

CHAPTER THE SECOND

TAKING PART

Section 1

There were now two chief things in the mind of Mr. Britling. One was a large and valiant thing, a thing of heroic and processional quality, the idea of taking up one's share in the great conflict, of leaving the Dower House and its circle of habits and activities and going out--. From that point he wasn't quite sure where he was to go, nor exactly what he meant to do. His imagination inclined to the figure of a volunteer in an improvised uniform inflicting great damage upon a raiding invader from behind a hedge. The uniform, one presumes, would have been something in the vein of the costume in which he met Mr. Direck. With a "brassard." Or he thought of himself as working at a telephone or in an office engaged upon any useful quasi-administrative work that called for intelligence rather than training. Still, of course, with a "brassard." A month ago he would have had doubts about the meaning of "brassard"; now it seemed to be the very keyword for national organisation. He had started for London by the early train on Monday morning with the intention of immediate enrolment in any such service that offered; of getting, in fact, into his brassard at once. The morning papers he bought at the station dashed his conviction of the inevitable fall of Paris into hopeful doubts, but did not shake his

resolution. The effect of rout and pursuit and retreat and retreat and retreat had disappeared from the news. The German right was being counter-attacked, and seemed in danger of getting pinched between Paris and Verdun with the British on its flank. This relieved his mind, but it did nothing to modify his new realisation of the tremendous gravity of the war. Even if the enemy were held and repulsed a little there was still work for every man in the task of forcing them back upon their own country. This war was an immense thing, it would touch everybody.... That meant that every man must give himself. That he had to give himself. He must let nothing stand between him and that clear understanding. It was utterly shameful now to hold back and not to do one's utmost for civilisation, for England, for all the ease and safety one had been given--against these drilled, commanded, obsessed millions.

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

But behind all this bravery was the other thing, the second thing in the mind of Mr. Britling, a fear. He was prepared now to spread himself like some valiant turkey-gobbler, every feather at its utmost, against the aggressor. He was prepared to go out and flourish bayonets, march and dig to the limit of his power, shoot, die in a ditch if needful, rather than permit German militarism to dominate the world. He had no fear for himself. He was prepared to perish upon the battlefield or cut a valiant figure in the military hospital. But what he perceived very clearly and did his utmost not to perceive was this qualifying and discouraging

fact, that the war monster was not nearly so disposed to meet him as he was to meet the war, and that its eyes were fixed on something beside and behind him, that it was already only too evidently stretching out a long and shadowy arm past him towards Teddy--and towards Hugh....

The young are the food of war....

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

Mr. Britling did his best to brazen it out.

"My eldest boy is barely seventeen," he said. "He's keen to go, and I'd be sorry if he wasn't. He'll get into some cadet corps of course--he's already done something of that kind at school. Or they'll take him into the Territorials. But before he's nineteen everything will be over, one way or another. I'm afraid, poor chap, he'll feel sold...."

And having thrust Hugh safely into the background of his mind as--juvenile, doing a juvenile share, no sort of man yet--Mr. Britling could give a free rein to his generous imaginations of a national uprising. From the idea of a universal participation in the struggle he passed by an easy transition to an anticipation of all Britain armed and gravely embattled. Across gulfs of obstinate reality. He himself was prepared to say, and accordingly he felt that the great mass of the British must be prepared to say to the government: "Here we are at your

disposal. This is not a diplomatists' war nor a War Office war; this is a war of the whole people. We are all willing and ready to lay aside our usual occupations and offer our property and ourselves. Whim and individual action are for peace times. Take us and use us as you think fit. Take all we possess." When he thought of the government in this way, he forgot the governing class he knew. The slack-trousered Raeburn, the prim, attentive Philbert, Lady Frensham at the top of her voice, stern, preposterous Carson, boozy Bandershoot and artful Taper, wily Asquith, the eloquent yet unsubstantial George, and the immobile Grey, vanished out of his mind; all those representative exponents of the way things are done in Great Britain faded in the glow of his imaginative effort; he forgot the dreary debates, the floundering newspapers, the "bluffs," the intrigues, the sly bargains of the week-end party, the "schoolboy honour" of grown men, the universal weak dishonesty in thinking; he thought simply of a simplified and ideal government that governed. He thought vaguely of something behind and beyond them, England, the ruling genius of the land; something with a dignified assurance and a stable will. He imagined this shadowy ruler miraculously provided with schemes and statistics against this supreme occasion which had for so many years been the most conspicuous probability before the country. His mind leaping forwards to the conception of a great nation reluctantly turning its vast resources to the prosecution of a righteous defensive war, filled in the obvious corollaries of plan and calculation. He thought that somewhere "up there" there must be people who could count and who had counted everything that we might need for such a struggle, and organisers who had schemed and estimated down to

practicable and manageable details....

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

His conception of his own share in the great national uprising was a very modest one. He was a writer, a footnote to reality; he had no trick of command over men, his rôle was observation rather than organisation, and he saw himself only as an insignificant individual dropping from his individuality into his place in a great machine, taking a rifle in a trench, guarding a bridge, filling a cartridge--just with a brassard or something like that on--until the great task was done. Sunday night was full of imaginations of order, of the countryside standing up to its task, of roads cleared and resources marshalled, of the petty interests of the private life altogether set aside. And mingling with that it was still possible for Mr. Britling, he was still young enough, to produce such dreams of personal service, of sudden emergencies swiftly and bravely met, of conspicuous daring and exceptional rewards, such dreams as hover in the brains of every imaginative recruit....

The detailed story of Mr. Britling's two days' search for some easy and convenient ladder into the service of his threatened country would be a voluminous one. It would begin with the figure of a neatly brushed patriot, with an intent expression upon his intelligent face, seated in the Londonward train, reading the war news--the first comforting war news for many days--and trying not to look as though his life was torn

up by the roots and all his being aflame with devotion; and it would conclude after forty-eight hours of fuss, inquiry, talk, waiting, telephoning, with the same gentleman, a little fagged and with a kind of weary apathy in his eyes, returning by the short cut from the station across Claverings park to resume his connection with his abandoned roots. The essential process of the interval had been the correction of Mr. Britling's temporary delusion that the government of the British Empire is either intelligent, instructed, or wise.

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

first inkling of the imaginative insufficiency of the War Office that had been so suddenly called upon to organise victory. He was to be more fully informed when he reached his club.

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

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

At his club Mr. Britling found much talk and belligerent stir. In the hall Wilkins the author was displaying a dummy rifle of bent iron rod to several interested members. It was to be used for drilling until rifles

could be got, and it could be made for eighteen pence. This was the first intimation Mr. Britling got that the want of foresight of the War Office only began with its unpreparedness for recruits. Men were talking very freely in the club; one of the temporary effects of the war in its earlier stages was to produce a partial thaw in the constitutional British shyness; and men who had glowered at Mr. Britling over their lunches and had been glowered at by Mr. Britling in silence for years now started conversations with him.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Mr. Britling did not know.

"Nine thousand."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Mr. Britling found a kindred spirit in Wilkins.

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

"A brassard," said Mr. Britling.

"It doesn't matter whether we really produce a fighting force or not," said Wilkins. "Everybody now is enthusiastic--and serious. Everybody is willing to put on some kind of uniform and submit to some sort of orders. And the thing to do is to catch them in the willing stage. Now is the time to get the country lined up and organised, ready to meet the internal stresses that are bound to come later. But there's no disposition whatever to welcome this universal offering. It's just as though this war was a treat to which only the very select friends of the

War Office were to be admitted. And I don't admit that the national volunteers would be ineffective--even from a military point of view. There are plenty of fit men of our age, and men of proper age who are better employed at home--armament workers for example, and there are all the boys under the age. They may not be under the age before things are over...."

He was even prepared to plan uniforms.

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

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

A momentary vision danced before Mr. Britling's eyes of red flannel petticoats being torn up in a rapid improvisation of soldiers to resist a sudden invasion. Passing washerwomen suddenly requisitioned. But one must not let oneself be laughed out of good intentions because of ridiculous accessories. The idea at any rate was the sound one....

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Section 2

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

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

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

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

Section 3

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

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

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

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

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

were we to find it?

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

Nothing else was to be expected. But now--somehow--the nation had to take hold of the government that it had neglected so long....

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

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

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

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

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

From this Mr. Britling broke away into a fresh addition to his already

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

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

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

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

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

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

Section 4

It was only when they sat together in the barn court out of the way of Mrs. Britling and the children that Captain Carmine was able to explain his listless bearing and jaded appearance. He was suffering from a bad

nervous shock. He had hardly taken over his command before one of his men had been killed--and killed in a manner that had left a scar upon his mind.

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

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

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

Section 5

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

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

"Go where?"

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

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

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

"What does Letty think?" said Mr. Britling after a pause. This was

right, of course--the only right thing--and yet he was surprised.

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

"She wants you to go?"

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The afternoon with them deepened his conviction that they really didn't in the slightest degree understand. Life had been so good to them hitherto, that even the idea of Teddy's going off to the war seemed a sort of fun to them. It was just a thing he was doing, a serious, seriously amusing, and very creditable thing. It involved his dressing up in these unusual clothes, and receiving salutes in the street....

They discussed every possible aspect of his military outlook with the zest of children, who recount the merits of a new game. They were putting Teddy through his stages at a tremendous pace. In quite a little time he thought he would be given the chance of a commission.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"If you think you're going to get back your job after the war," said

Letty, "you're very much mistaken. I'm going to raise the standard."

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

Section 6

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

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

Hugh had come to his father's study as he was sitting musing at his writing-desk over the important question whether he should continue his "Examination of War" uninterruptedly, or whether he should not put that on one side for a time and set himself to state as clearly as possible the not too generally recognised misfit between the will and strength of Britain on the one hand and her administrative and military organisation on the other. He felt that an enormous amount of human enthusiasm and energy was being refused and wasted; that if things went on as they were going there would continue to be a quite disastrous shortage of gear, and that some broadening change was needed immediately if the swift

exemplary victory over Germany that his soul demanded was to be ensured. Suppose he were to write some noisy articles at once, an article, for instance, to be called "The War of the Mechanics" or "The War of Gear," and another on "Without Civil Strength there is no Victory." If he wrote such things would they be noted or would they just vanish indistinguishably into the general mental tumult? Would they be audible and helpful shouts, or just waste of shouting?... That at least was what he supposed himself to be thinking; it was, at any rate, the main current of his thinking; but all the same, just outside the circle of his attention a number of other things were dimly apprehended, bobbing up and down in the flood and ready at the slightest chance to swirl into the centre of his thoughts. There was, for instance, Captain Carmine in the moonlight lugging up a railway embankment something horrible, something loose and wet and warm that had very recently been a man. There was Teddy, serious and patriotic--filling a futile penman with incredulous respect. There was the thin-faced man at the club, and a curious satisfaction he had betrayed in the public disarrangement. And there was Hugh. Particularly there was Hugh, silent but watchful. The boy never babbled. He had his mother's gift of deep dark silences. Out of which she was wont to flash, a Black Princess waving a sword. He wandered for a little while among memories.... But Hugh didn't come out like that, though it always seemed possible he might--perhaps he didn't come out because he was a son. Revelation to his father wasn't his business.... What was he thinking of it all? What was he going to do? Mr. Britling was acutely anxious that his son should volunteer; he was almost certain that he would volunteer, but there was just a little

shadow of doubt whether some extraordinary subtlety of mind mightn't have carried the boy into a pacifist attitude. No! that was impossible. In the face of Belgium.... But as greatly--and far more deeply in the warm flesh of his being--did Mr. Britling desire that no harm, no evil should happen to Hugh....

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

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

Hugh walked awkwardly to the hearthrug.

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

Mr. Britling's manner remained casual.

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

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

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

as privates...."

There was a little pause. Both father and son had rehearsed this scene in their minds several times, and now they found that they had no use for a number of sentences that had been most effective in these rehearsals. Mr. Britling scratched his cheek with the end of his pen.

"I'm glad you want to go, Hugh," he said.

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

"You aren't attracted by soldiering?"

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

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

"You know I can't get up a bit of tootle about this business," he said.

"I think killing people or getting killed is a thoroughly nasty habit.... I expect my share will be just drilling and fatigue duties and

route marches, and loafing here in England...."

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

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

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

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

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

Section 7

The battle of the Marne passed into the battle of the Aisne, and then the long lines of the struggle streamed north-westward until the British were back in Belgium failing to clutch Menin and then defending Ypres. The elation of September followed the bedazzlement and dismay of August into the chapter of forgotten moods; and Mr. Britling's sense of the magnitude, the weight and duration of this war beyond all wars,

increased steadily. The feel of it was less and less a feeling of crisis and more and more a feeling of new conditions. It wasn't as it had seemed at first, the end of one human phase and the beginning of another; it was in itself a phase. It was a new way of living. And still he could find no real point of contact for himself with it all except the point of his pen. Only at his writing-desk, and more particularly at night, were the great presences of the conflict his. Yet he was always desiring some more personal and physical participation.

Hugh came along one day in October in an ill-fitting uniform, looking already coarser in fibre and with a nose scorched red by the autumnal sun. He said the life was rough, but it made him feel extraordinarily well; perhaps man was made to toil until he dropped asleep from exhaustion, to fast for ten or twelve hours and then eat like a wolf. He was acquiring a taste for Woodbine cigarettes, and a heady variety of mineral waters called Monsters. He feared promotion; he felt he could never take the high line with other human beings demanded of a corporal. He was still trying to read a little chemistry and crystallography, but it didn't "go with the life." In the scanty leisure of a recruit in training it was more agreeable to lie about and write doggerel verses and draw caricatures of the men in one's platoon. Invited to choose what he liked by his family, he demanded a large tuckbox such as he used to have at school, only "much larger," and a big tin of insect powder. It must be able to kill ticks....

When he had gone, the craving for a personal share in the nation's

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

So Mr. Britling was out of conceit with volunteering, and instead he went and was duly sworn and entrusted with the badge of a special constable. The duties of a special constable were chiefly not to understand what was going on in the military sphere, and to do what he

was told in the way of watching and warding conceivably vulnerable points. He had also to be available in the event of civil disorder. Mr. Britling was provided with a truncheon and sent out to guard various culverts, bridges, and fords in the hilly country to the north-westward of Matching's Easy. It was never very clear to him what he would do if he found a motor-car full of armed enemies engaged in undermining a culvert, or treacherously deepening some strategic ford. He supposed he would either engage them in conversation, or hit them with his truncheon, or perhaps do both things simultaneously. But as he really did not believe for a moment that any human being was likely to tamper with the telegraphs, telephones, ways and appliances committed to his care, his uncertainty did not trouble him very much. He prowled the lonely lanes and paths in the darkness, and became better acquainted with a multitude of intriguing little cries and noises that came from the hedges and coverts at night. One night he rescued a young leveret from a stoat, who seemed more than half inclined to give him battle for its prey until he cowed and defeated it with the glare of his electric torch....

As he prowled the countryside under the great hemisphere of Essex sky, or leant against fences or sat drowsily upon gates or sheltered from wind and rain under ricks or sheds, he had much time for meditation, and his thoughts went down and down below his first surface impressions of the war. He thought no longer of the rights and wrongs of this particular conflict but of the underlying forces in mankind that made war possible; he planned no more ingenious treaties and conventions

between the nations, and instead he faced the deeper riddles of essential evil and of conceivable changes in the heart of man. And the rain assailed him and thorns tore him, and the soaked soft meadows bogged and betrayed his wandering feet, and the little underworld of the hedges and ditches hissed and squealed in the darkness and pursued and fled, and devoured or were slain.

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

And all that night was wonder....

Section 8

While Mr. Britling was trying to find his duty in the routine of a special constable, Mrs. Britling set to work with great energy to attend various classes and qualify herself for Red Cross work. And early in October came the great drive of the Germans towards Antwerp and the sea, the great drive that was apparently designed to reach Calais, and which

swept before it multitudes of Flemish refugees. There was an exodus of all classes from Antwerp into Holland and England, and then a huge process of depopulation in Flanders and the Pas de Calais. This flood came to the eastern and southern parts of England and particularly to London, and there hastily improvised organisations distributed it to a number of local committees, each of which took a share of the refugees, hired and furnished unoccupied houses for the use of the penniless, and assisted those who had means into comfortable quarters. The Matching's Easy committee found itself with accommodation for sixty people, and with a miscellaneous bag of thirty individuals entrusted to its care, who had been part of the load of a little pirate steam-boat from Ostend. There were two Flemish peasant families, and the rest were more or less middle-class refugees from Antwerp. They were brought from the station to the Tithe barn at Claverings, and there distributed, under the personal supervision of Lady Homartyn and her agent, among those who were prepared for their entertainment. There was something like competition among the would-be hosts; everybody was glad of the chance of "doing something," and anxious to show these Belgians what England thought of their plucky little country. Mr. Britling was proud to lead off a Mr. Van der Pant, a neat little bearded man in a black tail-coat, a black bowler hat, and a knitted muffler, with a large rucksack and a conspicuously foreign-looking bicycle, to the hospitalities of Dower House. Mr. Van der Pant had escaped from Antwerp at the eleventh hour, he had caught a severe cold and, it would seem, lost his wife and family in the process; he had much to tell Mr. Britling, and in his zeal to tell it he did not at once discover that though Mr. Britling knew French

quite well he did not know it very rapidly.

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

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

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

Mr. Van der Pant had had shots at various Zeppelins. When the Zeppelins came to Antwerp everybody turned out on the roofs and shot at them. He was contemptuous of Zeppelins. He made derisive gestures to express his opinion of them. They could do nothing unless they came low, and if they came low you could hit them. One which ventured down had been riddled; it had had to drop all its bombs--luckily they fell in an open field--in order to make its lame escape. It was all nonsense to say, as the English papers did, that they took part in the final bombardment. Not a Zeppelin.... So he talked, and the Britling family listened and understood as much as they could, and replied and questioned in

Anglo-French. Here was a man who but a few days ago had been steering his bicycle in the streets of Antwerp to avoid shell craters, pools of blood, and the torn-off arms and shoulder-blades of women. He had seen houses flaring, set afire by incendiary bombs, and once at a corner he had been knocked off his bicycle by the pouff of a bursting shell.... Not only were these things in the same world with us, they were sitting at our table.

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

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

Mr. Van der Pant did not seem to be angry with the Germans. But he manifestly regarded them as people to be killed. He denounced nothing that they had done; he related. They were just an evil accident that had happened to Belgium and mankind. They had to be destroyed. He gave Mr.

Britling an extraordinary persuasion that knives were being sharpened in every cellar in Brussels and Antwerp against the day of inevitable retreat, of a resolution to exterminate the invader that was far too deep to be vindictive.... And the man was most amazingly unconquered. Mr. Britling perceived the label on his habitual dinner wine with a slight embarrassment. "Do you care," he asked, "to drink a German wine? This is Berncasteler from the Moselle." Mr. Van der Pant reflected. "But it is a good wine," he said. "After the peace it will be Belgian.... Yes, if we are to be safe in the future from such a war as this, we must have our boundaries right up to the Rhine."

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

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

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

Mr. Britling temporised by saying he would "make inquiries," and put Mr. Van der Pant off for two days. Then he decided to go up to London with him and "make inquiries on the spot." Mr. Van der Pant did not discover his family, but Mr. Britling discovered the profound truth of a comment of Herr Heinrich's which he had hitherto considered utterly trivial, but which had nevertheless stuck in his memory. "The English," Herr Heinrich had said, "do not understand indexing. It is the root of all good organisation."

Finally, Mr. Van der Pant adopted the irregular course of asking every Belgian he met if they had seen any one from his district in Antwerp, if they had heard of the name of "Van der Pant," if they had encountered So-and-so or So-and-so. And by obstinacy and good fortune he really got

on to the track of Madame Van der Pant; she had been carried off into Kent, and a day later the Dower House was the scene of a happy reunion. Madame was a slender lady, dressed well and plainly, with a Belgian common sense and a Catholic reserve, and André was like a child of wax, delicate and charming and unsubstantial. It seemed incredible that he could ever grow into anything so buoyant and incessant as his father. The Britling boys had to be warned not to damage him. A sitting-room was handed over to the Belgians for their private use, and for a time the two families settled into the Dower House side by side. Anglo-French became the table language of the household. It hampered Mr. Britling very considerably. And both families set themselves to much unrecorded observation, much unspoken mutual criticism, and the exercise of great patience. It was tiresome for the English to be tied to a language that crippled all spontaneous talk; these linguistic gymnastics were fun to begin with, but soon they became very troublesome; and the Belgians suspected sensibilities in their hosts and a vast unwritten code of etiquette that did not exist; at first they were always waiting, as it were, to be invited or told or included; they seemed always deferentially backing out from intrusions. Moreover, they would not at first reveal what food they liked or what they didn't like, or whether they wanted more or less.... But these difficulties were soon smoothed away, they Anglicised quickly and cleverly. André grew bold and cheerful, and lost his first distrust of his rather older English playmates. Every day at lunch he produced a new, carefully prepared piece of English, though for some time he retained a marked preference for "Good morning, Saire," and "Thank you very mush," over all other

locutions, and fell back upon them on all possible and many impossible occasions. And he could do some sleight-of-hand tricks with remarkable skill and humour, and fold paper with quite astonishing results.

Meanwhile Mr. Van der Pant sought temporary employment in England, went for long rides upon his bicycle, exchanged views with Mr. Britling upon a variety of subjects, and became a wonderful player of hockey.

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

Mr. Britling celebrated abundantly about these contrasts.

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

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

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

to that sweet little Indian lady with the wonderful robes whom Carmine brought over with her tall husband last summer, than she is to Letty or Cissie. She, too, undertook to play hockey. And played it very much as Madame Van der Pant played it....

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

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

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

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

Section 9

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

"Of course," he said, "we have to do our Utmost for Brave Little Belgium. I would be the last to complain of any little inconvenience one may experience in doing that. Still, I must confess I think you and dear Mrs. Britling are fortunate, exceptionally fortunate, in the Belgians you have got. My guests--it's unfortunate--the man is some sort of journalist and quite--oh! much too much--an Atheist. An open positive

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

Mr. Britling attempted consolations.

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

Britling, those young women are anything but milliners--anything but milliners...."

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

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

Section 10

October passed into November, and day by day Mr. Britling was forced to apprehend new aspects of the war, to think and rethink the war, to have his first conclusions checked and tested, twisted askew, replaced. His thoughts went far and wide and deeper--until all his earlier writing seemed painfully shallow to him, seemed a mere automatic response of obvious comments to the stimulus of the war's surprise. As his ideas became subtler and profounder, they became more difficult to express; he talked less; he became abstracted and irritable at table. To two people in particular Mr. Britling found his real ideas inexpressible, to Mr. Direck and to Mr. Van der Pant.

Each of these gentlemen brought with him the implication or the intimation of a critical attitude towards England. It was all very well for Mr. Britling himself to be critical of England; that is an Englishman's privilege. To hear Mr. Van der Pant questioning British

efficiency or to suspect Mr. Direck of high, thin American superiorities to war, was almost worse than to hear Mrs. Harrowdean saying hostile things about Edith. It roused an even acuter protective emotion.

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

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

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

"The road turned first towards the left,
Where Perkin's quarry made the cleft;
The path turned next towards the right,
Because the mastiff used to bite...."

And again:

"And I should say they wound about
To find the town of Roundabout,
The merry town of Roundabout

That makes the world go round."

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

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

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

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

Section 11

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

Soon after Christmas there were rumours of an impending descent of the Headquarters staff of the South-Eastern army upon Claverings. Then Mr. Britling found Lady Homartyn back from France, and very indignant

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

"But beds," said Mr. Britling.

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

The whole Britling family, who were lamenting the loss of their Belgians, welcomed the coming of the twenty-five with great enthusiasm. It made them feel that they were doing something useful once more. For three days Mrs. Britling had to feed her new lodgers--the kitchen motors had as usual gone astray--and she did so in a style that made their boastings about their billet almost insufferable to the rest of their battery. The billeting allowance at that time was ninepence a head, and Mr. Britling, ashamed of making a profit out of his country, supplied

not only generous firing and lighting, but unlimited cigarettes, cards and games, illustrated newspapers, a cocoa supper with such little surprises as sprats and jam roly-poly, and a number of more incidental comforts. The men arrived fasting under the command of two very sage middle-aged corporals, and responded to Mrs. Britling's hospitalities by a number of good resolutions, many of which they kept. They never made noises after half-past ten, or at least only now and then when a singsong broke out with unusual violence; they got up and went out at five or six in the morning without a sound; they were almost inconveniently helpful with washing-up and tidying round.

In quite a little time Mrs. Britling's mind had adapted itself to the spectacle of half-a-dozen young men in khaki breeches and shirts performing their toilets in and about her scullery, or improvising an unsanctioned game of football between the hockey goals. These men were not the miscellaneous men of the new armies; they were the earlier Territorial type with no heroics about them; they came from the midlands; and their two middle-aged corporals kept them well in hand and ruled them like a band of brothers. But they had an illegal side, that developed in directions that set Mr. Britling theorising. They seemed, for example, to poach by nature, as children play and sing. They possessed a promiscuous white dog. They began to add rabbits to their supper menu, unaccountable rabbits. One night there was a mighty smell of frying fish from the kitchen, and the cook reported trout. "Trout!" said Mr. Britling to one of the corporals; "now where did you chaps get trout?"

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

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

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

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

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

to any departure from the public footpath....

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