moments he could not remember what it was. Then he remembered that France was invaded by Germany and Germany by Russia, and that almost certainly England was going to war. It seemed a harsh and

terrible fact in the morning light, a demand for stresses, a certainty of destruction; it appeared now robbed of all the dark and dignified beauty of the night. He remembered just the same feeling of unpleasant, anxious expectation as he now felt when the Boer War had begun fifteen years ago, before the first news came. The first news of the Boer War had been the wrecking of a British armoured train near Kimberley. What similar story might not the overdue paper tell when presently it came?

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

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

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

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

What would the Irish do?...

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

He got out of bed and dressed in a slow, distraught manner. When he reached his braces he discontinued dressing for a time; he opened the atlas at Northern France, and stood musing over the Belgian border. Then he turned to Whitaker's Almanack to browse upon the statistics of the great European armies. He was roused from this by the breakfast gong.

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

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

Section 2

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

"Food?"

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

"But--"

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

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

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

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

"Oh! it is!" she said.

"But why?"

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

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

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

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

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

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

Mrs. Faber looked slightly abashed.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Blacking!"

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

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

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

Section 3

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Section 4

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

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

Tucked away in the back of Mr. Britling's consciousness was something that had not always been there, something warm and comforting that made life and his general thoughts about life much easier and pleasanter than they would otherwise have been, the sense of a neatly arranged investment list, a shrewdly and geographically distributed system of holdings in national loans, municipal investments, railway debentures, that had amounted altogether to rather over five-and-twenty thousand pounds; his and Mrs. Britling's, a joint accumulation. This was, so to speak, his economic viscera. It sustained him, and kept him going and

comfortable. When all was well he did not feel its existence; he had merely a pleasant sense of general well-being. When here or there a security got a little disarranged he felt a vague discomfort. Now he became aware of grave disorders. It was as if he discovered he had been accidentally eating toadstools, and didn't quite know whether they weren't a highly poisonous sort. But an analogy may be carried too far....

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

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

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

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

All these people might, so far as he could understand, stop payment

under this moratorium! That hadn't at first occurred to him. But, of course, quite probably they might refuse to pay his account when it fell due.

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

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

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

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

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

Section 5

The conflict of interests at Mr. Britling's desk became unendurable. He

felt he must settle the personal question first. He wandered out upon the lawn and smoked cigarettes.

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

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

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

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

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

"But if we are short."

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

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

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

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

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

Mr. Britling ignored this personal application.

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

He paced the lawn with her and talked. He said that even now very few people realised the flimsiness of the credit system by which the modern world was sustained. It was a huge growth of confidence, due very largely to the uninquiring indolence of--everybody. It was sound so long as mankind did, on the whole, believe in it; give only a sufficient loss

of faith and it might suffer any sort of collapse. It might vanish altogether--as the credit system vanished at the breaking up of Italy by the Goths--and leave us nothing but tangible things, real property, possession nine points of the law, and that sort of thing. Did she remember that last novel of Gissing's?--"Veranilda," it was called. It was a picture of the world when there was no wealth at all except what one could carry hidden or guarded about with one. That sort of thing came to the Roman Empire slowly, in the course of lifetimes, but nowadays we lived in a rapider world--with flimsier institutions. Nobody knew the strength or the weakness of credit; nobody knew whether even the present shock might not send it smashing down.... And then all the little life we had lived so far would roll away....

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

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

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

She had about eighteen pounds in the house.

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

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

"Suppose they don't?"

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Writing is recording, not living. But now I feel suddenly that we are

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

He saw his own way clear.

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

Section 6

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Or since--One might go back."

"To the Roman Empire," said Hugh.

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

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

"So long as it could only be dealt with piecemeal," said Mr. Britling. "And that is just where the tremendous opportunity of this war comes in. Now everything becomes fluid. We can redraw the map of the world. A week ago we were all quarrelling bitterly about things too little for human impatience. Now suddenly we face an epoch. This is an epoch. The world is plastic for men to do what they will with it. This is the end and the beginning of an age. This is something far greater than the French Revolution or the Reformation.... And we live in it...."

He paused impressively.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Section 7

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

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

They discussed the possible duration of the war.

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

Section 8

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

After lunch Mr. Britling and Mr. Carmine went on talking. Nothing else was possible. They repeated things they had already said. They went into

things more thoroughly. They sat still for a time, and then suddenly broke out with some new consideration....

It had been their custom to play skat with Herr Heinrich, who had shown them the game very explicitly and thoroughly. But there was no longer any Herr Heinrich--and somehow German games were already out of fashion. The two philosophers admitted that they had already considered skat to be complicated without subtlety, and that its chief delight for them had been the pink earnestness of Herr Heinrich, his inability to grasp their complete but tacit comprehension of its innocent strategy, and his invariable ill-success to bring off the coups that flashed before his imagination.

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

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

He would reconsider his hand.

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

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

Section 9

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

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

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

your great-grandmother's. At any rate, they were contemporaries. Since then this nose has been in the family. He would have been the last to draw a veil over it, but other times, other manners. 'Publish,' he said, 'and be damned.'"

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

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

So she circulated about a number of houses which at any rate always welcomed her coming. In the opening days of each visit she performed marvels of tact, and set a watch upon her lips. Then the demons of

controversy and dignity would get the better of her. She would begin to correct, quietly but firmly, she would begin to disapprove of the tone and quality of her treatment. It was quite common for her visit to terminate in speechless rage both on the side of host and of visitor. The remarkable thing was that this speechless rage never endured. Though she could exasperate she could never offend. Always after an interval during which she was never mentioned, people began to wonder how Cousin Jane was getting on.... A tentative correspondence would begin, leading slowly up to a fresh invitation.

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

Moreover, he liked to see her casting her eye over the morning paper. She did it with a manner as though she thought the terrestrial globe a great fool, and quite beyond the reach of advice. And as though she understood and was rather amused at the way in which the newspaper people tried to keep back the real facts of the case from her.

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

the war crisis.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Section 10

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

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

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

"Keep stiffer," said the youngest Britling.

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

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

Section 11

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

Countless men that day whom Fate had marked for death and wounds stared open-mouthed at the news, and smiled with the excitement of the headlines, not dreaming that any of these things would come within three hundred miles of them. What was war to Matching's Easy--to all the Matching's Easies great and small that make up England? The last home that was ever burnt by an enemy within a hundred miles of Matching's

Easy was burnt by the Danes rather more than a thousand years ago.... And the last trace of those particular Danes in England were certain horny scraps of indurated skin under the heads of the nails in the door of St. Clement Danes in London....

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

Section 12

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

newspaper, with ideas and impressions continually clustering, expanding, developing more and more abundantly in his mind, arranging themselves, reacting upon one another, building themselves into generalisations and conclusions....

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

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

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

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

War had not been a reality of the daily life of England for more than a thousand years. The mental habit of the nation for fifty generations was against its emotional recognition. The English were the spoilt children of peace. They had never been wholly at war for three hundred years, and for over eight hundred years they had not fought for life against a foreign power. Spain and France had threatened in turn, but never even crossed the seas. It is true that England had had her civil dissensions and had made wars and conquests in every part of the globe and established an immense empire, but that last, as Mr. Britling had told Mr. Direck, was "an excursion." She had just sent out younger sons and surplus people, emigrants and expeditionary forces. Her own soil had never seen any successful foreign invasion; her homeland, the bulk of her households, her general life, had gone on untouched by these things. Nineteen people out of twenty, the middle class and most of the lower class, knew no more of the empire than they did of the Argentine Republic or the Italian Renaissance. It did not concern them. War that calls upon every man and threatens every life in the land, war of the

whole national being, was a thing altogether outside English experience and the scope of the British imagination. It was still incredible, it was still outside the range of Mr. Britling's thoughts all through the tremendous onrush and check of the German attack in the west that opened the great war. Through those two months he was, as it were, a more and more excited spectator at a show, a show like a baseball match, a spectator with money on the event, rather than a really participating citizen of a nation thoroughly at war....

Section 13

After the jolt of the food panic and a brief, financial scare, the vast inertia of everyday life in England asserted itself. When the public went to the banks for the new paper money, the banks tendered gold--apologetically. The supply of the new notes was very insufficient, and there was plenty of gold. After the first impression that a universal catastrophe had happened there was an effect as if nothing had happened.

Shops re-opened after the Bank Holiday, in a tentative spirit that speedily became assurance; people went about their business again, and the war, so far as the mass of British folk were concerned, was for some weeks a fever of the mind and intelligence rather than a physical and personal actuality. There was a keen demand for news, and for a time there was very little news. The press did its best to cope with this

immense occasion. Led by the Daily Express, all the halfpenny newspapers adopted a new and more resonant sort of headline, the streamer, a band of emphatic type that ran clean across the page and announced victories or disconcerting happenings. They did this every day, whether there was a great battle or the loss of a trawler to announce, and the public mind speedily adapted itself to the new pitch.

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

Hugh was at home all through August. He had thrown up his rooms in London with his artistic ambitions, and his father was making all the necessary arrangements for him to follow Cardinal to Cambridge. Meanwhile Hugh was taking up his scientific work where he had laid it down. He gave a reluctant couple of hours in the afternoon to the mysteries of Little-go Greek, and for the rest of his time he was either working at mathematics and mathematical physics or experimenting in a little upstairs room that had been carved out of the general space of the barn. It was only at the very end of August that it dawned upon him or Mr. Britling that the war might have more than a spectacular and sympathetic appeal for him. Hitherto contemporary history had happened without his personal intervention. He did not see why it should not continue to happen with the same detachment. The last elections--and a general election is really the only point at which the life of the reasonable Englishman becomes in any way public--had happened four years ago, when he was thirteen.

Section 14

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

The first raiding attack was certainly repulsed with heavy losses, and so were the more systematic assaults on August the sixth and seventh.

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

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

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

the flower.

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

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

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

anything important was on the track--than any cow that ever came to Chicago.... I was handed as freight--low grade freight.... It doesn't bear recalling."

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

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

"No one in England really seems to have any suspicion what is going on

in Belgium. You hear stories--People tell them in Holland. It takes your breath away. They have set out just to cow those Belgians. They have started in to be deliberately frightful. You do not begin to understand.... Well.... Outrages. The sort of outrages Americans have never heard of. That one doesn't speak of.... Well.... Rape.... They have been raping women for disciplinary purposes on tables in the market-place of Liège. Yes, sir. It's a fact. I was told it by a man who had just come out of Belgium. Knew the people, knew the place, knew everything. People over here do not seem to realise that those women are the same sort of women that you might find in Chester or Yarmouth, or in Matching's Easy for the matter of that. They still seem to think that Continental women are a different sort of women--more amenable to that sort of treatment. They seem to think there is some special Providential law against such things happening to English people. And it's within two hundred miles of you--even now. And as far as I can see there's precious little to prevent it coming nearer...."

Mr. Britling thought there were a few little obstacles.

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

"You don't begin to realise in England what you are up against. You have no idea what it means to be in a country where everybody, the women, the elderly people, the steady middle-aged men, are taking war as seriously

as business. They haven't the slightest compunction. I don't know what Germany was like before the war, I had hardly gotten out of my train before the war began; but Germany to-day is one big armed camp. It's all crawling with soldiers. And every soldier has his uniform and his boots and his arms and his kit.

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

Mr. Britling said they would soon be disillusioned.

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

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

"Grown-up people, ordinary intelligent experienced people, taking war

seriously, talking of punishing England; it's a revelation. A sort of solemn enthusiasm. High and low....

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

"Liège," said Mr. Britling.

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

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

Section 15

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

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

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

Teddy nodded thoughtfully.

"There's our fleet," said Letty.

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

Mr. Direck didn't, he declared, want to make disagreeable talk, but this was a thing people in England had to face. He felt like one of them himself--"naturally." He'd sort of hurried home to them--it was just like hurrying home--to tell them of the tremendous thing that was going

to hit them. He felt like a man in front of a flood, a great grey flood. He couldn't hide what he had been thinking. "Where's our army?" asked Letty suddenly.

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

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

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

"But there's no rifles!"

"There's shot guns."

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

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

He became gloomily pensive.

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

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

He looked at her earnestly.

"Old Glory?" asked Cissie.

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

He paused. "But how?" asked Cissie.

"It would be perfectly easy--perfectly."

"How?"

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

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

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

"I vow--" she began.

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

There was a moment of crisis.

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

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

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

auditorium into the arena.

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

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

Section 16

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

He was parting very reluctantly from his dream of a disastrous collapse of German imperialism, of a tremendous, decisive demonstration of the inherent unsoundness of militarist monarchy, to be followed by a world conference of chastened but hopeful nations, and--the Millennium. He tried now to think that Mr. Direck had observed badly and misconceived what he saw. An American, unused to any sort of military occurrences, might easily mistake tens of thousands for millions, and the excitement of a few commercial travellers for the enthusiasm of a united people.

But the newspapers now, with a kindred reluctance, were beginning to qualify, bit by bit, their first representation of the German attack through Belgium as a vast and already partly thwarted parade of incompetence. The Germans, he gathered, were being continually beaten in Belgium; but just as continually they advanced. Each fresh newspaper name he looked up on the map marked an oncoming tide. Alost--Charleroi. Farther east the French were retreating from the Saales Pass. Surely the British, who had now been in France for a fortnight, would presently be manifest, stemming the onrush; somewhere perhaps in Brabant or East Flanders. It gave Mr. Britling an unpleasant night to hear at Claverings that the French were very ill-equipped; had no good modern guns either at Lille or Maubeuge, were short of boots and equipment generally, and rather depressed already at the trend of things. Mr. Britling dismissed this as pessimistic talk, and built his hopes on the still invisible British army, hovering somewhere--

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

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

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

But in the afternoon Mr. Manning telephoned to comfort his friend. A reassuring despatch from General French had been published and--all was well--practically--and the British had been splendid. They had been fighting continuously for several days round and about Mons; they had been attacked at odds of six to one, and they had repulsed and inflicted enormous losses on the enemy. They had established an incontestable personal superiority over the Germans. The Germans had been mown down in heaps; the British had charged through their cavalry like charging through paper. So at last and very gloriously for the British, British and German had met in battle. After the hard fighting of the 26th about Landrecies, the British had been comparatively unmolested, reinforcements covering double the losses had joined them and the German advance was definitely checked ... Mr. Britling's mind swung back to elation. He took down the entire despatch from Mr. Manning's dictation, and ran out with it into the garden where Mrs. Britling, with an unwonted expression of anxiety, was presiding over the

teas of the usual casual Sunday gathering.... The despatch was read aloud twice over. After that there was hockey and high spirits, and then Mr. Britling went up to his study to answer a letter from Mrs. Harrowdean, the first letter that had come from her since their breach at the outbreak of the war, and which he was now in a better mood to answer than he had been hitherto.

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

good was it to keep it back? It was folly not to trust people! But it was all too dreadful for a poor little soul whose only desire was to live happily. Why didn't he come along to her and make her feel she had protecting arms round her? She couldn't think in the daytime: she couldn't sleep at night....

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

It was an ill-timed letter. The nonsense about Prince Louis of Battenberg and Lord Haldane and the torpedoed battleships annoyed him extravagantly. He had just sufficient disposition to believe such tales as to find their importunity exasperating. The idea of going over to Pyecrafts to spend his days in comforting a timid little dear obsessed by such fears, attracted him not at all. He had already heard enough adverse rumours at Claverings to make him thoroughly uncomfortable. He had been doubting whether after all his "Examination of War" was really much less of a futility than "And Now War Ends"; his mind was full of a sense of incomplete statements and unsubstantial arguments. He was indeed in a state of extreme intellectual worry. He was moreover

extraordinarily out of love with Mrs. Harrowdean. Never had any affection in the whole history of Mr. Britling's heart collapsed so swiftly and completely. He was left incredulous of ever having cared for her at all. Probably he hadn't. Probably the whole business had been deliberate illusion from first to last. The "dear little thing" business, he felt, was all very well as a game of petting, but times were serious now, and a woman of her intelligence should do something better than wallow in fears and elaborate a winsome feebleness. A very unnecessary and tiresome feebleness. He came almost to the pitch of writing that to her.

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

Mr. Britling's mood of relief did not last through the week. The defeated Germans continued to advance. Through a week of deepening disillusionment the main tide of battle rolled back steadily towards Paris. Lille was lost without a struggle. It was lost with mysterious ease.... The next name to startle Mr. Britling as he sat with newspaper and atlas following these great events was Compiègne. "Here!" Manifestly the British were still in retreat. Then the Germans were in possession

of Laon and Rheims and still pressing south. Maubeuge surrounded and cut off for some days, had apparently fallen....

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

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

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

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

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

Mr. Britling considered the position.

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

round to La Rochelle...."

He paused before the last distasteful conclusion.

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

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

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

Section 17

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

"One talks," he said, "and then weeks and months later one learns the meaning of the things one has been saying. I was saying a month ago that this is the biggest thing that has happened in history. I said that this was the supreme call upon the will and resources of England. I said there was not a life in all our empire that would not be vitally changed by this war. I said all these things; they came through my mouth; I suppose there was a sort of thought behind them.... Only at

this moment do I understand what it is that I said. Now--let me say it over as if I had never said it before; this is the biggest thing in history, that we are all called upon to do our utmost to resist this tremendous attack upon the peace and freedom of the world. Well, doing our utmost does not mean standing about in pleasant gardens waiting for the newspaper.... It means the abandonment of ease and security....

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

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

"At the back of our minds," he went on bitterly, "I suppose we thought the French would do the heavy work on land--while we stood by at sea. So far as we thought at all. We're so temperate-minded; we're so full of qualifications and discretions.... And so leisurely.... Well, France is down. We've got to fight for France now over the ruins of Paris. Because you and I, Manning, didn't grasp the scale of it, because we indulged in

generalisations when we ought to have been drilling and working. Because we've been doing 'business as usual' and all the rest of that sort of thing, while Western civilisation has been in its death agony. If this is to be another '71, on a larger scale and against not merely France but all Europe, if Prussianism is to walk rough-shod over civilisation, if France is to be crushed and Belgium murdered, then life is not worth having. Compared with such an issue as that no other issue, no other interest matters. Yet what are we doing to decide it--you and I? How can it end in anything but a German triumph if you and I, by the million, stand by...."

He paused despairfully and stared at the map.

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

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

Section 18

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

He considered. "It's like every one having to run out because the house

catches fire. But of course we have to beat them. It has to be done. And every one has to take a share.

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

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