CHAPTER THE THIRD

MALIGNITY

Section 1

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

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

His thoughts grew firmer and clearer; they went deeper and wider. His first superficial judgments were endorsed and deepened or replaced by others. He thought along the lonely lanes at night; he thought at his desk; he thought in bed; he thought in his bath; he tried over his

thoughts in essays and leading articles and reviewed them and corrected them. Now and then came relaxation and lassitude, but never release. The war towered over him like a vigilant teacher, day after day, week after week, regardless of fatigue and impatience, holding a rod in its hand.

Section 2

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

Notably he would not recognise at first the extreme bitterness of this war. He would not believe that the attack upon Britain and Western Europe generally expressed the concentrated emotion of a whole nation. He thought that the Allies were in conflict with a system and not with a national will. He fought against the persuasion that the whole mass of a great civilised nation could be inspired by a genuine and sustained hatred. Hostility was an uncongenial thing to him; he would not recognise that the greater proportion of human beings are more readily hostile than friendly. He did his best to believe--in his "And Now War Ends" he did his best to make other people believe--that this war was the perverse exploit of a small group of people, of limited but powerful influences, an outrage upon the general geniality of mankind. The cruelty, mischief, and futility of war were so obvious to him that he was almost apologetic in asserting them. He believed that war had but to

begin and demonstrate its quality among the Western nations in order to unify them all against its repetition. They would exclaim: "But we can't do things like this to one another!" He saw the aggressive imperialism of Germany called to account even by its own people; a struggle, a collapse, a liberal-minded conference of world powers, and a universal resumption of amiability upon a more assured basis of security. He believed--and many people in England believed with him--that a great section of the Germans would welcome triumphant Allies as their liberators from intolerable political obsessions.

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

comfortably, to quarrel with a government and not with a people. It took Mr. Britling at least a couple of months of warfare to understand that the Germans were fighting in an altogether different spirit.

The first intimations of this that struck upon his mind were the news of the behaviour of the Kaiser and the Berlin crowd upon the declaration of war, and the violent treatment of the British subjects seeking to return to their homes. Everywhere such people had been insulted and ill-treated. It was the spontaneous expression of a long-gathered bitterness. While the British ambassador was being howled out of Berlin, the German ambassador to England was taking a farewell stroll, quite unmolested, in St. James's Park.... One item that struck particularly upon Mr. Britling's imagination was the story of the chorus of young women who assembled on the railway platform of the station through which the British ambassador was passing to sing--to his drawn blinds--"Deutschland, Deutschland über Alles." Mr. Britling could imagine those young people, probably dressed more or less uniformly in white, with flushed faces and shining eyes, letting their voices go, full throated, in the modern German way....

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

Mr. Britling did his utmost not to believe these things. They

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

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

The first thing that really pierced Mr. Britling with the conviction that there was something essentially different in the English and the German attitude towards the war was the sight of a bale of German comic papers in the study of a friend in London. They were filled with caricatures of the Allies and more particularly of the English, and they displayed a force and quality of passion--an incredible force and

quality of passion. Their amazing hate and their amazing filthiness alike overwhelmed Mr. Britling. There was no appearance of national pride or national dignity, but a bellowing patriotism and a limitless desire to hurt and humiliate. They spat. They were red in the face and they spat. He sat with these violent sheets in his hands--ashamed.

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

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

"They do," said his friend.

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

"The whole of Germany is in that blind fury," said his friend. "While we are going about astonished and rather incredulous about this war, and still rather inclined to laugh, that's the state of mind of Germany.... There's a sort of deliberation in it. They think it gives them strength.

They want to foam at the mouth. They do their utmost to foam more. They write themselves up. Have you heard of the 'Hymn of Hate'?"

Mr. Britling had not.

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

"You will we hate with a lasting hate;
We will never forgo our hate--
Hate by water and hate by land,
Hate of the head and hate of the hand,
Hate of the hammer and hate of the crown,
Hate of seventy millions, choking down;
We love as one, we hate as one,
We have one foe, and one alone--
ENGLAND!"

He read on to the end.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Section 3

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

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

"That isn't at all my idea."

"We're not a thorough people. When we think of anything, we also think of its opposite. When we adopt an opinion we also take in a provisional idea that it is probably nearly as wrong as it is right. We are--atmospheric. They are concrete.... All this filthy, vile, unjust

and cruel stuff is honest genuine war. We pretend war does not hurt. They know better.... The Germans are a simple honest people. It is their virtue. Possibly it is their only virtue...."

Section 4

Mr. Britling was only one of a multitude who wanted to feel the bumps of Germany at that time. The effort to understand a people who had suddenly become incredible was indeed one of the most remarkable facts in English intellectual life during the opening phases of the war. The English state of mind was unlimited astonishment. There was an enormous sale of any German books that seemed likely to illuminate the mystery of this amazing concentration of hostility; the works of Bernhardi, Treitschke, Nietzsche, Houston Stewart Chamberlain, became the material of countless articles and interminable discussions. One saw little clerks on the way to the office and workmen going home after their work earnestly reading these remarkable writers. They were asking, just as Mr. Britling was asking, what it was the British Empire had struck against. They were trying to account for this wild storm of hostility that was coming at them out of Central Europe.

It was a natural next stage to this, when after all it became manifest that instead of there being a liberal and reluctant Germany at the back of imperialism and Junkerdom, there was apparently one solid and enthusiastic people, to suppose that the Germans were in some

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

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

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

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

Since the young man's departure he had sent two postcards of greeting directly to the "Familie Britling," and one letter through the friendly intervention of Mr. Britling's American publisher. Once also he sent a message through a friend in Norway. The postcards simply recorded stages in the passage of a distraught pacifist across Holland to his enrolment. The letter by way of America came two months later. He had been converted into a combatant with extreme rapidity. He had been trained for three weeks, had spent a fortnight in hospital with a severe cold, and had then gone to Belgium as a transport driver--his father had been a horse-dealer and he was familiar with horses. "If anything happens to me," he wrote, "please send my violin at least very carefully to my mother." It was characteristic that he reported himself as very comfortably quartered in Courtrai with "very nice people." The niceness involved restraints. "Only never," he added, "do we talk about the war.

It is better not to do so." He mentioned the violin also in the later communication through Norway. Therein he lamented the lost fleshpots of Courtrai. He had been in Posen, and now he was in the Carpathians, up to his knees in snow and "very uncomfortable...."

And then abruptly all news from him ceased.

Month followed month, and no further letter came.

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

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

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

Section 5

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

The little village perches high among the hills and woods, and at its very centre is the inn and the linden tree and--Adam Meyer. Or at least Adam Meyer was there. Whether he is there now, only the spirit of change can tell; if he live to be a hundred no friendly English will ever again come tramping along by the track of the Blaue Breiecke or the Weisse Streiche to enjoy his hospitality; there are rivers of blood between, and a thousand memories of hate....

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

Music, moonlight, the simple German sentiment, the hearty German voices, the great picnic in a Stuhl Wagen, the orderly round games the boys played with the German children, and the tramps and confidences Hugh had with Kurt and Karl, and at last a crowning jollification, a dance, with some gipsy musicians whom Mr. Britling discovered, when the Germans taught the English various entertaining sports with baskets and potatoes and forfeits and the English introduced the Germans to the licence of the two-step. And everybody sang "Britannia, Rule the Waves," and

"Deutschland, Deutschland über Alles," and Adam Meyer got on a chair and made a tremendous speech more in dialect than ever, and there was much drinking of beer and sirops in the moonlight under the linden....

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

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

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

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

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

Section 6

It will be an incredible thing to the happier reader of a coming age--if ever this poor record of experience reaches a reader in the days to come--to learn how much of the mental life of Mr. Britling was occupied at this time with the mere horror and atrocity of warfare. It is idle and hopeless to speculate now how that future reader will envisage this war; it may take on broad dramatic outlines, it may seem a thing, just,

logical, necessary, the burning of many barriers, the destruction of many obstacles. Mr. Britling was too near to the dirt and pain and heat for any such broad landscape consolations. Every day some new detail of evil beat into his mind. Now it would be the artless story of some Belgian refugee. There was a girl from Alost in the village for example, who had heard the fusillade that meant the shooting of citizens, the shooting of people she had known, she had seen the still blood-stained wall against which two murdered cousins had died, the streaked sand along which their bodies had been dragged; three German soldiers had been quartered in her house with her and her invalid mother, and had talked freely of the massacres in which they had been employed. One of them was in civil life a young schoolmaster, and he had had, he said, to kill a woman and a baby. The girl had been incredulous. Yes, he had done so! Of course he had done so! His officer had made him do it, had stood over him. He could do nothing but obey. But since then he had been unable to sleep, unable to forget.

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

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

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

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

Each month the war grew bitterer and more cruel. Early in 1915 the Germans began their submarine war, and for a time Mr. Britling's concern was chiefly for the sailors and passengers of the ships destroyed. He noted with horror the increasing indisposition of the German submarines to give any notice to their victims; he did not understand the grim reasons that were turning every submarine attack into a desperate challenge of death. For the Germans under the seas had pitted themselves against a sea power far more resourceful, more steadfast and skilful, sterner and more silent, than their own. It was not for many months that Mr. Britling learnt the realities of the submarine blockade. Submarine

after submarine went out of the German harbours into the North Sea, never to return. No prisoners were reported, no boasting was published by the British fishers of men; U boat after U boat vanished into a chilling mystery.... Only later did Mr. Britling begin to hear whispers and form ideas of the noiseless, suffocating grip that sought through the waters for its prey.

The Falaba crime, in which the German sailors were reported to have jeered at the drowning victims in the water, was followed by the sinking of the Lusitania. At that a wave of real anger swept through the Empire. Hate was begetting hate at last. There were violent riots in Great Britain and in South Africa. Wretched little German hairdressers and bakers and so forth fled for their lives, to pay for the momentary satisfaction of the Kaiser and Herr Ballin. Scores of German homes in England were wrecked and looted; hundreds of Germans maltreated. War is war. Hard upon the Lusitania storm came the publication of the Bryce Report, with its relentless array of witnesses, its particulars of countless acts of cruelty and arrogant unreason and uncleanness in Belgium and the occupied territory of France. Came also the gasping torture of "gas," the use of flame jets, and a new exacerbation of the savagery of the actual fighting. For a time it seemed as though the taking of prisoners along the western front would cease. Tales of torture and mutilation, tales of the kind that arise nowhere and out of nothing, and poison men's minds to the most pitiless retaliations, drifted along the opposing fronts....

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

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

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

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

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

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

Section 7

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

Too long had British life been corrupted by the fictions of loyalty to an uninspiring and alien Court, of national piety in an official Church, of freedom in a politician-rigged State, of justice in an economic

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

Under that strain the dignity of England broke, and revealed a malignity less focussed and intense than the German, but perhaps even more

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

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

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

Section 8

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

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

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

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

Mr. Britling, between the black hedges, came back presently from his attempts to recall his youthful inquiries into man's ancient speculations, to the enduring riddles that have outlasted a thousand

speculations. Has hate been necessary, and is it still necessary, and will it always be necessary? Is all life a war forever? The rabbit is nimble, lives keenly, is prevented from degenerating into a diseased crawling eater of herbs by the incessant ferret. Without the ferret of war, what would life become?... War is murder truly, but is not Peace decay?

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

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

splendid freedoms, of a coming age, of marvellous enlargements of human faculty, of a coming science that would be light and of art that could be power....

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

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

He came to a gate and leant over it.

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

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

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

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

Section 9

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

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

Mrs. Britling helped him pack a bag, and came with him to the station in order to drive the car back to the Dower House; for the gardener's boy who had hitherto attended to these small duties had now gone off as an unskilled labourer to some munition works at Chelmsford. Mr. Britling sat in the slow train that carried him across country to the junction for Filmington, and failed altogether to realise what had happened to

the old lady. He had an absurd feeling that it was characteristic of her to intervene in affairs in this manner. She had always been so tough and unbent an old lady that until he saw her he could not imagine her as being really seriously and pitifully hurt....

But he found her in the hospital very much hurt indeed. She had been smashed in some complicated manner that left the upper part of her body intact, and lying slantingly upon pillows. Over the horror of bandaged broken limbs and tormented flesh below sheets and a counterpane were drawn. Morphia had been injected, he understood, to save her from pain, but presently it might be necessary for her to suffer. She lay up in her bed with an effect of being enthroned, very white and still, her strong profile with its big nose and her straggling hair and a certain dignity gave her the appearance of some very important, very old man, of an aged pope for instance, rather than of an old woman. She had made no remark after they had set her and dressed her and put her to bed except "send for Hughie Britling, The Dower House, Matching's Easy. He is the best of the bunch." She had repeated the address and this commendation firmly over and over again, in large print as it were, even after they had assured her that a telegram had been despatched.

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

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

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

She gave no sign.

"Your nephew Hugh."

"Mean and preposterous," she said very distinctly.

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

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

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

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

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

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

She listened.

"Can you understand me?" he asked.

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

"You have always understood me," she tried.

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

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

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

"Hughie!"

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

"Don't let him get at your Hughie.... Too good for it, dear. Oh!

much--much too good.... People let these wars and excitements run away with them.... They put too much into them.... They aren't--they aren't worth it. Don't let him get at your Hughie."

"No!"

"You understand me, Hughie?"

"Perfectly, Auntie."

"Then don't forget it. Ever."

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

There came a little tug at his sleeve.

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

"But I can come again?"

"Perhaps."

She indicated departure by a movement of her hand.

Section 10

The next day Aunt Wilshire was unconscious of her visitor.

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

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

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

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

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

After that she lay still....

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

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

Section 11

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

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

abundant, sometimes rare and exceptional, among otherwise uninjured dwellings. Many of the victims he had visited in the little cottage hospital where Aunt Wilshire had just died. She was the eleventh dead. Altogether fifty-seven people had been killed or injured in this brilliant German action. They were all civilians, and only twelve were men.

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

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

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

people going to and fro with lanterns, and the sky empty again, the raiders gone....

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Section 12

All the while that Mr. Britling had been indulging in these imaginative slaughterings and spending the tears and hate that had gathered in his heart, his reason had been sitting apart and above the storm, like the sun waiting above thunder, like a wise nurse watching and patient above the wild passions of a child. And all the time his reason had been maintaining silently and firmly, without shouting, without speech, that the men who had made this hour were indeed not devils, were no more devils than Mr. Britling was a devil, but sinful men of like nature with himself, hard, stupid, caught in the same web of circumstance. "Kill

them in your passion if you will," said reason, "but understand. This thing was done neither by devils nor fools, but by a conspiracy of foolish motives, by the weak acquiescences of the clever, by a crime that was no man's crime but the natural necessary outcome of the ineffectiveness, the blind motives and muddleheadedness of all mankind."

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

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

Mr. Britling gave no heed to that.

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

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

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

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

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

These were thoughts that Mr. Britling had never faced before the war. They came to him now, and they came only to be rejected by the inherent quality of his mind. For weeks, consciously and subconsciously, his mind had been grappling with this riddle. He had thought of it during his lonely prowlings as a special constable; it had flung itself in monstrous symbols across the dark canvas of his dreams. "Is there indeed a devil of pure cruelty? Does any creature, even the very cruellest of creatures, really apprehend the pain it causes, or inflict it for the sake of the infliction?" He summoned a score of memories, a score of imaginations, to bear their witness before the tribunal of his mind. He

forgot cold and loneliness in this speculation. He sat, trying all Being, on this score, under the cold indifferent stars.

He thought of certain instances of boyish cruelty that had horrified him in his own boyhood, and it was clear to him that indeed it was not cruelty, it was curiosity, dense textured, thick skinned, so that it could not feel even the anguish of a blinded cat. Those boys who had wrung his childish soul to nigh intolerable misery, had not indeed been tormenting so much as observing torment, testing life as wantonly as one breaks thin ice in the early days of winter. In very much cruelty the real motive is surely no worse than that obtuse curiosity; a mere step of understanding, a mere quickening of the nerves and mind, makes it impossible. But that is not true of all or most cruelty. Most cruelty has something else in it, something more than the clumsy plunging into experience of the hobbledehoy; it is vindictive or indignant; it is never tranquil and sensuous; it draws its incentive, however crippled and monstrous the justification may be, from something punitive in man's instinct, something therefore that implies a sense, however misguided, of righteousness and vindication. That factor is present even in spite; when some vile or atrocious thing is done out of envy or malice, that envy and malice has in it always--always? Yes, always--a genuine condemnation of the hated thing as an unrighteous thing, as an unjust usurpation, as an inexcusable privilege, as a sinful overconfidence. Those men in the airship?--he was coming to that. He found himself asking himself whether it was possible for a human being to do any cruel act without an excuse--or, at least, without the feeling of

excusability. And in the case of these Germans and the outrages they had committed and the retaliations they had provoked, he perceived that always there was the element of a perceptible if inadequate justification. Just as there would be if presently he were to maltreat a fallen German airman. There was anger in their vileness. These Germans were an unsubtle people, a people in the worst and best sense of the words, plain and honest; they were prone to moral indignation; and moral indignation is the mother of most of the cruelty in the world. They perceived the indolence of the English and Russians, they perceived their disregard of science and system, they could not perceive the longer reach of these greater races, and it seemed to them that the mission of Germany was to chastise and correct this laxity. Surely, they had argued, God was not on the side of those who kept an untilled field. So they had butchered these old ladies and slaughtered these children just to show us the consequences:

"All along of dirtiness, all along of mess,
All along of doing things rather more or less."

The very justification our English poet has found for a thousand overbearing actions in the East! "Forget not order and the real," that was the underlying message of bomb and gas and submarine. After all, what right had we English not to have a gun or an aeroplane fit to bring down that Zeppelin ignominiously and conclusively? Had we not undertaken Empire? Were we not the leaders of great nations? Had we indeed much right to complain if our imperial pose was flouted? "There,

at least," said Mr. Britling's reason, "is one of the lines of thought that brought that unseen cruelty out of the night high over the houses of Filmington-on-Sea. That, in a sense, is the cause of this killing. Cruel it is and abominable, yes, but is it altogether cruel? Hasn't it, after all, a sort of stupid rightness?--isn't it a stupid reaction to an indolence at least equally stupid?"

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Even that vile airship was a ship of fools!

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

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

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

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

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