TO-MORROW AND TO-MORROW...

By

STEPHEN McKENNA

Author of VINDICATION

A STUDY of English inner political circles after the war, in which some of the characters of the author's famous novel "Sonia" make their final appearance.

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By STEPHEN McKENNA

NOVELS:

To-Morrow and To-Morrow
Vindication
The Commandment of Moses
Soliloquy
The Confessions of a Well-Meaning Woman
The Sensationalists:
I *Lady Lilith*
II *The Education of Eric Lane*
III *The Secret Victory*
Sonia Married
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Ninety-Six Hours' Leave
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By Intervention of Providence
While I Remember
Tex: A Chapter in the Life of Alexander Teixeira de Mattos

TO-MORROW AND TO-MORROW . . .

A NOVEL

BY
STEPHEN McKENNA

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TO

MARION

Three years ago, *The Secret Victory* brought to an end the trilogy which I called *The Sensationalists*. This book and the antecedent volumes—*Lady Lilith* and *The Education of Eric Lane*—described the fortunes of certain men and women who constituted part of the larger groups which I had approached in *Sonia, Midas and Son* and *Sonia Married*.

By the accident of birth, fortune or talent, "these our actors" were made to fill a position—before, during and after the war—which attracted to them more attention than was warranted by their historical importance. My defence—if I must defend myself—is that the butterfly in every age has claimed more notice than the bee. The social scene, to change my metaphor, presented by so single-minded a writer as Mr. Greville has to find room for the D'Orsays, the Egremonts, the Sidney Smiths and the Madame de Lievens, who throng his stage in act after act, as well as for the Peels, Wellingtons and Melbournes.

Is a defence still necessary for continuing the life of a character from one novel to another? Mr. Disraeli, in his splendid progress through a part of Mr. Greville's period, refused to cut the thread of an imaginary existence at the moment when his last page was bound into its cover; and the novel-sequence which aims to describe a social and political scene must, no less than succeeding volumes of memoirs, call back to the stage the same leaders and the same camp-followers. If this present series have any artistic or historical value, I should like it to be found in the completed picture.

I attempted, in *Sonia*, to trace the adolescence of the generation that grew to manhood in time to meet the shock of the war. That war ends in the first line of the present volume; and, before the last page, the government that was charged to bring peace back to the sparse survivors has itself passed away. One phase in history has been concluded; and this series, which aimed at describing a single English scene in the life of a single generation, ends with the end of that phase.

I ask no one to share any regret which I may feel in taking leave of characters that have been my constant companions for more than eight years. If they are no more likable than the men and women we meet in daily

life, I have at least never allowed parental affection to cover up their shortcomings. I present them to you as a small mark of a deep devotion.

STEPHEN MCKENNA.

“All our yesterdays have lighted fools
The way to dusty death.” . . .

SHAKESPEARE: *Macbeth*.

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PART ONE

CHAPTER ONE

TRUCE

" 'Rise up, rise up, thou Dives, and take again thy gold,
And thy women and thy housen as they were to thee of old.
It may be grace hath found thee
In the furnace where We bound thee,
And that thou shalt bring the peace My Son foretold.' "

RUDYARD KIPLING: *The Peace of Dives*.

1

"*The eleventh hour of the eleventh day of the eleventh month . . .*"

Though the departmental order was marked "secret", I did not hesitate to give my wife a hint of its contents. All the world—if the armistice were accepted—could read the news next morning. And the armistice would be accepted. Silence hung over town and country throughout the misty, long hours of Sunday: it was, I felt, as though all England were at prayer. Faint restlessness muttered throughout the lagging, cold hours of Sunday night: it was as though all England were keeping vigil.

"You *can't* doubt," I told Barbara, as we parted at the door of the Admiralty. "With any luck, the news is waiting for me."

"I can't *believe*," she answered. "Four years and three months. Nearly a fifth of my whole life. I'm used to the war . . . almost. I don't see why it should ever stop."

2

It was my turn for late duty; but, when I reached my room, I found a message:

"Captain Hornbeck's compliments; and it will not be necessary for Commander Oakleigh to stay unless he wishes."

Peace was not yet come, then, or Philip Hornbeck would have told me; it would come that night, or he would not have granted me leave of absence. The Admiralty, meanwhile, could not have been more silent if the old world had died in giving birth to the new.

"You got my chit?," Hornbeck asked in an undertone, when I went to report. "Unless you *want* to hang about here . . ."

"My taste for bureaucracy," I answered, with a glance of loathing at his "IN", "OUT" and "PENDING" trays, "has been cured." How long did Barbara say the war had lasted? Since 1914? Yes, four years and three months had passed since I began to masquerade unconvincingly as an officer of the Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve. With the actors, artists, barristers and stockbrokers who combined to make up my section of the intelligence department, I had talked a hundred times of the day when we should have taken our last undeserved salute and laid aside the latest of our comic-opera uniforms. Now it was come. "As I'm here, I may as well lend a hand. I suppose they're bound to sign?"

Hornbeck unlocked a row of japanned boxes and glanced perfunctorily at his secret files before plunging them in the fire.

"It won't come through in time for the morning papers, so I'm getting rid of the evidence before I'm told not to," he chuckled. " '*The eleventh hour . . . of the eleventh day . . . of the eleventh month.*' Sounds as if a journalist had had something to do with that!" One file slipped to the floor; and I read on the faded docket "*Goeben and Breslau, 1914*". It had been a very long war. "Lord! These papers are a satire on the vanity of human wishes!," he drawled. "You can give all your people leave for the day. They won't be in a fit state to work . . . even if you had any work to give them. And I suppose you won't have. It . . . takes you some time to grasp that it's all over," he added, checking half way to the fire and staring bemusedly at the papers in his hands. Looking at him, I needed time to recall that he had been a young man when war broke out. "What are you and Lady Barbara going to do with yourselves?," he asked after a pause.

"Get away to the sun," I answered with the grim determination of a man whose vitality was spent for lack of rest and good food.

"Wonder . . . what will happen . . . to *us*," Hornbeck pondered, punctuating his words with abrupt shrieks of rending paper. "No more wars; . . . no more navies . . . or armies."

“Well, you of all men are entitled to a holiday,” I said. Four years of Whitehall had made him short-sighted and round-shouldered; his square, wooden face was pallid; and his slow speech argued a tired brain.

“Everything will seem a bit flat now,” muttered one of the most powerful men in England, who within the next few days or hours would be as inconsequential as myself. Beyond a narrow circle described round the Treasury Exchange, the name of Captain Hornbeck was unknown; the weight and cunning of his hand, however, had been felt for more than four years in Mexican revolutions, Greek *coups d’état* and Russian counter-revolutions. The papers which he was destroying ranged from reports on South American credit-transfers to track-charts of North Atlantic commerce-raiders. “This is what the N.O. has been training for, ever since the old Britannia days,” he went on. “Now that we’ve finished it . . .”

Wiping the sweat from his forehead, he threw open the window. From force of habit, he switched off the lights before pulling up the blind; then, as the last night of the war engulfed him in a grey eddy of fog, he laughed at his own forgetfulness.

“There’s still a fair-sized mess to clean up,” I reminded him, as he raked with irresolute fingers the memoranda that constituted the Admiralty’s suggestions for the peace conference.

“Ah, I must leave that to you politicians,” he laughed. “And I don’t envy you the job. A world without war . . . It’s a thing we’ve never seen, George. And when you consider that we’re all of us demoralized and most of us bankrupt . . . I suppose friend Woodrow knows what he wants, but I don’t believe any one else does. . . . Doctor feller once told me that, when a baby’s born, it comes into the world with its fists clenched. I sometimes wonder if war isn’t a natural instinct.”

“Self-preservation is the first natural instinct,” I answered; “but it’s not consistent with modern methods of fighting.”

“Oh, I know. This war will be a friendly scrap by comparison with the next.”

“It’s stopping,” I said, “just when we were beginning to learn something of mass-production, mass-enlistment, mass-mobilization of resources, mass-destruction.”

Hornbeck strolled to a vast wall-map of the world and stared at it, with his hands dug deep into his pockets.

“In the next war, we shan’t attempt to distinguish between combatants and non-combatants,” he predicted. “The air-raids and the blockade have caught the civilian.”

“And no country will be allowed to remain neutral,” I added, “any more than Luxemburg and Greece in this war.”

“Until, at the end, when the human population of the earth has been destroyed with typhoid-germs and poison-gas, you’ll be left with two submersible flying-tanks chasing each other among the ice of the North Pole.”

He stirred the fire to a blaze and began once more to feed it with the papers from his private safe. I might have helped him; but this news of approaching peace seemed to relax all my muscles. For the first time in more than four years I could look beyond the work of the moment and see myself as an individual. When I was less tired, I could go back to the old life; and, for a man with a competence, life in England had been more than tolerable until the fourth of August, 1914.

“Don’t let’s talk about the *next* war,” I said. “Unless we can find a substitute . . .”

“People talked like that after Waterloo,” Hornbeck murmured.

“I expect they talked like that after the siege of Troy; but they always sowed their peace with the seeds of the next war.”

The night air was chilling the room; and Hornbeck interrupted his task of destruction to shut the window.

“Well, what kind of peace do you want now?,” he asked, with a smile half mocking, half wistful playing over his tired face. “This war followed inevitably on the war of ’70, which followed inevitably on the nationalist wars, which followed inevitably on Napoleon’s conquests. Will you divide the world now according to nationalities? I’m afraid you’ll have new wars in Poland, Alsace-Lorraine, Austria, Turkey; not to mention Egypt and India. People talk about a United States of the World; but, when you’ve been getting the last ounce out of national spirit for all these years, you won’t persuade white men to take their orders from an international committee of dagos.”

I turned from the wall-map to the official estimates of casualties in all countries.

“When people remember what a bloody business war is . . .” I began.

"We had South Africa and Japan to warn *us*!" he interrupted. "The next generation . . . George, I promise you that, unless you get your new heaven and your new earth functioning at once, you'll drift back to the only kind of life a nation knows. Fear and arrogance; insane hatred and colossal stupidity. Periodically the world will panic into war, which is the only final solution known to history." . . .

"The only one we've tried; and it's a solution of nothing," I answered. "My God, if I didn't believe this was really a war to end war . . ."

I paused as Hornbeck was called to the telephone. He listened for a moment, nodded to me and took down his coat and cap. Even he could work no longer; and, as I walked home alone, I tried to understand that the "war to end war" had itself ended. In four years I had forgotten how London looked before the lamps were shrouded and the hoardings placarded with patriotic appeals. Their purpose was accomplished; a uniform would soon be as rare as civilian clothes were now; the hospitals would empty; the blue coats and red ties of the convalescents would disappear.

The city was very silent; but at eleven o'clock, I imagined, there would be such a silence as would make men think that the earth was halting in her course. Out there, over the water, some would adventure amicably into the enemy's lines; some would drift back to their base; most would wait dumbly for orders; and one man would be the last to die in the Great War.

At the top of Waterloo Place I found a policeman flashing his lantern on the doors and shutters of the shops.

"I think you'd like to know that the Germans have accepted the armistice," I said.

"Thank you, sir," he answered with a salute.

A taxi crawled westward across Piccadilly Circus; and I told the driver.

"They 'ave, 'ave they?," he muttered in perplexity. "Oh, they *'ave*. . . . Well . . ."

I hesitated long before reckoning the number of those for whom peace came too late. In '14 my generation was of an age to be called for the hottest and the longest of the fighting. Sam Dainton had escaped with a flesh wound, Jack Waring with a split head and a broken nerve, David O'Rane with the loss of his sight; these, with the five or six who had failed to pass the doctors or had been tied to a mission abroad, were all that remained of the friends who had said good-bye to their schools in the last years of the nineteenth century.

A lifetime had passed since we all talked of what we would do “on the day peace is signed”; and yet, when we spoke of “last summer”, we always meant “the summer before the war”. It was, at the same time, an eternity and an episode.

“So,” I reflected at the door of my house in Seymour Street, “one school of political thought in France looked upon the Revolution and the Empire.”

From force of habit, I headed for the hot milk in my dressing-room and rang to have my bath prepared. Then I recollected that I need never again work by night and sleep by day.

“I’ll breakfast first,” I told Barbara’s maid. “And I shan’t go to bed this morning. The armistice has been signed.” The girl tried to speak, but could only turn away with a sob that sounded like “dad”. “Has her ladyship been called?,” I asked.

Still unable to speak, the girl shook her head and nodded in the direction of a breakfast-tray.

3

Barbara was asleep, with a light burning by her side and an open book face-downwards on the bed. At last, I told myself, I could see something of my wife. I should be able to read the new poets and novelists who overflowed her cases. At last we could entertain our friends again. At last, after eight months, we could have our honeymoon. Barbara looked dangerously fragile. As I watched her, one hand was drawn slowly up the sheet; and the fingers were almost transparent. Her head turned restlessly from side to side; and I knew that she was dreaming. There was a whispered sigh; and I felt that her dreams were unhappy.

“George! Oh, it’s you!,” she exclaimed with a throb of relief; and, as she brushed the cloudy hair back from her face, I saw that her big, deep-set eyes were black and anguished.

“Who else should it be?,” I asked, as I draped a shawl over her thin shoulders and kissed her flushed cheeks. “They’ve signed, Babs. It’s all over.”

“It’s . . . all . . . over?,” she repeated dreamily.

“Yes. I telephoned to your mother from the Admiralty. They’re safe: Neave and Charlie.”

Silence fell between us until Barbara covered her face and murmured: “Thank God!” Then she sat up and stared round the shadowy room:

“What . . . what are we going to do now?”

Within an hour I felt that most people would be asking themselves that question:

“I don’t know. For this morning Phil Hornbeck suggested that I should invite a few friends to my room in case there’s anything to see. Afterwards . . .”

“Afterwards you must take me away!,” she cried. “You’re quite sure there’s been no mistake?”

“Quite sure!,” I answered, as I sat down by the telephone and tried to remember which of our friends we should both care to have with us at the moment when peace dawned.

A change had overtaken London by the time that I set out to collect my party. As on August bank-holiday four years earlier, when I drove about Gloucestershire, with Loring and O’Rane, waiting for news, the city had an air of suspended animation. Of the twenty strangers who interrogated me on my way across the park, not one had more doubt that the terms would be accepted than that the sun would rise on the morrow. And yet, so nicely balanced were hope and fear, I should have been surprised if any one had laid me long odds on peace. Like Barbara, they were grown used to the war. As I spread the news from house to house, every one said: ‘What time is it now?’; and it seemed as if the eleventh hour of the eleventh day would never come. There was a muddle-headed point of honour, too, that no one should betray even impatience.

“Oh, yes, I’ll look in, if I have nothing better to do. You might have called here instead of bringing me to this infernal contraption,” growled my uncle Bertrand, who always visited his hatred of the telephone on the heads of those who addressed him by it. “That all you have to say? Filson! Filson!,” I heard him calling to his man. “They’ve signed!”

Lady Dainton, whom I invited for the sake of old associations, murmured: “Thank you so much. I know Roger will be interested,” as though I had announced a minor change in the cabinet. Raymond Stornaway said: “I trust this doesn’t mean a general holiday: I’ve the very devil of a day’s work ahead of me.” My sister Beryl hoped that I had not gone to the expense of buying that new uniform.

I had already warned old Lady Loring by telephone; and, when I reached Curzon Street, I found my cousin Violet dressed to go out and playing in the hall with her boy.

"I'm waiting to be told what to do next," was her greeting.

Though she had worn her deep mourning for more than three years, her little white face looked pathetically young and helpless. I wondered what kind of life she could expect from the armistice.

"We're all in the same boat," I answered. "I called to suggest that you should bring Sandy to the Admiralty. My father could just remember the Famine; my mother remembers the crowds in the streets when Sebastopol fell. Sandy may carry away something to fix this, eighty years hence, as the day when the Great War ended."

"I wonder if people will talk about it then as 'the Great War'?," Violet mused.

As she buttoned her boy into his coat, I felt that she was thinking only of the day when her husband of a month, with all that health, fortune, rank and riches could give him, drifted whimsically to France, in the meshes of a machine which he ridiculed, there to die in defence of one country, which he faintly despised, against another, which he mildly disliked. Violet had been left with a son to bring up and a vast estate to administer. She would never, I knew, marry again; and, now that the war was over, she saw herself fading into the twilight of life to dwell with ghosts and memories and dreams.

"The Great Waste," I suggested, as we set out. "If any one could have foreseen, four years ago, how this would end, I wonder if there'd have been a war? I tremble to think what the world will look like when we have time to take stock."

In our passage from Loring House to the Admiralty, I found that the news had spread before us; and young Lucien de Grammont, speeding towards the French Embassy, stopped long enough to vent on us his disappointment that the allies had not insisted on unconditional surrender.

"Those accursed Americans!," he cried. "But for them, peace would have been signed in Berlin! Now in fifty years' time . . . Well, let us hope we shan't be alive to see it."

As he flung off in furious disappointment, I ventured the opinion that, but for the Americans, a German peace might have been dictated in Paris. Then we pressed through the crowd in the Processional Avenue and took up our positions to see at least the greatest war in history ending. My secretary

had cleared the table of its trays; and we sat in a row, looking through the mist of Horse Guards' Parade and trying to guess what was going to happen. The Crawleighs had arrived before us and were talking to Raymond Stornaway; Sir Roger and Lady Dainton followed on our heels; and our last inch of space was filled when my uncle Bertrand, puffing and growling at the stairs, lumbered in with heavy tread and demanded in the loud voice of incipient deafness why it was necessary to collect this nest of magpies.

"Disreputable old wrecks we are!," he muttered with a glance of sour and comprehensive disfavour from Lord Crawleigh to Sir Roger Dainton and from Sir Roger Dainton to Raymond Stornaway. The grey November light, shining on a row of bent backs and haggard faces, made us older than our years. "We've *had* our chance," he continued; "I believe the only way of stopping war is to have conscription for all men and women over fifty and to call up the oldest classes first."

"So that you could hear men of thirty boasting that they'd 'given' two grandfathers to the army?," asked Raymond.

"They'd still be of an age to be kicked, if they tried that kind of cant. . . . No, but I'm sufficiently sick of everything to feel it's indecent for me to be alive when mere children are wearing black for men who might have been my grandsons. Eighty-four. . . . Most of my friends will tell you I've lived twenty years too long; and, on my soul, I believe they're right."

"You said something of the kind on the day war broke out," I reminded him. "Now that it's all over . . .?"

Bertrand gathered himself for attack, towering over me with his hands on his hips till the silence of the room daunted him. Then he shrugged his shoulders and turned, with a savage tug at his black walrus-moustache, to shake hands with his neighbours:

"I don't detect any great reason for optimism. Um, Crawleigh. You English have seen a million or two of your best men killed or wounded. . . . Whose child is that? . . . You've seen new debt piled up to the tune of thousands of millions. . . . How do, Lady Crawleigh? . . . I'm an Irishman. . . . Violet, my dear! . . . And a liberal. I've seen liberalism stamped out of existence and the Irish party broken. . . . Lady Dainton, your humble servant. Find me a seat, George, there's a good boy."

Most of us knew my uncle well enough to imagine his violent anger if any one else had dared to be so despondent. My father-in-law, however, felt obliged to pick up the gage.

"You mean that we should be no worse off," he suggested, "if the Germans had drawn up the terms and we had accepted them?"

"Not quite," Bertrand conceded, "not quite. . . . I beg your pardon, Barbara my dear, I didn't see you! . . . If you know your Bible, my dear Crawleigh, you'll recollect that a Jew called Samson tried to get level with the Philistines by pulling a heavy roof down on their heads. He got level; but he paid for it with his life. Some one pulled away the pillars that had been holding up our civilization for Heaven knows how many centuries. Credit, commerce, law and order, faith and morals, production, exchange, distribution: they've all toppled; and they've toppled on the heads of *all* of us. You'll see as soon as peace really sets in. No! No, Crawleigh! This war should have ended two years ago, while there were still a few tiles left on the roof!"

I recalled my uncle's warning, on the day war broke out, that freedom of speech was dead; on the day it ended, he asserted his right to it with a truculence that had been shouted down when he pleaded for "a patched-up peace" at the end of 1916, before the United States came in, and again in 1917 when the Lansdowne letter was published.

"Lucien de Grammont wants to go on to Berlin," I said.

Bertrand clasped his hands over the crook of his stick and nodded scornfully at a headstrong world that refused to take his advice. His expression and attitude reminded me of Dr. Johnson, in the celebrated picture, awaiting an audience with Lord Chesterfield.

"He forgets, perhaps, that we at least went into this war to uphold the neutrality of Belgium. We stayed in to make the Germans pay for the damage they'd done there. Later . . . Later, we were told that the French must have Alsace-Lorraine, Russia must have Constantinople, Italy must have an infernal place called the Trentino. And any stray islands or continents where a German or the ally of a German has ever set foot must be taken away and given to somebody else. It may be all very right and proper; but that wasn't our aim in 1914."

More was coming; but his audience began to shew signs of hostility; and Violet intervened by setting her boy on the old man's knee and whispering:

"You mustn't quarrel on a day like this. Help me to shew him the different nationalities, Uncle Bertrand. Sandy! Sandy! You see the little man down there by the tree. D'you know what he is? He's a Jap. Japanese."

"Jap-an-ese," Sandy repeated slowly.

“Those are Americans,” she continued, with her finger pointing to three grave, lean-faced young officers. “Amer-i-cans.”

“Call ’em ‘Yanks’, most noble marquess,” grunted Bertrand, who—with much else that was Johnsonian—exhibited the doctor’s unreasoning antipathy to the new world.

“Merry-cans,” Sandy repeated.

“There’s a Frenchman! There’s a Canadian! See, Sandy? Uncle Bertrand, find me an Italian,” Violet pleaded. “I don’t know how much this mite will remember, but it is rather marvellous to see them all together. That’s a South African, isn’t it? Oh, and a poor soul with only one leg. There’ll still be plenty of them for him to see when he’s grown up. I *wish* I could find an Italian!”

The open space under my window had filled so rapidly that it was hardly possible for any one to move. Typists from the government offices, in short skirts and transparent blouses, were standing on tiptoe, bare-headed in the biting cold, staring bright-eyed over the shoulders of those in front. There were soldiers, in uniform and in their hospital undress; sailors; nurses; government messengers with battered red boxes; a park-keeper; two clergymen; some errand-boys; and a thousand nondescripts. At one moment they were very silent; at another, they broke into feverish conversation with unknown neighbours, occasionally shaking hands and cheering a foreign uniform.

“Five minutes to eleven,” muttered a voice which I could not identify.

4

The emotions of the crowd were reacting on us. Behind me, I could hear murmurs like the soughing of wind, rising and falling with the murmurs of the crowd. When hands were excitedly shaken below us, I felt Barbara’s fingers gripping my wrist and saw Violet bending to kiss the silken curls of her child’s head.

Out there, over the water, the ‘cease-fire’ must be travelling down the unending shambles of the two opposing lines. The shadow that had darkened the world for more than four years had at last been driven away; and no one was going to be mutilated or killed any more. All—more than all—that we set out to do in 1914 had been accomplished; and the bound heads and empty sleeves of the survivors, the black dresses of those with no survivors to welcome, testified to the cost. Of the uniforms below us, some had first been donned in Tasmania, some in Natal, others on the Alaskan border.

Belgium and Servia, Russia and France, Portugal and Japan, Italy and Rumania: all had joined hands with our English-speaking peoples to hem in the wild beast. Throughout the night, the news had crackled from Poldhu to the Azores, from Arlington to Seattle, that the wild beast was subdued. It had flashed to lonely patrols through the frost of the North Sea and the fire of the Persian Gulf; two hundred million men were now standing silent, with their eyes on their watches; and I fancied again the unearthly hush that must drop on the world when the last war ended.

In spite of Bertrand, in spite of Lucien de Grammont, in spite of Hornbeck I believed that it was the last war.

Burp! . . . Burp! . . . Burp! The maroons were like the rending of colossal drums. *Burp! . . . Burp! . . . Burp!* Sandy turned wide eyes of alarm upon us and buried his face in Violet's bosom. *Burp! Burp! Burp!*

"Eleven o'clock," muttered Roger Dainton in a quavering voice.

My secretary collapsed into a chair, murmuring "Air-raid"; and, though I knew that air-raids had now passed into history, I imagined for a moment that the last 'scrap of paper' had followed the first and that London and Paris were to be laid in ruins.

Burp! . . . Burp! Burp!

There was no concerted cheering from the crowd below; but I had a curious feeling that the next man but one, down all that line from the Admiralty Arch to Buckingham Palace, had opened his lips and was waiting for a neighbour to cheer with him. Heads were turning in every direction; eyes were gazing upward, as though they expected to see "Peace" written across the sky in letters of flame; bodies, for a moment, were very still.

Then that vast sea of men and women gathered itself up and poured with a hoarse roar towards the Palace. There was a check, and I fancy the first-comers must have been pressed against the railings; I threw open my window in time to hear a mutter rolling from lip to lip: "The king! They're calling for the king." Later, though we could see and hear nothing of it, the word was passed: "The king! He's speaking"; later still: "He's finished! Give him a cheer! Hip, hip! *Come on.*"

The human sea must have eddied at the Palace. Five minutes later, as the crowd below my window surged forward, a returning stream poured down the Processional Avenue into Trafalgar Square; and a new current set in towards the Abbey. There was little cheering now, though every one made individual noises of greeting and laughter. A War Office car hooted its

deliberate way across Horse Guards' Parade and was promptly seized by three wounded soldiers and four girl-clerks, who ranged themselves along the running-boards and perched on the bonnet. As though all had been awaiting a signal, the crowd broke into little groups and swept like swarming bees upon every vehicle in sight. So long as all could move, it did not matter whither they hurried: something, all seemed to feel, must be happening somewhere else.

"The war's over!," some one cried; and mechanically, like hysterical children, a dozen others repeated uncomprehendingly: "The war's over! The war's over! The war's over! The war's over." . . .

"And the funny thing," said Raymond Stornaway, blowing his nose vigorously, "is that they don't know what to do next."

"Do *we*?," asked Bertrand; and, for once, he seemed less anxious to instruct than to be instructed.

5

No one wanted to speak first. No one wanted to move. No one cared to look any one else in the eyes. Lady Crawleigh, I think, was the first to recover; and she was slipping out of the room, with a twisted smile, when Raymond put his back to the door and took the position in hand with a general invitation to lunch with him at the Carlton.

"No speeches or 'celebrations'," he promised. "If you'll fight your way there as best you can, I'll telephone for a table."

With the exception of Violet, we were glad to have our minds made up for us. Bertrand was right: we none of us knew what to do next. The movements of the crowd had become rhythmical by the time that we set out. Every cab and bus was loaded with excited clusters of men and women who seemed ready to do anything but remain still. Boys with paper caps and empty tins marched aimlessly at the head of irregular battalions; overwrought girls and grave grey-beards tramped with arms linked, sublimely unselfconscious. The streets were carpeted with torn paper. An indistinguishable hum of voices floated over and about us, still seeming—as before—to come from our next neighbour but one; and on every face was written vague relief, vague good-will, dawning disappointment and vast perplexity.

" 'They order this matter, I said, better in France'," quoted Raymond, as we drifted slowly through the crowd to kill time before luncheon. "The English don't know how to express their emotions."

"They haven't had much time yet to think what their emotions are," I reminded him. "What's the next stage? Babs and I are going off to the Riviera as soon as we can. But after that?"

"*My* work will go on," Raymond murmured with a rueful glance down Pall Mall. We were within sight of the unwieldy mansion from whose roof young Deryk Lancing fell or flung himself on the eve of the war. The estate, I believe, was valued at about twenty-five million pounds sterling; and a freakish will had laid upon Raymond's shoulders the task of distributing a fortune which Deryk himself could not control nor keep from increasing. "You can come and help me, if you like, George."

"Thanks, I've done the last day's work of my life," I answered; "but I've lived so long at other people's orders that I've forgotten how to take a holiday."

The rest of our party was awaiting us by the door of the restaurant; and throughout the meal we talked, for talking's sake, of the fourteen points and the probable terms of peace. Though we had all accepted Raymond's invitation with relief, we were more sincerely relieved when luncheon came to an end. We wanted to think; and, when I had written a formal request for immediate demobilization, I took Barbara home. The streets were emptying as the silent crowds began to feel that they could not for ever tramp to and fro or steal aimless rides. Hunger was driving them in search of food; and the sunless November afternoon, already touched with frost, was mottling their white faces and chapped hands.

"I feel . . . dazed," Barbara signed, as we got into a taxi with her parents.

"We all do," answered Lady Crawleigh.

As we drove away, I watched our party scattering. From their silence I judged the Crawleighs were trying to realize that their two elder boys were safe at last; the Daintons, walking close together with bent heads, were no doubt thinking of the son who would not return. As my uncle's big, lonely figure disappeared from sight, I fancied that he might indeed be feeling he had lived too long. William the Fourth had completed half his reign when Bertrand was born: a man who had survived the nineteenth century, the Victorian era and the greatest war in history might well shrink aghast from the unknown future.

6

At Barbara's thoughts I could make no guess. Before the war, she had been more mercilessly pursued by publicity than any one of her generation.

When our engagement was announced, I slunk like a criminal past the contents-bills that proclaimed a "*Famous Society Beauty Engaged*"; and, on the day of the wedding, when the traffic was held up for three hours and the auxiliary police were numbered by hundreds, the London crowd was certainly far more concerned to catch a glimpse of Lady Barbara Neave than to hear that the Channel ports were safe. Since our marriage, she had hardly appeared in public; but, as she crouched over the fire without speaking, I wondered what picture she was composing for her life in the unknown, new peace.

When her maid came to dress her, I went to my own room. Night had fallen silently; and, when I looked towards the corner of Park Lane, the streets were more empty than on the night of an air-raid. Once or twice I heard the echo of subdued revelry; but, in ten minutes, I counted only four men and two women walking rapidly westward, closely buttoned against the biting air. Any vision of what this day would be had nothing in common with the patchwork I had seen. Dawdling luxuriously—for the first time in four years—over my dressing, I could recall scraps of altercation with Bertrand, flashes of speculation with Hornbeck, confidences with Crawleigh. Jerkiness, incompleteness, artificial reserve, an overwhelming perplexity and a relief too great to be expressed were what I carried away from the armistice; and I should think that most people in England experienced the same confused emotions and lay down that night with the same confused recollections.

There was none of the vulgar debauchery that had disgraced the capital of a great empire on Mafeking night: in nineteen years our pride was more chastened and our thankfulness more heartfelt, even if we did not know how to give it words.

"I thought you promised to arrange a survivors' dinner," said Barbara, as we went up to bed.

"Only about six of us survived," I answered. "And we're all scattered. We're tired, too. The war went on too long." Though I was almost too exhausted to think, I remembered a far-away debate at Melton on the first anniversary of the war, when the greatest headmaster and the wisest man that I have met warned me that a long war would be followed by an even longer moral reaction: a bruised world, said old Burgess, would go back to the ways it knew and to the fleshpots it loved. "We shall be useless for years," I said.

"I wonder if it was worth it," Barbara mused.

"That depends on what you expected or wanted. We've secured our terms. And, if it's not too rhetorical, I believe that every man who voluntarily offered his life, at a time when we thought we were degenerating, has to a great extent saved his soul. This country has been spared invasion."

Barbara parted the curtains in her room and looked down on the silent street.

"The first night of peace since Jim's last party at Loring Castle," she murmured. "We . . . Well, I suppose we go on from that?"

"If we want to."

"Well, don't you? For the last four years we haven't been able to call our souls our own."

"I wonder whether we ever shall again," I said, as I filled my final pipe. That last night of peace lingered more vividly in my memory than any since. War was certain. We had read Grey's speech; and I walked with O'Rane up and down the valley-terrace, trying to decide what we were fighting to preserve. "We want something more than the *status quo*," I told Barbara. "That night . . . There was no question, then, of a general levy: the war must be over in a few months, and only the regular army would fight. Well, we'd seen Jack Summertown and a car-load of officers driving off the night before: they were a small minority who were quite clearly going to risk their skins for the rest of us. Were we worth it? I told Raney that I'd like to shew something that was better worth fighting for."

"And haven't we? When you think how every one has worked and fought . . ."

"But now that it's all over?," I persisted. "Raney said that people couldn't come back from the war to take up the old futility; you couldn't set up social barriers between men who had undertaken the same charge. It was unthinkable to save a country from invasion in order to perpetuate things like sweated labour. I wonder." . . .

"What a long time ago it all seems!"

There was no cynicism in Barbara's voice; but, if anybody spoke nowadays of a new world, his words were dismissed as Fleet Street rhetoric or Downing Street claptrap; and, though not one man of all the thousands who would be returning in the next few days was likely to say that he had risked his life to perpetuate sweated labour, I could not imagine that many would exert themselves to abolish it.

Exertion! I was too tired to undress! The world might be bankrupt and yet survive; the world might be decimated and yet make good its wastage; first and foremost, the world was weary to the marrow of its bones.

CHAPTER TWO

RETROSPECT

"Now tell us what 't was all about,"
  Young Peterkin, he cries;
And little Wilhelmine looks up
  With wonder-waiting eyes;
"Now tell us all about the war,
And what they fought each other for."

"It was the English," Kaspar cried,
  "Who put the French to rout;
But what they fought each other for,
  I could not well make out;
But every body said," quoth he,
"That 't was a famous victory. . . .

. . . . . .

"With fire and sword the country round
  Was wasted far and wide,
And many a childing mother then,
  And new-born baby died;
But things like that, you know, must be
At every famous victory. . . .

. . . . . .

"And every body praised the Duke
  Who this great fight did win."
"But what good came of it at last?"
  Quoth little Peterkin.
"Why that I cannot tell," said he,
"But 't was a famous victory."

ROBERT SOUTHEY: *The Battle of Blenheim*.

1

When we set out for Cannes three days after my demobilization, I intended to remain out of England for at least a twelvemonth. Since the night when Hornbeck and I waited for news of the armistice I had thought many times of his blank and puzzled confession: '*This is what the N.O. has been training for, ever since the old Britannia days.*' If I had not also been preparing for the peace and for the war which preceded it, I had at least toiled for the whole of my adult life to preserve the peace which preceded the war. Now I could have adapted Hornbeck's reasoning of '*no more wars, no more armies and navies*' to my own case; and, when my friends asked me what I was going to do now, I might have said: 'No more wars, no more politics or journalism on the old lines.'

And this, I take it, was the attitude of all who had even a smattering of modern history. From the moment when I warned Barbara that we should perhaps never again be able to call our souls our own, I realized that the armistice had ended nothing but the long business of killing. The victors would now contend for the fruits of their victory, as Russians, Prussians and British had contended in the Congress of Vienna; the vanquished would struggle to preserve in defeat all that compassion, adroitness and obstinacy could secure them, as Talleyrand had struggled for France after Waterloo. The alliance, if it was like any other of modern times, would be strained and perhaps broken in the first weeks of peace, as after our wars with Louis XIV and Napoleon. We should hear men speaking, as de Grammont and Hornbeck already spoke, of "the next war". Any one who was concerned to avert that must be prepared for a continued effort in which he might truly be unable to call his soul his own.

2

Such energy or ability as I possess were ready to be thrown into the common stock. I had told Philip Hornbeck that the war would have been fought to no purpose if we failed to discover a means of preventing future wars. My difficulty was to know where my own very moderate ability and energy were to be applied. The leading articles and public speeches of these days, taking their time from President Wilson, were familiarizing the idea of a league of nations. Neither speech nor article, however, made clear how the league could be helped to birth by the good-will of insignificant, isolated individuals. I debated with Bertrand whether I should stand again for parliament; but my radicalism from 1906 to 1910 was too strong for the taste of Frank Jellaby and the other liberal whips; it would be repugnant now

to every section of an assembly that had sunk party divisions and was aiming at an agreed peace. Very much as Bishop Blougram counselled Gigadibs to "overhaul theology", my uncle suggested sardonically that I should examine the creeds which I had been professing for the last quarter of a century and see how much of them the war had left. He did not, however, urge my returning to the House; and, if the outbreak of war had justified him in discontinuing our propaganda in *Peace*, the end of the war was hardly the occasion for resurrecting it.

"I'm more completely out of a job than any of you," I told Hornbeck when my old colleagues at the Admiralty entertained me to a farewell dinner on my last night in England. "An obsolete political editor . . ."

"Lucky man!," he sighed enviously. "I've been warned for duty when the peace conference opens. And, after that, I'm to convert the intelligence department here to peace uses. Beating swords into plough-shares; and what not."

"If I thought I could be of any use to you . . .," I began, with temperate enthusiasm; but Hornbeck shook his head and nodded meaningly towards the men at the far end of the table.

"I've already more than I know what to do with," he murmured ruefully. "*You* don't *need* a job, but most of these fellows do; and it'll be harder for them to find one than for you. The war was the opportunity of a lifetime for most of them; but when it's a question of conventional, peace-time billets . . ."

Hornbeck shrugged his shoulders and looked with mingled pride and amusement at the flock which he had collected. There were men and women, married and single, old and young; drawn from a dozen different professions, they were alike in nothing but their admitted ignorance of civil-service ways. And, in the hands of Hornbeck, this ignorance had been converted into an asset. As the department is dead, I can praise it—without offence—for loyalty, hard work and efficiency such as I have never seen excelled; without offence, too, I hope, I can say that we were the strangest collection of government officials that one man ever assembled below one roof. The war, if it did nothing else, gave scope to our versatility. At this dinner I recollect that Bellamy, the actor, sat next to Clayton, the paper-manufacturer. On his other side was Whitburn, the chancery silk; and, beyond him, old Norton, the banker. Next to him sat my private slave and fact-finder, Spence-Atkins, who had reached manhood as a traveller in Manchester goods and, on being discharged for neglect of business, had

drifted about the world, collecting figures and languages. Next to him, again, was Jefferson Wright, who began the war as a mathematical coach, lost a hand at Neuve Chapelle, formed the statistical branch of the Purchase-and-Supply Department, seconded himself to the Admiralty and ended mysteriously as a brigadier on the pay-roll of the Ministry of Labour.

"It takes all kinds to make an intelligence department," I said.

"I wish I could find something for them to do now," answered Hornbeck; and I remember his words as the first hint of the human dislocation that would come as the country declared itself in a state of peace.

In the meantime, our conversation at this dinner strengthened my feeling that I could do no good by remaining in England at present; and I had excellent private reasons for wishing to go abroad and to keep my wife abroad. Until conditions were normal, we did not even know where to live. Most of my income was derived from Ireland: sentiment and duty required that I should spend part of my time there as soon as the country was habitable; and, now that my sister was married and my mother had made her home in the south of France, Barbara might well grasp at the chance of escaping from England.

"Quite deliberately, I feel as if I never wanted to go back," she announced next day, as we watched the white cliffs of Dover fading from view.

"But London, without you, would simply not be London!," said Lucien de Grammont, who was taking us to stay with him at his father's house by the Etoile.

"It will perhaps be better for London, certainly better for me, if we both make a fresh start," she answered. "I'm rather tired of it all."

"Of London in war? Naturally!," Lucien persisted. "And for the first months after the war, when we look for the familiar faces and have to tell ourselves that they will not come back . . . Later on . . ."

"Later on, we must see how we feel," I said; and the conversation swung on to a less dangerous tack.

Though we never discussed her adventures in the days before our marriage, I felt that Barbara was thinking less of the familiar faces, which she would not see again, than of those which would inevitably reappear in London when each man returned to his own place. Among our distressingly free-spoken friends it was commonly reported that she was half engaged at the beginning of the war to young Jack Waring; and, though she never

pretended to be in love with him, the engagement—according to the Crawleighs—kept her from marrying Eric Lane, with whom she was in love beyond all shadow of doubt. Jack was in England looking for work. Eric had been lecturing and travelling in America and Japan; he would be coming to England as soon as he had a new play to produce. I did not want Barbara to be reminded, I did not want to be reminded myself, that she only married me when Eric vanished from her world.

"We want to begin our married life in some place with no associations," she went on, half to herself. Then, as though to protest that she was not thinking of Eric, she looked up with a smile and took my arm. "George and I have had no honeymoon yet; and my beloved parents didn't make things very comfortable for us when I married without a dispensation. Perhaps they'll be more reconciled if we give them a holiday. . . . How soon will peace be signed?"

"That depends how soon the conference opens," Lucien answered with a shrug. "You are to have your general election first; and we . . . you will not find we are in any hurry. There are nearly five lost years to make up. France too is tired."

The lost years were being recovered when we reached Paris in the last days of November. We had seen the war ending in London; here we watched it being buried. Every one who could get a passport and a ticket seemed, like us, to be heading for the Riviera and spending a week in Paris on the way. Every one, too, seemed to share our vagueness and indifference to what lay ahead of this holiday. For the first time in four years, our time was our own; for the first time in four years Paris could dine and dance without fear of being bombed or shelled. Barbara bought frocks; Lucien arranged parties; and I added the hall of the Ritz to the brief list—headed by Port Said and Charing Cross—of the places where a man, without waiting unduly long, can be sure of meeting every one who has ever crossed his path before.

I doubt if in any other single week I have eaten so many meals or spent so much money. From time to time Lucien grumbled half-heartedly at all this waste of time: he had been recalled from the embassy in London to assist in drafting the agenda for the conference, and I felt he owed a grumble to his conscience. For myself, I blessed every hour of delay that enabled us to shed the memories of the last five years and to forget the acerbities of the last five months. Lucien had long been an old enough friend to drop his diplomatic reserve in talking to me; and there were times, before and after the expeditions to Gallipoli and Salonica, before and after the United States entered the war, before and after the Italian reverse and the Russian collapse,

when the alliance would have been severed if we had been responsible for it. Now, as I told him, this brief spell of dissipation had saved us from becoming stale. With Victor Boscarelli, from the Italian embassy, and Clifford van Oss, from the American Red Cross, we formed a private international alliance, each entertaining the others by turn and all swearing friendships that death itself would be powerless to sunder. A critic might have been puzzled to say whether Clifford's Italian was worse than my French; but our radiant good-will transcended the halting interpretation of words, and I felt a warmer liking for my neighbours than I had ever, in my pitiable insularity, been able to achieve before with men of another race.

"At last," I pointed out to Lucien, "we can talk amicably without discussing whether one country did all the work and another made all the money. There's a real understanding. France, England, America: all are at the very top of their prestige. If we can pull together, we can make what we like of the peace."

"I still think we ought to have gone on to Berlin," he persisted. "However, if you back us up and if we can get what we want without it, I shan't complain."

"Remember you're all coming to stay with us at Cannes," I said.

And, on that word, we set out for a house where the rumour of war and world-settlement seemed never to have penetrated.

Looking back on the three months which we spent with my mother, I am in one way reminded of the two years which Jack Waring passed as a prisoner in Germany. So complete was our isolation that, when we emerged from it, we found a world of peace hardly less different from the one we had left than Jack's war-world of tanks and gothas and tear-shells was different from the one which was blotted out in the early days of 1915. In the first weeks we saw no visitors; we read no papers; and, when we were rested enough to think and talk, we turned to the days when the world had last been at peace and speculated why the war had come and how other wars were to be prevented.

The last of my reasons for hurrying abroad was that I could take up no work in England until I had discharged the task which Violet Loring imposed on me within a few hours of her husband's death. As the world in which we had been brought up was swallowed by the war, she asked me to set down my memories of it for the later instruction of her boy. I had carried my account to 1915; but, after that, the mass of material was too great for me to attack in odd hours after my work at the Admiralty. A steamer-trunk,

filled with memoirs and monographs, kept me company to Cannes; and, in the few weeks that remained before my cousin came to demand her bond, I philosophized about the deluge and described the world before it and speculated about the world that would appear when the waters had subsided.

Small wonder if at this time, with my mother placidly dipping into Victorian biographies and with Barbara dreaming over her share in the history I was writing, we knew little and cared less about what was happening in Paris and London, Washington and Rome! While Lucien de Grammont drew the lines of a recreated Europe, I was living again through the years when Sandy Loring's father and I were fellow-fags and fellow-monitors at Melton, when we were freshmen at Oxford, when we ventured together into Edwardian London. The dead so came to life, as I wrote about them, that sometimes I would lay down my pen and forget the war for the days before David O'Rane was blinded and Tom Dainton killed, the days when every one was quoting Barbara's latest epigram and discussing Val Arden's last novel, the days when Sonia Dainton broke a heart a week and an engagement a season. Musing of days and nights softened by time, I felt that never had there been such years in the life of any country, never had there been women and men like those of our generation.

"In two or three years I expect everything will be very much as it was before the war," predicted Barbara.

"The people will be different," I answered; "and they'll make everything else different. Sandy's world will never be like Jim's."

And then I fell to wondering what Sandy's father would have made of the new dispensation which was taking shape before our eyes. He and I, who agreed on little else, agreed that we were saying good-bye, that last night at Loring Castle, to a phase in history. The old ruling families had lost their power since the first marquess commanded his fifteen seats in the unreformed House of Commons and "Trimmer" Crawleigh dodged in and out of George the Fourth's ministries, leaving a broken government in his train; under a new distribution of wealth they might lose their prestige. The *arrivistes* of the nineties, who had floated on waves of beer and diamonds into the arid heights of a depressed territorial aristocracy, would find their places taken, in the nineteen-twenties, by social adventurers of ambition equal to Lady Dainton's and of wealth greater than Sir Adolph Erckmann's. A new class of politician, officer, publicist and financier must inevitably be brought to birth by the new demands of public life: the sons of the new men would quickly preponderate in the old schools and universities, their daughters would soon come to dominate a new society. That which I had

denounced, in my hotter radical days, as "privilege" would count for less in Sandy Loring's life.

It was not within my terms of reference to say if the one order was in any way better or worse than the other: it was different. My haphazard recollections, covering a period of about fifteen years, were chosen solely for the light which they threw on the generation that was of military age when war broke out.

"*As*," I wrote in conclusion, "*the French Revolution challenged and overthrew the territorial aristocracies and feudal kingships of the middle ages, so the Great War challenged the systems which the French Revolution had evolved in their place.*"

There—for the moment—I stopped, for no one could say what systems the Great War would evolve in place of those which it overturned. Later, in brooding over these reminiscences of a vanished generation, I began to read a moral into them; and, on the morning of Violet's arrival, when Barbara bent over my chair to ask if I had finished my work, I had to answer that, so far as I could see, it was only beginning.

"If I'm right," I explained, "the old governing classes are being superseded, under our eyes . . ."

"The new lot will pick up the old ideas," she interrupted.

"That's just what I'm afraid of," I said.

3

My discovery—the one incontrovertible moral that I could read into the war—had been made by others before me; and I doubt not that some at least of them reached it by the same road after toiling conscientiously through the official explanations and apologies which every foreign office in Europe issued in proof of its own innocence. The polychromatic outpouring of white papers, green books and red books was succeeded by a vaster flood of unofficial polemics, in which defensive chancellors and prime ministers, field-marshals and admirals demonstrated that some one else was responsible for the war and that peace would have been preserved or victory secured if only their advice had been followed. To the strategical arguments I paid little attention: nothing will make me understand strategy by land or sea, and it was hardly relevant to my main enquiry. The diplomatic defence, on the other hand, I studied with care, deciding—as, I imagine, most people outside Germany have decided independently—that, while Berlin was guilty of starting the conflagration, every other power lent a hand in piling up an

inflammable heap of suspicions, jealousies and misunderstandings. It was this conclusion that pointed me my moral.

"And what do you make of it all?," my mother asked as I laid aside the last of these bitter, aggressive manifestoes.

"Well," I said, "whoever made the war, it's clear that no single country, no single form of government was able to keep the peace."

With that conclusion no one could disagree.

"In contrasting Jim's world with the present," I told Violet Loring, when my essay was ready for her criticism, "the outstanding lesson is that the government of man by his fellow-man has broken down in every form that's been tried. You had constitutional monarchy in England, absolutism in Russia, a republic in France and America, a feudal kingship in Austria-Hungary. None of them could perform the elementary duty of protecting the life and liberty of their citizens. Those who took no part lived on the sufferance of the belligerents. From China to Honduras . . ."

"When once war breaks out . . ." Violet began helplessly.

"The governments that allowed war to break out failed in their first duty," I maintained. "By negligence or malignity or impotence they're responsible for the death or mutilation of some ten million human beings. It's not enough to put the blame on Germany or the kaiser or Bernhardi. If a homicidal maniac runs amok in England, we blame the police for not stopping him."

While my cousin turned the pages of my manuscript, I flung a similar cold douche of first principles over the head of Philip Hornbeck, who had come to us for a week between dismantling his old department and erecting the new.

"If you'd had a bigger police-force," he suggested, "your homicidal maniac would have had no run for his money. If we'd smashed the German navy while it was building . . ."

"And turned homicidal maniac on our own account?," I interrupted.

"If you like to put it that way. It's not much use arguing with me, George, because I'm one of the old impenitents who believe that there will always be wars and what not. *Admitting* that it's the duty of all governments to keep the peace, *admitting* that every government has failed in its duty, what are you going to do then?"

"Try a different kind of government," I answered.

"A soviet?," he asked. "If the aristocracy and *bourgeoisie* have failed, that's all you have left."

"I'd sooner have a soviet that thought it could keep peace than an aristocracy that admits it can't."

"You should go and live in Russia," Hornbeck recommended.

The battle-piece which I was composing for Violet seemed naturally to take the form of a triptych; and the first two panels shewed that the governing classes in all countries had failed to keep the peace and had bungled the business of making war. When the third panel came to be painted, I wondered whether they would be more successful in making peace.

"Is this going to be a *lasting* settlement?," I asked Lucien de Grammont, when he came to refresh himself after his work on the agenda.

"We're doing our best," he answered. "As I told you at the time, the war stopped too soon. If we're to secure that France is never again to be menaced, we must to some extent carry the war on into the peace."

"Do you still think there will be another war in fifty years' time?"

"I won't pin myself to a date, but you'll never abolish war."

"Then," I said, "it's time you made way for somebody who will. The old systems, the old diplomacy, the old men who ran the old system, are a self-confessed failure."

Lucien twirled his neat moustache and addressed to his neatly-shod feet a muttered confidence about doctrinaire idealists. Gerald Deganway, for the honour of the old diplomacy as practised in the British Foreign Office, screwed his eye-glass into place and exclaimed:

"I say, you know, George, you're an absolute bolshevist!"

And Hornbeck administered the most damaging criticism by accepting my premises and proceeding to a diametrically opposite conclusion.

"You're proving too much, old son," he argued. "I agree that governments should prevent wars, I agree that every government in the world failed to prevent this last one. That only shews you're asking governments to do an impossibility. Take every nation in turn, from Belgium to the States, and tell me how the government of any one could have kept out of the war. When once the racket begins . . ."

“We must go back a stage, then,” I said, “to the time before it begins. We must have a ‘will to peace’.”

“Didn’t we have that in England?,” asked Violet. “Honour apart, we couldn’t afford to stay out in 1914.”

“You must go beyond England,” I told her. “We want an international ‘will to peace’; a solemn league and covenant, not between foreign secretaries, but between the units of the world’s cannon-fodder. War will end of its own accord when you can’t fill your armies.”

“And how will you set your solemn league and covenant to work?,” Hornbeck enquired sceptically.

I could make no reply until I had found more time to think; time, too, perhaps, to talk with my uncle Bertrand of the old Disarmament League and of the propaganda that issued from *Peace* office before the war. When I told Barbara that, so far as I could see, my work was only beginning, I felt that in all likelihood the task before our generation would be to create a ‘will to peace’ out of the present disgust with war. If history was human nature repeating itself, there had been the same disgust at the end of every great war; but the memory of that disgust faded quickly. It was no match for the urgent plea that honour or security was at stake; no match for the cynical resignation of those who said that there always had been wars and always would be.

“Of course you’re right to try,” was the utmost encouragement that I could win even from Violet, “but these Hague Conventions and things haven’t done much good, have they?”

“No one has yet appealed to the rank-and-file,” I answered. “No one has appealed while the full horror of war was vividly remembered. No one has shewn the dumb millions of the world how much alike they all are, how they swim together and sink together. In all I’ve been reading these last few weeks I’ve been amazed by the sameness of conditions in all countries. If we can work on that till the sameness becomes a oneness . . .”

In aiming at perspective for my second panel, I tried to set my own impressions and experiences of the war beside those of the cosmopolitan population that floated through Cannes in these first weeks of the armistice. When we had passed the stage of fancying that our individual histories were unique, I was more struck by the similarities of what I heard than by the differences. Necessarily, the islander and the continental must always disagree on foreign politics; and in Cannes I met for the first time the

chronic terror that is begotten of land frontiers. “It’s all very well for you,” I was told by Italians, Greeks, Poles and Dutch: “You’re an island.” With allowance for this, I felt that the war had left on every country an almost identical mark. The Austrians and Germans whom I met in Monte Carlo, old journalistic allies—for the most part—, were as bitterly convinced that the war had been forced upon them as we in England were convinced that they had forced it on us; but, when we had agreed to differ, their description of the last four years in their own countries might have been applied, almost without a word changed, to England. There were, I discovered, idlers, *embusqués* and adventurers of both sexes in all classes everywhere; and it was amusing, for one who thought of a German alternately as a sheep and a genius, to hear the tribute of Austria and Germany to our more than Teutonic docility and enterprise. France had her rapacious profiteers, Prussia her bloated munition-makers. The drinking that was said to obtain in English high-places could be matched by the drugging that was reported to be corrupting Austrian society. I was assured, without calling for proof, that there was little to choose for courage and endurance between the best troops of any two countries; and, when the public morale broke, any one class in its own way cut as sorry a figure as any other. If I despaired of the populace that believed the grotesque stories in the Pemberton-Billing case, I despaired more profoundly of Lady Dainton when she told me that Prince Louis of Battenberg had been executed in the Tower for treason.

“The moral is,” I told Violet Loring, “that, under an abnormal strain, the sublime and the dastardly go hand-in-hand. Five years ago, we didn’t know the meaning of danger or suffering. To face it without breaking, we called up the primitive beast that lies inside all of us: he was a very brave beast, but he was also very treacherous, savage, credulous.” . . .

As Violet turned my pages, I looked through a palisade of palm-trees to the sparkling blue of the Mediterranean and filled my lungs with warm, scented air. Cannes, after London, was like the open street after an opium-den; and, in thinking of the strange shapes seen in the long, mad half-light of the war, I almost fancied that I had been dreaming. The political intrigue and chicanery that began with the high-explosive controversy in 1915 and continued until the 1918 election was incredible unless one likened it to a panic on board a burning ship. If Violet had told me four years earlier that one common acquaintance would be imprisoned for trafficking in cocaine and that another would commit suicide to avoid prosecution for forgery, I should not have believed her. I could now hardly believe my own certain knowledge until I remembered that every war has claimed its civil casualties.

“How long does it take to chain up your primitive beast?,” Violet asked. “I mean, . . . these are the people that the war has left us to live with and work with.” . . .

To that I had no answer ready. It was easier to say that Sonia O’Rane would not have run away from her husband before the war than to be certain she would not run away again. And it seemed idle to talk of international conferences and a reconstructed world, of a new spirit and a ‘will to peace’ while the passions of the war were still unfettered.

4

My triptych, displaying—in its centre—the war and—on either side—the peace that preceded and should follow the war, spared no space for dividing or linking frame-work: though I was working in the transition-period between full war and full peace, I made little attempt to describe the condition in which we all found ourselves at the moment when a truce was called.

To some extent—in these blissful, lazy days, when we had nothing to do but sleep and eat and smoke and gossip—we filled the blank by discussing the present and future states of our friends. My battle-piece was subjected to a more general scrutiny than I had intended; and for many rather embarrassing days I was challenged to defend myself against critics who opened wide fields of speculation with the words:

“*If*, as you think, the old political game is really played out . . .”; or

“*If* you’re right about the redistribution of wealth . . .”

In the morning, as we idled in long chairs on a glowing marble verandah; at night, as we sat in a half-circle while Barbara played to us; in leisurely afternoon walks and occasional peripatetic sessions from one bedroom to another, we discussed war-literature and war-religion, the new position of women, the fate of the demobilized soldier and the day-to-day life which we expected to lead when peace was proclaimed.

Most of our predictions were unbelievably wild, in their assumption either that everything or that nothing would be the same as before the war; and our discussions were so formless that they could never be summarized or recorded. When we abandoned conjecture for the concrete plans that each was making for himself, I felt that—in the words used at a dinner to Eric Lane in New York—‘the convulsion’s as great, when you turn a soldier into a civilian, as when you turn a civilian into a soldier.’ Sam Dainton, after ten years’ service, was leaving the army, “to prey on society”, as he put it.

Deganway was saying good-bye to the Foreign Office; Barbara's cousin, John Carstairs, to the Diplomatic. Professionally, the climax in both their lives had been reached and passed; the first wanted to make money, the second to look after his estates.

At this time I began to detect the rise of that adventurer-class at which history points a punctual finger after every great war but which I somehow did not expect to see in my own time. When I was called back to London, I found new men in Fleet Street and the City, new names at Covent Garden and in the candidates' books of the clubs; at Cannes I discerned, in the good-looking person of Violet's brother Laurence, an adventurer in the making. As I became acquainted with his friends in the course of the next three years, I saw the natural, perhaps the necessary, evolution of a type which has not yet found its place in the social void. My cousin had been snatched from Melton on his eighteenth birthday and thrust into the Irish Guards, where his precocious development as a man-of-the-world had been won at the expense of his small aptitude for learning. The Hunter-Oakleighs could not afford to maintain him in idleness; and Laurence, recognizing this, quartered himself on Loring House and allowed Violet or any other of his relations to maintain him. In theory, he was reading for the bar; and a text-book on Roman law was always at hand to rebut the charge of idleness. In practice, he blandly awaited pecuniary compensation from a society which had taught him expensive tastes at a time when he might have been teaching himself the means of gratifying them. The army had paralysed his initiative; he believed —or affected to believe—that, at one-and-twenty, his life-work was done; and already he had learned that personal charm and rich friends were a fair substitute for industry.

"I wish you'd advise me about Laurie," said Violet one day, with a troubled glance down the verandah to the bed of down cushions where her brother was devoting to *La Vie Parisienne* the hours demanded by the institutes of Justinian. "He's rather a problem."

"The whole of his generation is a problem," I said. "He stands between Jim, who's dead, and Sandy, who's still a child. He and his like have already borne the burden of the war; now he'll have to bear the burden of clearing up after the war."

My proposal found less than no favour in the hearing to which it was directed.

"I'm not bearing any more burdens till I've made myself secure," Laurence declared. "Nor's any one else. Half the men I know have come

back to see another fellow doing their job; the other half are like me and never had a job to come back to. And, while we were away, you let a pack of women into all the professions," he grumbled.

"Laurie will marry a rich wife," Sam Dainton prophesied. "I'd do the same myself, only I'm so precious ugly."

"That doesn't matter when men are scarce," said Laurence reassuringly; "but I'd much prefer it if *you* married the rich wife and let me blow in as the *tertium quid*. That's the way all the best marriages are arranged nowadays."

"I wonder what the modern girl will turn into," drawled Philip Hornbeck at a tangent.

"The modern girl is a contradiction in terms," answered Lucien de Grammont. "To modernize yourself is to change; and woman never changes, she only adapts herself."

"She adapted herself in the war, good and plenty," said Sam Dainton with authority.

"She was brought up to know nothing," rejoined Barbara; "she thought she knew everything. With luck she'll learn enough to bring her daughters up better than she was brought up herself."

"This from you!," Violet laughed.

"It's only now that I see what narrow squeaks I had," said Barbara reflectively. "Whenever a girl makes a mess of her life, I believe it's the parents who are to blame."

While this theme was developed in the uneasy hearing of my mother, Violet took a last look at my manuscript before handing it back to me.

"You say nothing about religion," she commented in an undertone. "It's the biggest thing in life for many people."

"For women more than for men," I submitted. While we were still at school, Darwin, Huxley and Renan were made accessible to us in cheap reprints. I have felt, ever since, that, if my salvation depends on faith in something that ignores ordinary rules of evidence, I would prefer not to be saved. "And you couldn't have had a bloodier war, if we'd all been followers of Anti-Christ. By a paradox, the only people who tried to live up to their religion were persecuted as conscientious objectors."

"What will you put in its place?," Violet asked.

I should only have hurt her feelings if I had suggested that Christianity might now be given a trial: to her, that faith is synonymous with the Holy Roman Catholic Church; to me, it is the service of man, and the Christian churches with their deadening forms and dead rules, their deferred punishments and rewards, their proscriptions and feuds and exclusive salvations have gone far to stifle Christianity.

"If people thought less about the next world," I answered, "they might make a more tolerable place of this."

And it was in some such words that I ended my criticism of the war. The folly and suspicion and malevolence of all the nations had made it possible; when it came, all the nations engaged in it exhibited much the same endurance, if simultaneously they exhibited much the same savagery.

"Well, is it 'the Great War' or 'the Great Waste'?," Violet asked. "Jim was over age when he gave up the staff. They didn't want him to go. He felt that every one who got so much out of England in peace *must* go. *I* felt that, too. I shouldn't like to think I'd helped to have him killed for no purpose."

If we had taken a poll of the eager disputants at the other end of the verandah, I doubt if the verdict would have satisfied her. On their own admission, the mailed fist of Philip Hornbeck, the diplomacy of Lucien de Grammont and the first-hand experience of war which Laurence and Sam Dainton had won on four fronts provided no more security than the religion of Violet Loring that another war, equally or more cruel, unnecessary and futile, should not break out as soon as the memories of one generation were grown dim and the exhaustion of one generation had been repaired.

"Doesn't that depend on the people who've survived?," I asked. "Until the conscriptionists turned a crusade into a hunt for cannon-fodder, the war had a moral grandeur. Whether Jim's death served a useful purpose for any one but himself depends on our power to recapture the spirit of 1914."

For this elastic formula I can claim little credit. The cynic is now sure of his laugh if he mocks the idea of "a war to end war"; but I saw too much of my contemporaries in 1914 to join the later chorus of fashionable disparagement. Before their first idealism became jaded, the young men who had been reared in an atmosphere of war-preparations and war-scares, who aspired to a world orderly and a life beautiful and who saw their aspirations thwarted by men too old for hope or faith, resolved to create from the war a world of which they need not be ashamed. They enlisted in the service of man. From their deaths I learned the phrase. One of them, the last and best

of my friends, who was literally and awfully crucified, came back blinded and broken to tell me that he was unrepentant.

"*I was in New York*," O'Rane wrote at this time, "*when the armistice was proclaimed. If you'd shouted 'as you were' from the Woolworth Tower, you couldn't have scattered people more quickly. 'As you were before the war' is the general feeling. I expect it's been the same in England. We must do better than that.*" . . .

"I'm not sure that I know what you mean," said Violet.

"And I'm not sure that I can put it into words," I answered. "In general terms, no sacrifice was too great in the war; I want people to feel no sacrifice is too great in peace. It's an empty victory if a high proportion of the victors are diseased, hungry, verminous, discontented. Any one of imagination must be ashamed of the slums in our big cities; but we *won't* make the effort or the sacrifice to cure them. I want to fan the crusading spirit of 1914 back to life. . . . Before that, though, we must make sure that we aren't going to drift into another war. That means a crusade covering the whole inhabited world."

"I don't know how you'll begin."

"Nor do I yet. I may be able to tell you more in a week's time. Have you heard that the O'Ranes are coming here? He cabled to say that he was in urgent need of my advice. I cabled back that I was in much more urgent need of his."

Glancing at my manuscript for the last time before sending it to be typed, I felt that, in a week's time, I might know better how to paint my third panel. We had to see now whether those who had failed to avert war were capable of ending war.

5

Though I charged O'Rane at the time with disturbing the repose of our retreat, I can see now that, even before I invited him to Cannes, I was resigned to moving at least one stage nearer to the heart of politics. It is true that my uncle Bertrand's appeal for help in his election was answered with a lame reference to Barbara's health; simultaneously I told Frank Jellaby, without a trace of lameness or indecision, that I was too little in sympathy with the liberal party to fight a seat on my own account; all the time, however, I was conscious of a chilling remoteness. I did not want to go back; I was thankful that Barbara seemed content to vegetate; but, if I was

right in thinking that the fruits of the war remained to be gathered, I was right in thinking that they could not be gathered in Cannes.

I hoped that O'Rane, with his knowledge of other countries, would tell me whether my derided 'will to peace' was practicable or even necessary. If he shared my misgivings, I wanted his help in planning a campaign that would be bounded only by the confines of the inhabited earth and would engage our energies for the rest of our lives. A train of reasoning is sometimes so persuasive in its premises and overwhelming in its conclusion that human intelligence rejects it without argument; and a train of this kind was presented to me on the eve of the armistice, when Hornbeck declared in succeeding breaths that another war would be synonymous with the end of the world and that nothing could prevent another war. His first premise was substantiated by all the evidence of the late war; his second was at least supported by every soldier and statesman whose memoirs I had been reading for the last month. The syllogism could only be refuted by a general strike against war. This was my revelation and mission; and I had suffered too long from the revelations and missions of others to trust my own until I had been put to the question.

The O'Ranes arrived, with my sister and her husband, a week before Christmas. It was characteristic of the times that I should first set eyes on my brother-in-law two years after his marriage. Beryl wrote in 1916 to say that she was engaged to a certain Gervaise Maxwell, whom she had nursed at the Lorings' hospital in Scotland. They parted after a week's honeymoon: Beryl went back to House of Steynes, Gervaise rejoined his battalion in Mesopotamia; and they met for the second time four days after the armistice.

Now they were coming to exploit my influence in finding work for Gervaise; and I, knowing the slender proportions of that influence and recollecting the claims already advanced by Sam Dainton and my cousin Laurence, wondered helplessly whether the government did wisely in releasing men from the army before they had found civil employment. For a week before leaving London my telephone had been agitated by the voices of anxious friends who assured me that they could be demobilized at once if I would invent some urgent private business for them. "Good pay, light work and decent holidays," they all said. I suppose the army let them go because the army could not retain them. At Wilminster and Yareham the troops demobilized themselves and walked home; at Enstaple and Durncliffe they threatened to mutiny if they were ordered back to France. It was one thing, however, to kick a uniform into a cupboard; and something quite different to

find civilian clothes that would fit. Gervaise, I decided, must wait until I had discussed with O'Rane my own plans. It might be that, within a few months, I should want all the men I could get; or it might be that I should be cultivating my garden in Ireland. I must wait, too, until I had heard O'Rane's proposals. Eighteen months had passed since I hunted him out to America, nominally to lecture on the war and really to make a fresh start with Sonia after her disaster with Vincent Grayle. In that time I had purposely not enquired how they were getting on, as a fresh start might well be the fresh start only to more trouble. The woman who jilts two men, marries a third, runs away with a fourth and returns with his child, all before the age of thirty-three, has either too much emotion in her nature or else too little.

I must confess to a feeling of embarrassment as the train drew in. The feeling passed as Sonia waved ecstatically from her window and announced breathlessly that no one would believe what a success she had had in Paris, that she was insolvent, that this no longer mattered, that she had the most wonderful news for me, that she was going to have an unprecedented success in London, that it was heavenly to see me again and that she was really going to enjoy herself in Cannes.

A woman who lived only for the moment was not likely to be disturbed by regrets or fears; and, as Sonia swung down from the train into my arms, her eyes were as limpid and innocent, her lips were as moistly red and provocative, as when I took her to supper at her first parties fifteen years before. Then and now, she was of those who make the world take them at their own valuation. Then she had babbled of her earliest ball-room triumphs; now she described the men who had thrown themselves at her feet from San Francisco to Paris.

"Then you enjoyed yourself?," I asked, when she paused for breath.

"*They* enjoyed *me*," she answered complacently. "I don't think they'd ever seen anything quite like me before. Oh, George! Has David told you our news? We met Mr. Stornaway in London; and he wants us to come and work with him! Say, kid, can you beat it? I asked him what the work was; and he said it was just helping him to spend money. If there's one thing I *do* know about . . . We're going to be the new big noise in London. Collect David; and we'll tell you all about it!"

If my embarrassment returned as I went forward to give her husband a hand, it vanished as he took up the interrupted tale. In voice and manner there was nothing to hint that he had ever been estranged from his radiant wife; and I decided that, in a sense, he too lived only for the moment. When

we first met, a small boy without a friend in the world had decided that he must put himself to school. His father had been killed, fighting for Greece against Turkey; and David made his way to England, with enough money for one term, by working his passage round the world. When he had sucked in all that Melton and Oxford could give him, he banished them into the past, as he had already banished his wanderings, and concentrated all his energies on making money; when the money was made, he turned his back for ever on the oil-fields of Mexico and devoted himself to English politics until the war imposed on him a more urgent duty. On the day that he was discharged from hospital, blinded and maimed, he called to tell me that he had already secured new work. When Sonia left him, he set himself to get her back; and, when she returned, I am sure that he set himself with equal singleness of purpose to forget that they had ever been parted.

Now he could think of nothing but Raymond Stornaway's proposal.

"That's where I want your advice," he explained gravely, as though in all his thirty-five tempestuous years of life he had ever taken advice from anybody.

"And I want yours," I told him. "I'm sorry to find Raymond butting in: I expect to need your help much more."

That evening after dinner, when the others had gone away to gamble, we talked of the war and of that other evening, when we stood on the dividing ridge between two worlds. Of the men who dined at Loring Castle on the last night of peace, he and I alone had survived. We talked of the war that was over as then we had talked of the war that was coming. I quoted him the words in which he had described his vision of what the world might be after the war; and I challenged him to say whether he still believed in the perfectibility of man.

"I've acquired a lot of patience in the last four years," he answered.

Then I tested him with Hornbeck's prediction that wars would be fought so long as the human race survived to fight them.

"I want you to help me organize a general strike against war," I said, as I began to blow out the candles. Then I paused to frame a question which I had kept unasked since our last evening of peace: "D'you remember blowing out the candles that night?" He nodded. "You left two. Why?"

As he hesitated, I saw that he was frowning. I saw also that, like the rest of us, he had aged in the last five years, though the thin face had its old passionate vitality and the fine black hair its old gay disorder. Slight as ever,

boyish as ever, he was none the less lined with the mental and physical tortures of the war. His very hesitation was a subtle mark of decline, as though for the first time in his life he doubted himself.

"I knew in my bones that only two of us would come through," he muttered. "I should be one; I couldn't make a guess at the other."

"There aren't more than half-a-dozen left out of all our generation," I told him. "The old club-groups at Oxford. . . . I can't look at them."

"And I couldn't see 'em if I *did* look. Not that I need to be reminded of them." . . . The unseeing eyes flashed in sudden exaltation. "What death takes away, George, is very little by comparison with what he leaves! The men I've loved best in the world have been my father and your uncle and old Burgess and you and Jim. Three of you, thank God!, are alive: I stayed with Burgess for his last night before he retired from Melton; but you're no more alive than my father and Jim. Nothing can take away the time I spent with them. . . . I shan't see again in this world, but nothing can take away all that I've seen in the past. I still see the men I recruited, the men who trained with me, though I helped to bury more than a few."

"Some of them were here to-night," I said.

"Yes! And what death has done is just to put their bodies out of action . . . . That means there are fewer hands and more work." . . .

As I led him to the door, O'Rane's fingers ran lightly down my arm.

"It's about twenty years since you first came to stay with us," I reminded him.

"I suppose it must be. Good, full years."

"I was feeling middle-aged till you came. Middle-aged and depressed."

He laughed and gripped my hand:

"We've no time to grow middle-aged. It's the next twenty years that will count. We must pull together. In a sense we *are* the last two."

As I blew out the remaining candles, the room once more seemed to fill with our friends of other days. We were indeed almost the only survivors; and I could not tell these ghosts that they had given their lives, I could not tell O'Rane that he had given his sight, to no purpose.

"Think over what we've been saying," I suggested. "Tell me if you can see any reason why just such another war shouldn't break out with just as little reason."

“If it does, then this war wasn’t worth while. . . . And it’s our business to make it worth while,” he answered.

CHAPTER THREE

THE DAWNING OF MORN

" 'Rise up, rise up, thou Satan, upon the Earth to go,
And prove the peace of Dives if it be good or no;
For all that he hath planned
We deliver to thy hand,
As thy skill shall serve to break it or bring low.' "

RUDYARD KIPLING: *The Peace of Dives*.

1

Average, sensual man is no match for an enthusiast. When O'Rane wrote that he wanted to ask my advice, vague instinct warned me that he wanted the costlier, if no more valuable, privilege of my personal cooperation.

And it was my intention that he should cooperate with me. If I seemed a doctrinaire to Lucien, a fanatic to Hornbeck and a 'bolshevist'—whatever that might mean—to Deganway, I seemed to myself the mildest revolutionary that had ever schemed to carry out a revolution by deputy. When, at this time, people talked of "winning the peace" and asked what we meant to do, I felt and said that no active man or woman who had survived the war was justified in sitting idle. I was ready to write, speak and subscribe money on behalf of any organization that would rouse the world to the danger which I saw threatening it. I would work for my "will to peace" as others worked, in the years that followed and along lines which I deplored, for the League of Nations. I lacked the fire and the endurance, however, to inspire a crusade. This, I felt, was O'Rane's part.

Nevertheless, from our first conversation I divined that we were thinking on different planes. To "make the war worth while", in my view, was to secure, first and foremost, that there should be no future wars. Perhaps because he had spent so many months in America, where by now the world seemed already to have been made "safe for democracy", perhaps because he had seen too much of the late war to fancy that any one wanted more of it, O'Rane assumed the end at which I was aiming.

“If the war is to be made ‘worth while’,” he pronounced at the end of our first night together, “we have . . . in some way . . . to make England . . .”

“ ‘A land fit for heroes’ and what not,” Philip Hornbeck interrupted flippantly.

After that, though we conducted our debates in private, I felt that O’Rane’s enthusiasm was sapping my will to the point when I should be drawn from my own leisurely crusade and pressed into his. If, at the end of ten days, he returned to London without me, I can only explain his failure by saying that in the meantime I had fallen to the assault of a yet more formidable enthusiast.

2

“You heard what Sonia said about Stornaway’s proposal?,” O’Rane began on the second day.

The rest of the party had disappeared to Monte Carlo; and I was imprisoned in the shade of a palm-tree until I surrendered or bolted.

“He made the same proposal to me,” I said. “I turned it down because I thought there was more important work nearer to hand.”

“Our work won’t lack in importance.”

“Then you’ve accepted his offer?,” I asked. “You’re giving up the House?”

“I’m committed in principle,” he answered. “Yes, I shan’t stand again: this coupon business leaves no scope for the independent member. Why the prime minister wants an election at all, when his position is impregnable . . .”

“He wants to keep it impregnable,” I said. “Well, you’re going in with Raymond to succeed where Deryk Lancing and his father and every millionaire in history has so far failed? It’s easier to make money honestly than to spend it wisely, you’ll find. How much is there?”

“About twelve hundred thousand a year.”

“You can do a lot of harm with that,” I said. “How will you spend it?”

“For the first year or two it’s ear-marked for universities and hospitals.”

“And after that?”

"We might make the war worth while," he laughed. "But you must help. The trouble with England at present is that we've so little sense of responsibility. Isn't it about time we educated people up to a civic conscience? In the war, I admit . . ."

"You found a hundred men who would die for their country to one who would live for it."

"Because, in peace, we call people 'good citizens' if they obey the laws and pay their taxes. That's not enough for a civilized state, George! Good God, when a man commits murder, we hire another man to hang him! It's you and I who ought to be hanged for not teaching him our own reverence for law. We hire people to persecute other people for beating their wives or neglecting their children or concealing their diseases! It's *we* who ought to be persecuted. Illness, to me, is the wound inflicted on society by the indifference of the healthy. Poverty. Degradation." . . .

"And your civic conscience . . .?," I reminded him.

"Another word for imagination! You'd be ashamed of yourself if your tenants in Ireland died of want; if the men drank or the women turned prostitutes. Yet I've seen sights in different parts of the world that would make your blood run cold. Famines and pestilences and massacres. Things we don't allow in England: we've got *that* far. Now it's time we went farther. If the war's to be worth while, you must satisfy yourself that what has been saved was worth saving."

"But how on earth are you to do it?"

In other days I had heard Aylmer Lancing, as he wheeled himself with slow impatience about his workroom, muttering of a dread project to corner the raw material of high explosives throughout the world. Some Central American republic was causing him trouble; and he had decided to make future wars impossible. Later, I had been present when Raymond Stornaway schemed to force up the standard of living for manual labour by paying uneconomic wages in one place and raising a storm of envious discontent in every other. Both men had been wonderfully convincing; but they had done nothing. Behind O'Rane's shining eyes, in a stain of shadow between two white sheets of sunshine, I seemed now to see Raymond's tired face at his luncheon-party on Armistice Day.

"So far," said O'Rane thoughtfully, "no one's gone about it in the right way."

"It was not for want of intelligence. Can it be that the modern world has grown too fast for any one to control it?"

If I had not parted with my little monograph on the war, I should have liked to explore this idea that civilization was bursting like an overripe fruit. Everywhere, in my own lifetime, I had seen fourth-dimensional energy collecting in a world of three dimensions. At a far distance, I had watched the Harrimans and Carnegies and Rockefellers bowing under wealth too great for a single man's direction; and, since we began to raise men a hundred thousand at a time and to spend money at the rate of millions a day, I was convinced that we were operating forces which we could not control. For twenty years I had tried to "think imperially", but I doubt if Mr. Chamberlain himself would have recognized the British Empire as I saw it represented from my window at the Admiralty on Armistice Day: in fifty years it had changed to something that might become a federation of British states but had certainly ceased to be an empire. America had ceased to be a nation without becoming even a federation. When I heard of a gas that would destroy whole cities, when I read of private fortunes that could buy whole countries, I felt that the earth was hardly big enough for its Rockefellers and Hearsts and Fords; the Rockefellers and Hearsts and Fords themselves seemed hardly big enough for the monsters they had created.

"No one," said O'Rane, "has spent twelve hundred thousand a year to spread his own doctrines. We'll buy up derelict palaces like Braye and Eldridge; turn 'em into schools for the new poor who can't afford Eton and the new rich who can't get in. We'll stuff them with scholarships to attract the brightest wits; we'll have our subjects taught, as we want them taught, by giving prizes at Oxford and Cambridge. And, when the best men in every profession, every walk of life, are men who've been through our mill, we can convert the world."

What the text-books of a civic conscience were to be I did not enquire at this stage. If O'Rane aspired to make each man love his neighbour as himself, that was an aspiration towards which the Christian churches, usually with relatively greater wealth, often with the power of the sword and always with a grip on the fears and hopes of the faithful, had been working for nearly two thousand years.

"The late war," I propounded, "was not a good advertisement for Christian teaching."

"Because Christianity has never been brought to men's doors and into their lives.

'*What ragamuffin-saint*
Believes God watches him continually,
As he believes in fire that it will burn,
Or rain that it will drench him?'

I often wonder what would have happened to Christianity if it had come into the world with our modern means of communication."

We were still arguing when the rest of the party returned; and, until the brief winter twilight faded, we sat and spent Stornaway's money for him. To this day I can see the half-circle of light dresses and the fire-fly movements of the men's cigarettes; I can see faces white with avarice and eyes dark with excitement.

"Over a million a year . . .," Barbara gasped.

"I told you we were going to be the big new noise in London," said Sonia complacently. "George, of course, thinks he's very superior." . . .

"I only think it's a tremendous responsibility," I defended myself.

"If the job's too big, we can turn it down," said O'Rane.

"The others thought that, too," I warned him.

It was a strange discussion, which ultimately became a monologue of foreboding. As all the world knows, Aylmer Lancing made his first fortune by chance and then found that he could not help adding to it; after buying the site of a burnt city, he had to build a city on the site; he constructed railroads to feed his city and manufactured agricultural machinery to pay for the food. Daily, until his breakdown, he grew richer; and, in the long years of his dying, he was to find that, while the hospitals, the universities, the museums and galleries could live on his bounty for a year, after that he must invent new outlets.

"If your income's too big, you can always reduce your capital," Sam Dainton contributed. "I've been doing it for years."

"With a capital of five-and-twenty million?," I asked. "It's not a simple question of dropping bags of gold into the sea."

Early in his career, as I told them, Aylmer Lancing had tried to sell the New-Mexico-Montana Railroad when it was threatened by the South-Western Trunk. As he unloaded, the price fell; and, as the price fell, others unloaded too. A panic set in at one moment, to be ended the next by a rumour that Lancing was selling a bear. Up went the price; and Aylmer sold

his last share on a soaring market, to find himself the richer by several million dollars.

In time I tired of my Cassandra prophecies. Unlike his predecessors, Raymond Stornaway was face to face with a world in which every one would for many years be trying to pay for the war; and I fancy the annual income of the trust had been handsomely exceeded before each of us had explained the best method of spending it. While my sister Beryl, with her hospital training, launched vague projects for stamping out phthisis and cancer, Gervaise rebuilt the more unsightly parts of England. Hornbeck petitioned for an arctic expedition; and Barbara threw the stock-markets into confusion by paying off the national debt.

"I don't say it's impossible," I told them in conclusion, "but Lancing wasn't the only multimillionaire in history. Other people have faced his problem, but none of them solved it."

3

In the two years that followed, O'Rane and I were to hark back many times to this first discussion; but we suspended it now before I learned what part he was assigning me in his moral revolution. The invitations which I had scattered so impulsively in Paris matured disconcertingly at the same moment; and we were dragged from our lazy reminiscences and lazier speculations to disagree fiercely about frontiers of which I had never heard and which I suspected Lucien de Grammont of inventing.

As my mother's villa was by now full, our guests overflowed to the Regina and came to us only for meals and for a preliminary peace conference at sundown. Daily, with noses sensitized to the lure of gin and vermouth, the dark and voluble spokesmen of the new states collected to redraw the map of Europe. Through indolence or defective imagination, the rest of us took little part in the earlier discussions: the peace, like the armistice, would be based on President Wilson's fourteen points; and I for one was thankful that it was some one else's business to unravel these unpronounceable Balkan combinations and to delimit these undiscoverable Baltic states.

"The English are incurably insular!," Lucien fumed at short intervals. "If you would look at politics from a *European* point of view, George . . ."

"It was our love for the European point of view," Hornbeck retorted, "that made us shoulder a heavier burden than any other power. Our contribution in money, men, ships . . ."

Though the claim was inoffensive enough to my "insular" hearing, he was not allowed to finish. The war, we were assured in spluttering rotation, had been won wholly and solely by the Belgians in their first defence of Liège and Namur; wholly and solely by Russian numbers; wholly and solely by French endurance and strategy. Italy and Rumania had won it by intervening to prevent a stalemate; the United States by pouring in money and men at a time when the allies were exhausted.

For an hour the verandah was like a Tower of Babel attacked by a swarm of bees.

"If those who did most to win the war are going to have most voice in making the peace," Hornbeck prophesied as we went up to dress, "you'll be able to hear their deliberations in London. This dago-parliament is your remedy against future wars?"

If I left his gibe unanswered, it was because the tone—still more the unanimity—of these impassioned voices had disquieted me. I can hardly say too often that my mother's villa was a political vacuum: we all assumed that, when we emerged from it, we should find the armistice taking permanent form in a peace drawn on similar lines. I had not dreamed until this night that a new war was to be declared at the conference-table. Yet the demands of my excited young friends were of a kind that no signatory of the armistice could accept. Paul Sanguszko, I think, outdistanced all competitors by demanding a united Poland which in fact included more Germans than Poles; but Lucien, in his rape of Alsace, and Boscarelli, in his butchery of the Tyrol, were but a short head behind him.

"Aren't you rather forgetting your old panegyrics on nationality?," I asked Lucien.

"Are you handing back the German colonies?," he demanded in his turn.

"That's for our dominions to say. I don't know."

"*And* you don't care!," Lucien rejoined bitterly. "Now that the German navy is out of the way, nothing else matters!"

"With luck, George, this ought to be a peace to end peace," Hornbeck whispered.

Next day, I asked Barbara whether she was feeling homesick for England. I have been so long indentured to politics that the hint of a new development sets me fidgeting to be back amid the whispers of the clubs and the rumours of Fleet Street. Unless I could wholly discount the wild words of Lucien and his friends, the peace negotiations would develop very

differently from my expectations; and, whether I could discount him or not, I was realizing for the first time how far we had travelled since the day when we talked of fundamental understanding and a common effort for a common cause.

"Do you mean you're tired of this place?," asked Barbara with a smile.

"I was only feeling we were rather out of things," I answered. Then, as the "dago-parliament" collected round the cocktail-table for a morning session, I caught Hornbeck's eye. "Are people in England talking the same kind of criminal nonsense?"

"Well, the House is not sitting," he summed up judicially. "On the other hand, there's a general election raging. What you lose on the swings, you make on the roundabouts."

"If you *want* to go back . . .," Barbara was beginning with a sigh, when my mother came on to the verandah with a cable in her hand.

It was from my uncle Bertrand: if we had a bed to spare, might he occupy it? Otherwise, would we engage a room for him at the Regina? He must see me at once. A letter was following; but, if we did not know already, he had lost his seat.

In so far as any one moment can be separated from all that goes before and linked with all that follows after, I suppose this moment should be called decisive. Two minutes before, my wife had shewn me that she wished to remain abroad; from this moment hung the chain that drew us back to London. Twenty-four hours earlier I had been bandying academic crusades with O'Rane; forty-eight hours later I forsook my own crusade and extricated myself from his in order to join my uncle's.

"Bertrand *beaten*?," I cried. "That's been a safe radical seat for fifty years!"

"Where are the English papers?," O'Rane asked.

"It must have been an odd election if *he* couldn't get in," said Hornbeck.

Thanks to our isolation, I think we were all taken equally by surprise. As I read out the strength of the new parties, our tranquil garden became like a stricken field the day after battle. For a time we tried to count the dead; then we found it simpler to hunt for the living.

"Runciman's gone!," I cried. "McKenna's gone . . ." Then the tragedy changed to farce. "*Asquith's* gone!"

Laurence caught the paper from my hand:

"Coalition-liberal . . . Coalition-liberal . . . Coalition-unionist." . . .

"The old liberal party's dead!," I exclaimed. "There's a handful of independents." . . .

"Ireland, except in the north, has gone solid for Sinn Fein," Hornbeck read out over my shoulder.

"Labour will be the biggest single party in the House," said Laurence.

"You were asking if people in England were talking the same kind of rot," Hornbeck reminded me.

Then we sat silent as he pieced together this amazing election and rehearsed the battle-cries on which it had been won. As he read, I saw O'Rane rising slowly and facing north with one hand outstretched for an instant towards the bleeding and exhausted world on the far side of our sheltering mountains: from Denmark to Italy, from Ireland to Siberia, two continents were still fighting for life because one man, nearly five years before, had flung bombs at another.

"It'll take years to undo this," he muttered.

Hornbeck read remorselessly on.

"The Germans themselves couldn't improve on it," he commented at the end.

"But *we* can! We *must*!," O'Rane cried. "In Heaven's name . . . We went into this to secure the rights of small nations to a free existence; no one seems to care whether the big nations have a free existence or not! Could France and England follow out their destinies in the days when we lived under the shadow of this war? Can they do it now, when Europe is being sown with dragon's teeth?"

None answered him; but, as I waded later through the rhetoric of the election, I felt something of the helplessness that came over me four and a half years earlier, when one telegram after another shewed us that peace was slipping momentarily farther from our reach. The old dispensation could not avert war and could not make war; was this the third panel of my triptych and should we have to admit that the old dispensation could not make peace?

We should all of us, I suppose, have been less thrown off our balance, if we had been given the least warning how the election was being conducted.

Writing four years afterwards, I seem to be claiming an exceptional wisdom for our criticism at this time: section by section, the electorate that backed the 1918 coalition has withdrawn its support, though my old liberal colleagues made no sign of protest at the time. Little by little, the government itself swallowed its own rash words. The wildest fire-eater says now what Hornbeck and Laurence, O'Rane and I—a sufficiently heterogeneous group!—were saying in the last days of December four years ago. Our views were an accident of geography, for we were living in a political vacuum; an accident of history, too, for in our serious moments we based our expectations on the settlement of Vienna, believing that we in our generation were neither less magnanimous nor more insane than the contemporaries of Castlereagh.

"If this is to be the atmosphere of the peace conference . . ." Hornbeck muttered.

"These," I reminded O'Rane, "are the people you're going to educate up to a civic conscience."

"I must be getting back to London," was all he would answer.

I was reminded irresistibly of a similar party, similarly dispersing in the first days of August four and a half years earlier. We had all said then that we must get back to London; we could none of us have said what we expected to do there.

"You'll wait till Bertrand comes," I begged.

"Yes. I don't suppose a day or two more or less will make much difference," said O'Rane. "After all these years, too . . . It's a curious thing, George; we're both of us Irishmen, both of us men of peace; and, most of all, we're reformers. All our working life we've seen the reforms nearest our hearts postponed and postponed by an eruption in Ireland or by a threat of European war. God forgive me, I had to stand as a tory and a militarist, because I saw this war coming! Overboard went all my dreams of making life tolerable for the sons of Ishmael! And now again!"

I might have added that it was this feeling of futility which kept me from standing again for parliament when I lost my seat in 1910.

"Until these same sons of Ishmael strike against war," I answered, "it's idle to think of improving their lot."

"And yet it's so little I'm asking!," he sighed. "I only want every man to have freedom to work . . . and save money . . . and marry . . . and have children . . . without interfering with his neighbours . . . and without

interference from them. I want him to spend his old age in the comfort and peace of mind which he has earned. His children must be born healthy, to work, to save, to marry, to live and die as he has done. If civilized society can't give him that . . . And it can't so long as a country contains one single prison or workhouse or infirmary or brothel . . ."

"I suspect there were brothels in the golden age," I interposed.

O'Rane leant forward and gripped my wrist till I winced with the pain.

"In the golden age," he answered between his teeth, "there were hopeless, uncaring cynics, who said that prostitution was the oldest profession in the world. Slavery was the oldest solution of all labour problems. Torture was the oldest safeguard of civil authority. The moral sense of the world must be roused till it sweeps away prostitution and disease, as it swept away torture and slavery. It was not to keep them flourishing that we went to war. And we *can't* sweep them away while another war threatens." . . .

He broke off, as my mother came into the garden with the day's letters; and, as I struggled against the impact of my uncle's fury, I recognized that I was being assailed by a stronger enthusiast even than O'Rane and being asked to save by propaganda a world that I thought had already been saved by war.

4

Bertrand's descent upon Cannes may be likened to the unheralded arrival of the headmaster in a form-room that has for some time been left to its own devices.

" '*The Theodosian code*'," Laurence recited virtuously, " '*was published in Constantinople on the 15th of February, 438* . . .' If Bertrand tries to find me a job, say I'm suited, thank you."

The rest of us, for all our feeling that we were drowsing in a back-water, looked regretfully at the blazing hibiscus-hedge and guiltily at one another.

"We all ought to be going back," said Barbara, who—six weeks before—had never wished to see Dover Cliffs again.

I asked what good we could do; I nearly told her what harm we could not avoid doing, for Eric Lane had crossed from New York on O'Rane's boat and was now in London. Bertrand's outpouring, however, was beyond the range of argument.

"*You will find*," he predicted, "*that the world is entering on a new glacial age of materialism. We must fight it.*"

And his method of fighting it was to resurrect our old paper, to set me in the old editorial chair, to sweep the country with new propaganda and to create a new political party in the dining-room of Seymour Street.

Those who have never edited a paper are inclined to compare themselves with Delane at his most legendary; and the comparison is seldom favourable to Delane or to *The Times*. Those who have never tried to influence opinion —as my uncle and I tried in six years' devoted service to the Disarmament League—become in their daydreams a rival to Parnell or Gladstone and convert mass-meetings with a single speech. Hard-won experience had taught me better, yet this is what Bertrand proposed; and Barbara, I knew, was seeing herself already as the maker of cabinets and the adviser of kings.

"*Read your Balzac*," my uncle recommended in a disastrous postscript. "*London, for the next few years of your life, will be amazingly like Paris in the restoration-period . . .*"

It was the postscript, I think, that fired Barbara's imagination; and, as I watched her big eyes lighting up, I knew that it was empty to ask if she felt competent to stay a glacial age in its course. For a year or two before the war, she had occupied a position that, so far as I know, had never before been accorded in England to an unmarried woman, certainly to an unmarried woman of twenty. Raised above ordinary laws by her utter fearlessness, she had imposed a law of her own, in dress and manners, speech and thought, upon the greater part of her generation. As a child, Barbara has often told me, she saw that her personality would be bled white by her father's. In Ottawa, in Simla and in London her wings beat unceasingly against the political, the religious and the social bars of the Crawleigh cage. Then she asserted herself; and, ten years later, she was known by sight wherever an illustrated paper penetrated; the first colonial contingents demanded to see Westminster Abbey and Lady Barbara Neave; and, had she ever paused, she might have seen herself becoming a legend in her own lifetime, as Bernhardt —on vastly more bizarre lines—became the heroine of the 'Sarah myth' in France.

I had my answer to the question which I had asked myself on Armistice Day, when she gazed into the fire for a picture of what her own new life was to be. London, in the restoration-period, was marked out for her empire.

When my uncle arrived, his mood was made apparent by the sombre opening statement that nations got the governments they deserved. He

added, with fine public spirit, that the worst result of the election was the lack of an effective opposition. Then less impersonal feelings broke through: he charged ministers with treating the fourteen points as 'a scrap of paper' and recommended a strait-waistcoat for all who escaped the lamp-post. Sitting in a half-circle round his chair, with Lucien's international parliament huddled on our fringe, we were castigated with a fury that would have been better deserved if we had in fact uttered the vain things with which we were charged: *we* had promised that there should be no punitive damages and now *we* were threatening to squeeze Germany like an orange; *we* were pledged to try the kaiser, if not to execute him without trial; *we* were to restore our trade by destroying our best customer.

"If I'd asked for the kaiser's head on a charger," Bertrand thundered, "you'd have promised me *two* heads on *two* chargers."

When the first fury had abated, Lucien fanned it to life by a reference to the peace of Brest-Litovsk, demanding why Germany should be treated more tenderly in defeat than she had treated others in victory.

"If England had been *invaded* . . ." he went on with a kindling eye. "The mistake your prime minister made was that he didn't say enough."

"You should have thought of all that before you agreed to the armistice," Bertrand retorted.

"Well, say, the terms of the armistice . . ." began Clifford van Oss.

I have no doubt he was going to say that, if the French quoted one set of undertakings against us, then America, which had drawn the terms, would speedily quote another. My uncle, however, who detested what he called "the American habit of making speeches instead of conversing", broke in with a speech of his own:

"Not that it matters whether he said too little or too much! The speeches have served their turn. I tell you, Lloyd-George is a better journalist than Northcliffe in knowing what the public will want the day after to-morrow! *He* knew that, when the troops came home to find no job waiting for them, people would forget they'd ever called him 'the man who won the war'. Before they forgot him for high taxation, high prices, falling wages and a creeping paralysis of unemployment, he had to make himself snug. *And he has!* Five years of autocratic power with the certainty that something *must* turn up; five years' support from the Curzons and Milners who'd never have seen the back-door of office without him; five years' support from the Monds and Greenwoods of the liberal second-eleven; five years' support

from every man who's lost a son, every woman who can't make both ends meet. You need only promise to hang the kaiser and make Germany pay: England was worth a general election."

Bertrand's outburst was followed by a long silence; and, as he chewed his moustache and gathered strength, I fancied that he might be reflecting how much he had aged since we incubated the Disarmament League in Princes Gardens and hatched *Peace* out of a grimy office in Bouverie Street.

"You give this lot five years, sir?," asked O'Rane.

"Unless they blunder into a new war before then," Bertrand answered; "or unless we can make an opposition strong enough to break them."

As he swung round on me, I pointed out that he was forming an opposition before he had anything tangible to oppose.

"We must *shape* the peace!," he cried. "I give you till to-night to make up your mind! If you desert me, George, I shall fight single-handed. And I'm getting too old for that. Where's Barbara? I must explain what's expected of her."

I capitulated without even taking my hours of grace. When Bertrand stumped indoors, I knew he was going to depict a shattered and mutinous army of liberals rallying to our exhortations and reconciled by Barbara's diplomacy. I knew, further, that, outside the pages of a woman's novel, politics never had been so theatrically arranged. Lord Crawleigh might dine with his daughter, but he would never vote with his son-in-law. Frank Jellaby and the independent liberals might, if we caught them unawares, maintain a civil front to the coalition-liberals, but they would never serve in the same administration as the men whom they charged with stabbing them in the back. None of this, however, was likely to influence Barbara in her present mood of exaltation.

"Liberalism," said my uncle in one of his fine, vague phrases, "is greater than the liberal party."

"In the present state of the liberal party," I answered, "that would not be difficult. But you don't *believe* you're going to make a new party of any kind."

Bertrand shook his head mournfully and sat with the far-away expression of an old and tired man who had sampled in his time the liberalism of Mazzini and Lincoln, Bright and Cobden, Bradlaugh and Chamberlain, Gladstone and Asquith.

"If we can bring liberalism back to life," he sighed, "a party will form without our help: all we need is a rallying-point. I mean something bigger than electoral reform and tariff squabbles, George: I mean a liberal spirit in politics. At the beginning, I should have called this a liberal war. When Wilson aimed at a peace that should leave nobody too strong, nobody too much broken, I called that a liberal spirit. I wrote to you about the glacial age of materialism, because a liberal spirit is the only thing that can melt it. Every individual, every country will fight for its own hand: it's instinctive, like food-hoarding in 1914. Does Lucien care if Russia's starving? Does van Oss care if England's crippled with debt? Does any one care if the majority get less than the best out of life? Devil take the hindmost! That's the spirit we have to fight."

"But can it be done with a sixpenny review?," I asked.

5

When our other guests had left us, Bertrand, Barbara and I set ourselves to collect our headquarters staff.

"Old men," boomed my uncle oracularly, "make wars; and young men fight them. We must be surrounded by the young men."

He then sat back, in the attitude which had become characteristic of him since his stroke, with his hairy, gnarled hands clasped over the ivory knob of his stick. I saw Barbara's dark eyes shining as she hurried indoors and returned to the verandah with a pencil and paper. In her absence, Bertrand sought to seduce me by describing my room at the office and hinting at the furniture which he proposed to transfer from Princes Gardens. He resented my criticism that we were setting out to convert the world with six dubious Sheraton chairs and less than six more than dubious phrases; but, as we drafted our programme, I became ever more gloomily convinced that we were losing sight of the essentials in a wanton outburst of ornamentation. My excellent and unpractical colleagues agreed that we could have a delicious meal sent in from the Greyfriars Tavern for the editorial dinners; Barbara fought gamely for a weekly cartoon; Bertrand informed us, with an air of originality, that the youth of the nation were the trustees of posterity; and no one said a word about our gospel or our prophets.

"All the conditions are new," my uncle reminded me at short intervals. "We need new men, new methods. A new spirit . . ."

And, while he coined phrases and Barbara designed our front page, I thought over the young men whom I had met when I was working at the

Admiralty. Spence-Atkins and Jefferson Wright were still on Hornbeck's "live register" of unemployed; and I invited them to take charge of our foreign policy and economics. That their names were unknown seemed a recommendation to Bertrand, who exclaimed in high glee:

"New men! To catch the other new men!"

On that, I presented him with a cynical jack-of-all-trades whom Hornbeck had engaged for his experience in the deeper waters of undetected roguery. I have no proof that Triskett's hands were soiled, though a man whose friends included the scamps of every race and country must have lived under constant temptation to blackmail. I did not propose to give him free scope in what he wrote; but I thought that his curious information might sometimes illuminate an obscure motive.

"A new man to catch the other new men," Bertrand repeated.

"A thief to catch a thief," I answered; "but, if it's youth you want, these men are all under thirty-five."

The average was reduced further when, at Barbara's suggestion, I invited a novelist of thirty, a poet of twenty-five and a composer of nineteen to take our artistic pages under their protection. They were all, she told me, touched with genius. I was also becoming reckless.

"And now," said Bertrand, "can you set them to work in three months' time? You'll want that to get in touch with new conditions. You must study life in the marketplace, George. Mass-feeling. The great movement of men. . . . We'll have our first editorial dinner somewhere about the end of March."

"I should have it," I suggested, "on the first of April."

When my uncle returned a few weeks later, we returned with him; and, while Barbara made our house ready for party-meetings and drawing-room conclaves, I carried the dubious Sheraton chairs to Fetter Lane and passed from the Eclectic Club to my uncle's study in Princes Gardens, in leisurely pursuit of the great movement of men.

I doubt if I have at any time felt more out of my element. I could understand O'Rane's contention that, for all they won from civilization, the vast majority of mankind would be no worse off by taking to the hills and woods as bandits. I was prepared to work quite reasonably hard for my rooted faith that, if this vast majority was to be saved, it must be saved by its own efforts. I could sympathize with the proselytes to the League of Nations, though I placed no reliance in a league that did not make

disarmament its first condition of membership. What I wholly failed to grasp was my uncle's objective in taking an expensive office, exhuming our old manager from his retirement and entering the name of our paper once more at Stationer's Hall.

London had never, in all my experience, been so little interested in politics.

"What's been happening?," Sam Dainton echoed when I took Barbara to dine with his parents. "Well, I've awarded myself the order of the bowler-hat; and I had the hell of a time in Paris after I left you; and now I'm thinking how I can make a bit of money."

"Same here," added John Gaymer. "If you come across anything, George . . ."

"Oh, the family first," Laurence interrupted. "*Dear* Cousin George . . ."

The conversation at most dinner-parties in these weeks seemed to run on ways and means. Seizing on the jargon of the times at a moment when every one else was abandoning it, Lady Dainton described herself facetiously as "one of the new poor" and denounced every more fortunate neighbour as a "profiteer", though I could not see that her novel poverty compelled her to retrenchment nor that her scorn for profiteers prevented Sir Roger's trying to sell Crowley Court, at three times what he gave for it, to one of "the new rich". In place of retrenchment I found a bewildering blend of ingenuity, industry and blackmail on the part of those who insisted on a life of pleasure and could find no one to finance it for them. Day after day, Barbara was dragged to new shops, where her friends sold her hats at exorbitant prices. Other friends offered to decorate our house. Others, again, begged me to open a "social" column in *Peace* and to put them in charge of it.

"You can't expect people to take much interest in public affairs," Lady Dainton said to me at this first dinner. "There are *so* many other things! These children"—she looked benevolently round the table at the girls she had collected for the approval of her necessitous son—"they don't know what society *was* before the war. They've none of them even been presented, so you can imagine the flutter they're in. Their first season!"

"I shouldn't have thought any one had the money to make much of a season," I objected, with a cast back to her late confession of universal ruin.

"The war has only transferred it from one pocket to another," she assured me.

This dark saying was made plain in these first unsettled days before the rebirth of our paper, when I drifted about London, analysing the atmosphere of the armistice. Less diplomatically, Lady Dainton might have said that, if the natives had too little money, the foreigners had too much; and, without a trace of diplomacy, a number of my acquaintances seemed to be coaxing it back from the new pockets to the old. With my own ears I heard the Duchess of Ross demanding a list of the Americans she could advantageously invite to her house. I listened with amusement as Clifford van Oss tried to explain politely that the people on whom she fawned were not received in New York. And I watched Sir Adolf Erckmann being made a test case for the date at which a wealthy man with a German name could be received by his less wealthy friends.

"The great movement of men isn't carrying me anywhere in particular," I confessed to Bertrand as the day of our first issue drew near. "I've met a number of spongers, lately, and a greater number of snobs. Which are the more to be pitied . . ."

"That's only a phase," my uncle answered. "London's only a part of England; these people are only a part of London. While you were a boy, you must have seen the Rand Jews agonizing to fill their houses; and you saw the 'new poor' of the Harcourt death duties taking all they could get."

"And we saw the result in the last years before the war," I said, as Sir Adolf Erckmann shambled out of earshot. Could we give rein to our racial prejudices, I never knew whether I would sooner lynch him or the girls, like Sonia Dainton, who in those days had endured his odious familiarities for the sake of a string-quartet, a champagne supper and a free drive home in an Erckmann car. "A whole generation grew up in the belief that man had a natural right to be amused at some one else's expense."

"You'd have found the same thing in Rome and Nineveh," said Bertrand. "Whenever a conspicuous social position is divorced from the means to keep it up . . . *That's* not a thing to notice. I told you to study the movement of men because one class is being squeezed out of existence. It may last my time, but it won't last yours. It was never a big class, but in some ways it was the best. Now the sons have been killed; and the parents are crippled with taxation. Who's coming to take their place, George? That's the riddle for boys like you; and it's to the newcomers we must appeal. . . . Is everything ready for our first number?"

"As ready as it can be," I answered, "without a principle, a policy or even a catchword."

When I went to Fetter Lane for the ceremony of ordering the machinists to print off, I was glad to see that my colleagues shewed no lack of enthusiasm. Headed by Bertrand, we marched to the Clock Tower Press and stood in a half-circle till he should give the sign. Martin Luther, printing his own bibles, could hardly have been more impressive; and, as we marched back to toast Bertrand in tepid champagne, the day seemed pregnant with fate.

"All the same," I said, as we dispersed, "you've none of you suggested a single reason why any one should want to buy this paper. People are simply not thinking of politics."

"They will, when they come out of their fool's paradise," answered Bertrand.

With a prediction so vague I could not contend. Reconstruction, of which I had heard so much in the last years of the war, appeared to stop short when private lives and fortunes had been reconstructed. Employment was good; money was plentiful; trade was booming; and, after we had spent five million pounds a day without suffering for it, after we had found work for every one at his own price, it was not wonderful if the laws of political economy seemed to have been suspended. My brother-in-law Gervaise was but one of many whom I settled on the permanent wage-sheet of the country; during the next few days I was to help Sam Dainton into an engineering firm at Hartlepool and to be told that the directors could accommodate as many more of the same kind as I chose to send.

It was too good to be true; it was too good to last; but, while it lasted, I felt we could expect little support for gloomy vaticinations that were being falsified under our eyes.

CHAPTER FOUR

AFTER THE DELUGE

Death is the end of life; ah, why
Should life all labour be?
Let us alone. Time driveth onward fast,
And in a little while our lips are dumb.
Let us alone. What is it that will last?
All things are taken from us, and become
Portions and parcels of the dreadful Past.
Let us alone. What pleasure can we have
To war with evil? Is there any peace
In ever climbing up the climbing wave?

TENNYSON: *The Lotus-Eaters*.

1

At the end of March, as Bertrand had ordained, our first editorial dinner took place. It was followed by a reception; and the two events might have been read, by the optimistic, as an announcement that a new force was at work in political and social London. Throughout the long preparations, Barbara told us repeatedly that she had no personal interest in our organization; but she could not have worked harder if this had been a battle which she had to win or a lost battle which she had to retrieve. For the first time since our marriage, she seemed fully alive; the old love of ascendancy had returned; and I forgot the futility of my uncle's crusade in the happiness which it brought to my wife.

"Well, I wasn't going to spoil *your* life, if I could help it," she laughed, when I complimented her on her new radiance. "Whatever kind of mess I've made of my own . . ."

"It's early days to be saying you've made a mess of your life," I told her.

These first weeks had been less formidable than I had expected. Every one was too busy with his own concerns to recall the furious tongue-wagging of the war; and the players in what Barbara counted her tragedies

had obligingly withdrawn from the stage. Jack Waring, the first of her victims, crossed my path but once in three years: I met him hurrying out of his tailor's, and he stopped only long enough to say that he was breeding blood-stock in the midlands and hardly ever came to London. Eric Lane, a greater sufferer in a longer tragedy, had disappeared; I was told that he was in London and I assumed that he must be at work on a new play. Certainly we did not see him for several months; and it was only in rare, startling moods of depression that Barbara seemed to remember him.

"How much you feel depends on how much you put into life," she suggested, a little wistfully. "You can make a mess of your life when you're a child, if you go the right way about it. *You* wouldn't, because you let other people live your life for you; but I always had to make mine a great spiritual adventure, a thing to be squeezed dry, not tasted! At the end I must feel that I've taken a wonderful journey and that every moment of it has been marked by poignant emotions, vivid experiences. The whole of myself must go into everything."

"When you see a WET PAINT sign, you must make sure that the paint is really wet?," I asked.

"With both hands! Unlike my dear George, who avoids all paint because some of it is sometimes not quite dry. We're a strange and wonderful combination, darling."

"The actor and the audience."

"You're content just to look on?"

"Life is varied enough!," I said. "And, though I don't suppose any period is dull when you know it, I believe our own period is the most interesting in all history. I believe, too, that we're in the most interesting part of the most interesting period. Bertrand will tell you that our day is over and that the future lies with the new men. I'm watching."

2

My uncle's opinion was endorsed, perhaps naturally, by one who was a new man himself and who introduced me at this time to some at least of the other new men. Nearly four years have passed since I began to watch this battle of old and new; I am watching still, and the battle is undecided. It was on the day when our paper was reborn that our old advertisement-manager called in Fetter Lane to prove that we were working on wrong lines; and, as he knew enough of mob-psychology to make a fortune out of it, I listened respectfully to the criticism and studied the critic. Sir Philip Saltash had

travelled far since the August day when Bertrand paid off the staff—Mr. Saltash included—and brought *Peace* to an end by shivering the electros of the headings with a mallet; he was to travel farther before he entered the House of Lords as Lord Saltash of Bonde, publicity-expert and political wire-puller. How much farther he will travel is another of the things I am watching.

"If *you* think people will listen to the *stuff* your old man's put in his *prospectus*," he began with a force and directness that made me feel the new men were bringing new manners with them, "you're making the mistake of your life. You may be right; every one else may be wrong . . ."

As he paused with a shrug of contemptuous challenge, I reminded myself that he was come to offer me publicity for *Peace* and must therefore prove that, without publicity, *Peace* would wilt and die.

"My uncle feels," I said, "that it's bad policy to cure one Alsace-Lorraine by setting up half-a-dozen others. It's time *some* one made a protest against the last election."

"Even if no one pays any attention to it? Mark you, I can *make* people listen," he added, as he rolled an unlighted cigar from side to side of his loose mouth; and I tried to recall how many million pounds Saltash had advertised into war-loans and how many thousand men he had ordered, from his ubiquitous hoardings, into the army. "That's my job. *Has* been, ever since I left you."

"How would you make people listen to *us*?," I asked.

Saltash caught up a copy of our first number and turned the pages with loud slaps of an annihilating hand. I have forgotten his technical proposals, though I remember that he kindled me with his cleverness the while he was outraging me with his vulgarity. I have not, however, forgotten his lyrical flights in describing the place of publicity in public life. I had met "press-secretaries" and heard of "propaganda sections" in government departments; I had suspected that certain ministers were raised or disgraced at the bidding of certain newspaper-proprietors; but I had not imagined that newspaper-proprietors themselves struck or spared at the behest of men like Saltash, who in their turn controlled the flow of information from Whitehall to Fleet Street.

"It's a question of spot-light," Saltash explained; and I learned that, when Dormer came to grief over food-rationing, it was Saltash's artful

manipulation of the switches that saved him from public vengeance and secured him his seat in the cabinet.

"I never *did* think Dormer was to blame," I happened to interpose.

"I never let you!," cried Saltash. "Remember the Flying Corps scandal? *I* did that. And you soon forgot about Dormer. I told him from the first he had only to lie quiet. . . . Later on . . ."

Later on, without prompting, I remembered Dormer's reappearance. Discovered by the caricaturists and taken to the heart of the public, Dormer —with his vast chin and grotesque hat—became a music-hall hero. "Our Willie" was acclaimed by the gallery with the loyal fervour accorded in other days to "good old Joe". The *Snap-Shot* shewed him pruning roses with his smiling wife in an "old-world garden" and playing bumble-puppy with his apple-cheeked children. Finally, in the last days of a united front against a common foe, his portrait was thrown on the screen—after those of King Albert and General Joffre, Lord Kitchener and Mr. Lloyd-George—as the man who had saved England from starvation.

The cost of Dormer's apotheosis was one baronetcy and the promise of a peerage when the more squeamish section of the government was better used to the Saltash idea.

"Spot-light," repeated the wizard. "People can't look at more than one thing at a time. Has it ever occurred to you why the old coalition went and the new one came? The ginger-group were working that way from the day Asquith carried conscription for them; they didn't need him after that, but the public wasn't ready for a change. Well, it was my job to *make* the public ready. I concentrated opinion against certain men and never left 'em alone; I concentrated in favour of others. The Dardanelles. Mesopotamia. Shells. Food. You and I know that the new lot were tarred with the same brush as the old; but we made the public think they'd been on another planet when all these messes were made. The old lot were too quiet; they never hit back."

"There was a war on," I reminded him.

"They would never have fallen if they'd shewn fight," Saltash retorted. "A man's power in politics is what he makes others believe it to be. 'This war is too big for ordinary folk,' people were saying: 'we want supermen.' Well, we said the new lot *were* supermen. When there weren't enough to go round, we made so much din that office-sweepers seemed like supermen. We restored confidence; and we frightened the Germans. Now, you say you're reviving the old rag and your slogan is to be 'a *lasting* peace'. You'll

be called pro-Boche. You'll be told you're letting the Hun off. I don't despair, though. The first thing is to out the present lot; and I can do that on departmental scandals alone. 'Got all the papers. Then we must prepare a big peace-boost. . . . Lunch with me and talk it over."

Though I had nothing to discuss, I went with Saltash because Saltash hypnotized me to come. All the vitality of young America radiated from him, though he styled himself a Canadian; his features recalled semitic South Russia, though he dissembled his love for the Jews; in the ten or twelve years that I had known him I never detected a trace of breeding, education or principle; and in the next two years I was never to see him entirely sober. Until he has his first stroke, however, I count him one of the six most dangerous men in Europe, for the "yellow" press of every country is an instrument on which he has played himself into wealth and power. As a purveyor of publicity, he is the logical conclusion from the cheap press that came into existence when England was taught, willy-nilly, to read; and England is imperilled by him, as she is imperilled by every man who, in his daily work and life, has everything to gain and nothing to risk.

"*I* trouble waters," he explained thickly. "*Other* fellers do fishing. No personal axe t' grind."

After a champagne luncheon he talked to me of these others. If the war unified the British Empire, it also brought to England a number of adventurous spirits who had made existence unsafe for themselves in their native dominions and whose claim to a hearing depended less on their political wisdom than on the number of miles they had travelled to reach Downing Street. The blatant harangues of Mr. Giles to indulgent imperial conferences were received with so much respect that hysterical women petitioned to have him included in the war-cabinet; a country with population and wealth equal to the city of Glasgow ranked in our councils as a great power.

"*I* did that," Saltash confided. "Overseas dominions. Young wolves claiming place council-rock. People here *crawled* to him. And the government didn't dare snub him."

"So long," I said, "as the prophet comes from another country, he has full honour in ours."

"He was a cut above some of them," said Saltash defensively; and I was told of one great public man who had dodged the dock in Australia to buy papers in England, of another who operated in London because he was threatened with a bullet in his brain if he ventured back to Winnipeg.

Though Saltash did not say so, I think they may have fished in the waters which he troubled.

"The revenges of time!," I said, as I stood up to go. "This is the remittance-man come home to roost."

"A party can't exist without funds," said Saltash, beckoning to our waiter for a third liqueur. "Or without publicity."

That I was not prepared to contest; and, as a new-born party had to collect its funds and build up its organization at short notice, I was not surprised that the rich men surrounding the coalition were more numerous and less savoury than the sufficiently dubious candidates for honours whom I had seen haunting the whips' office during my active political career. If I was to believe Saltash, however, London had suddenly become a hunting-ground for the desperadoes of the empire. These "new men" were unknown names when the war began; soon I heard of them whenever a political crisis was being engineered. Their ability was undoubted; their experience had been gained in rough schools; and their resourcefulness admitted no limit. Supplying the impecunious with money and the affluent with advice, they acquired knowledge and influence which they used to acquire more money; and this in turn purchased them a further power of unseen interference in the direction of our government.

That night, as I sat down to our inaugural dinner, I told Bertrand of my host at luncheon and of his conversation.

"It's no new thing," said my uncle, who in these nights of doubt and sorrow unmasked an almost irritating resolution to be jolly at all costs. "The great international financiers have influenced governments and been influenced by them since banks and governments began."

Historically, that may have been true. The new thing, as Bertrand himself might have said, was the character of the new men and the new methods which they employed.

3

This dinner was to be my last frolic as an irresponsible spectator.

When, as editor and managing-director, I proposed the toast of "*Peace*", a vibration from my colleagues' eagerness troubled my rigid negations and stirred doubt in my bland assurance. *Was* Bertrand's project so hare-brained as I had thought? I questioned myself in honest uncertainty as I settled my tie and looked down on the double row of expectant faces. The old man's

predictions at Cannes were fulfilled as soon as the conference met and a vague parliament of man reformed as a quarrelsome committee of ten; the clash between President Wilson's fourteen points and Mr. Lloyd-George's election speeches rang out when the committee of ten shrank to a camarilla of four; and, if we had ever doubted the apathy of the British public, our doubt must have evaporated day by day as the first House of Commons in the new glacial age sat with hands folded and eyes set jealously on the position each member had wrested from the war. Twice or thrice in these months a vigilance-committee of sterner and more unbending new members sent hectoring telegrams to keep their representatives up to the mark; President Wilson once ordered his ship to get up steam; and the Duchess of Ross dined out intermittently on M. Clemenceau's latest epigram; but it is substantially true to say that no one in England thought of the peace-treaty until it was submitted for the approval of parliament.

In my speech I confined myself to congratulating Bertrand on his staff. At the end, he hoisted himself slowly to his feet and indicated his own part in our endeavour:

"You young men will have to do the work; but perhaps, from a long experience, I may be able to advise you. No lasting peace can be founded on a sense of grievance; and, though the heathen are raging furiously now, they'll outgrow that phase. Maybe it's because I had to keep my mouth shut during the war, maybe old age is making me more radical. This is not a party organ, it never was; it was an expression of liberal spirit, and that's what it has to be again. We were called hard names when war broke out; but we had the right vision. Labour still thinks parochially; toryism still thinks imperially, which is the same thing; radicalism must think internationally. These fierce local patriotisms are an unconscionable time a-dying; but England is a bigger conception than the heptarchy, Europe is a bigger conception than England, the world is a bigger conception than Europe. We depend too much on our neighbours to blow them out of existence every few years. That truth has been vouchsafed to those of us who are at this table; we have to get it accepted."

I rang a bell; and we were handed early copies of our first number. Every man turned avidly to his own contribution. Then Barbara sent for me to help her receive our guests.

This first of many receptions might have been arranged, I thought, as a review of all that the war had left us. Barbara stood at the stair-head in a white shawl of Chinese silk, with flamingoes in flight and a deep fringe sweeping to the scarlet heels of her white shoes. One shoulder, miraculously

whiter than the shawl, was bare; a high comb of dark tortoise-shell proclaimed the astonishing fairness of her skin; and in the soft light of the chandelier her deep-set eyes shone like huge sapphires. I stopped in stupefaction to realize that this was my wife; and Barbara, reading my thoughts, coloured softly and pressed my hand. As our guests came self-consciously up the stairs, I saw one after another checking in the same bewilderment; and Raymond Stornaway supplied the image that was eluding me when he exclaimed:

"A wand! A wand! You sweet child, with a wand in your hand you'd be the fairy queen I fell in love with at my first pantomime, fifty years before you were born."

As I had taken little part in sending out the invitations, I have only an indistinct memory of all who came. A phalanx of perpetually disapproving relations gave place to a battalion of my old Admiralty colleagues, headed by Hornbeck; new young diplomats, representing yet younger, newer states, raised Barbara's hand ceremoniously to their lips; *débutantes* of a generation after mine pressed under the elbows of old family friends, who blocked the traffic while they retailed trivial anecdotes of my wife's or my infancy. Here and there I saw an actress, whose name in private life always eluded me; time and again I uttered or received a warning against 'the world's worst bore'. I remember being introduced, after frantic, whispered explanations, to innumerable authors in tortoise-shell-rimmed spectacles. In my turn, I remember introducing to Barbara the lost political sheep whom she was to charm back into their fold.

"I didn't know there were so many people in the *world*!," she exclaimed in one of the few brief lulls.

Raymond Stornaway overheard her and sighed:

"It's the summer and autumn without the spring."

As the brief lull ended, my thoughts went back to the morning of Armistice Day when I paused on my way home from the Admiralty to reckon how many of my own generation had survived the war. As Robson bent, straightened himself and turned at the stair-head, I expected at every moment to hear him calling out "Captain Dainton" or "Lord Loring" or "Mr. Arden"; had I shut my eyes to their absence, I could have fancied that we were living in 1914. Now, as then, Crawleigh was so much engrossed in a political altercation with Bertrand that he walked stormily into the drawing-room without noticing us; Sam Dainton trotted up grinning—as usual—and whispering scandal into Violet Loring's reluctant ear; Sir Roger, waiting

uneasily for his wife, was mistaken—as usual—for a hired waiter and urged to tell John Gaymer where he could get his usual drink.

"The last time I did this sort of thing was at my coming-of-age ball," Barbara murmured.

"Which you gave for yourself because no one would give it for you?"

"Well, I hated father's friends; and he hated mine," she laughed. "Besides, I'd been in so many scrapes that I *had* to see whether people would continue to know me."

"They all came," I said.

"Except one. That was the time when Jack Waring proposed to me one day and quarrelled with me the next," she explained lightly. "Why he wanted to marry me when he disapproved of everything I did . . . I invited him specially." . . .

"And he wouldn't come?"

"No. Apparently . . . Eric isn't coming . . . to-night."

The announcement fell so tranquilly, it was so long since we had mentioned Eric Lane's name that I doubted for a moment if I had heard her aright.

"You . . . invited him?," I asked.

"Yes. Sonia and David were dining with him; and I told David to bring him. You don't mind? I wanted to be friends. Ah . . .!" The sound was painfully like a sob; but, when I turned, I saw Barbara smiling eagerly as the O'Ranes came—unaccompanied—up the stairs. "Take David where he won't be trampled on," she whispered.

I was glad of a moment's respite after the unintended shock which Barbara had given me. Eric had left too deep a mark on her spirit to be quickly forgotten; but I fancied, when her old exuberant joy in life returned, that she was no longer missing him. An hour before, I had been stupefied to realize that Barbara was my wife; now I wondered how much she was my wife. Not all her thoughts were mine; was all her affection? I was checked, by some question from O'Rane, on the verge of a shameful jealousy.

"You want to know who's here?" I looked down on a seething mass of heads. "It would be easier to say who's not. Generally speaking, any one who was too old or too young for the war; and a sprinkling of people with

charmed lives. The summer and winter without the spring, Raymond calls it."

"It was a slaughter and a half!," O'Rane muttered. "If you calculate, among your own friends, the families who've been left without a direct heir . . ."

"Oh, Bertrand will tell you the old aristocracy is done for. I don't know. It weathered the industrial revolution and the Napoleonic wars."

"The shock was more gradual; there was a greater power of resistance. Now the big estates are breaking up; and the great masses are becoming conscious of their strength."

As I looked down the stairs, Crawleigh and Bertrand were finishing their altercation. I heard Raymond telling them that it was time for old men to be in bed; and the phrase reminded me of my meeting with Saltash. In every sense of the term, they were old men, no longer able to hold their own against the young vigour of Saltash's recruits; in any struggle of class with class, the material ammunition had passed from their hands. Their prestige was weakening before the pressure of those who excelled them in everything but length of tradition; and that tradition was now being cut short.

"I suppose you can call yourself a radical and still believe in the value of a good strain in breeding," I said. "That hard-worked creature 'the historian of the future' will *have* to say, I suppose, that the people of this country carried a heavier burden than any other in the war? I *think* he'll say that, of all our people, those who carried the heaviest burden were the leaders. In fighting, in directing, in paying . . . And in being killed: that's why there are so few of them here to-night. We shall be the poorer if we lose that strain."

"We'll hope there are still enough of them left to carry it on," said O'Rane.

"The next few years will be a race; there'll be a fight against time, to spread the tradition before the people who maintain it are swallowed up."

We talked at random until Sonia came to collect him for another party.

"I'm sorry we couldn't bring Eric," I heard him say to Barbara on leaving. "Some friend of his had a first night; and he'd promised to look in."

"Did he say if he was coming on?," asked Barbara.

"I should think it depends on the time. There was some talk about a supper-party afterwards."

"Then I don't suppose he will," she answered with the composure of complete indifference. "Good-night, David. Good-night, Sonia."

When we were by ourselves, I sent the servants to bed; and we sat for half-an-hour discussing the party.

"Half-past one," she sighed at last. "Nobody *can* be coming now."

"If any one does," I said, "he'll find an excellent doorstep to sit on. Come to bed, Babs."

"I must write one letter first. You go on and turn out the lights. If you see my torch, you might put it on the hall-table."

I chose a book and went to my room. Only when I was in bed did I discover that I had brought the wrong book; and, on going downstairs again, I saw the lights in the hall blazing. Then, as I reached the drawing-room, I caught sight of Barbara, seated in a high-backed chair at the stair-head. At first I thought she was asleep; then I saw that she was staring through the hall to the front door.

"Is anything the matter?" I asked.

"He *can't* be coming now," she answered.

"Who? Eric?"

My earlier whisperings of jealousy were silenced by her utter forlornness. I did not care whether her thoughts and affection and heart and soul were his, so long as I could take the look of pain out of her eyes. I wanted to tell her that I understood and was sorry for her; but the name had roused her, and she stood up with languid dignity:

"Yes." . . . She was once again the alert and vigilant hostess of an hour before. "I thought it would look so terribly rude if he came here and found no one to receive him. After I'd specially asked him, too," she added on a higher note. Then her self-possession returned to her. "It's two o'clock. As he hasn't come now, I suppose . . . he's not coming . . . at all." . . .

4

If "the historian of the future", whom I have already invoked, have the microscopic vision and the titanic industry with which his predecessors credit him, I believe he must find space for a footnote, in brilliant, to describe our share in forming a critical opposition during the last four months of the armistice. In the days immediately following the 1918 election, the government had hardly an enemy; in the months after the

peace-treaty was signed, it had hardly a friend. Even before the *Economic Consequences of the Peace*, even before the mutual vituperation of the allies, an independent mood of questioning and doubt succeeded to the hysterical assertions and demands of the mad election. How far we fostered that mood by means of open propaganda and private suggestion, how far we made articulate a frame of mind that was already struggling to express itself, I cannot say; but that the mood became contagious cannot be challenged. In these first spring days, Barbara's circumspect cousin, Lord John Carstairs, avoided our house for fear of finding himself described as a 'defeatist', a friend of the enemy, a creature of Caillaux or a hireling of Stinnes. By the end of the summer, an alert opportunist such as Sir Rupert Foreditch sought publicity in the columns of *Peace* or opened his campaign by an attack on Seymour Street because our paper was frank and fearless and because "the Oakleigh gang", as we were unflatteringly called, was too important and, in time, too numerous to be ignored.

On the morrow of the inaugural dinner, Bertrand hunted me out of doors to study "the great movement of men", while he plotted with Barbara new days of keeping me on the run. No reference was made to our pitiful encounter at the stair-head; but I left a note to say that she was not to be called, and, when I carried in her breakfast, she looked up—with the eloquent silence of a dog—to thank me for understanding and to shew that she too understood. At once, after that, she began to discuss the party of the night before.

I am not going to pretend that my work for the next three years, though it left me without an hour, a house or a wife to call my own, was void of interest: duty compelled me to meet every one, from labour-leaders to cabinet ministers and from editors to bishops, who might be thought to influence action or opinion by a hair's breadth; I had to read the new books and absorb a mass of papers; I explored different parts of the country to find what different classes were saying or thinking; and a New York reporter could not have been quicker to lay hands on the foreign bankers and diplomats who passed through London. Two or three dinner-parties were given in each week to these unofficial missionaries; I met my uncle daily at the Eclectic Club to pool our discoveries in collective psychology; and on Wednesday nights the staff of *Peace* assembled on their spurious Sheraton chairs and helped to hammer out a new message to mankind.

If from time to time I harboured unworthy projects for desertion, my weakness of purpose must be attributed to natural indolence and perhaps justifiable impatience. Our progress seemed so lamentably slow; our aims

were so exasperatingly vague! Much as I valued Bertrand's long experience, greatly as I admired his flashes of intuition, I dreaded his descents on Fetter Lane in these first discouraging months. From Sir Philip Saltash or from the spirit of the age he had caught an itch for supermen; and I went about my work with a shame-faced consciousness of inadequacy while my uncle clasped his hands over his stick and boomed oracularly of novel tendencies and strange expedients.

"We're becoming precious," he grunted unamiably at our second number. "Average opinion; the common touch: you mustn't neglect that, George. If you take your friend Dainton as a barometer . . ."

And I was incontinently pricked into the least comfortable of my clubs, where I tested average feelings as they were represented in the changing utterances of one well-meaning and uniquely stupid legislator. The first experiment was made at a time when the successful candidates of the December election were uneasily hoping to be saved by the firmness and idealism of President Wilson from the consequences of their less temperate speeches.

" 'Wilson *le bienvenu*'," Dainton murmured approvingly, as he laid down a welcoming number of *Punch*.

A few weeks later, I found the French press excitedly proclaiming that Germany was being let off too easily. Sir John Woburn demanded with all the polyphonic energy of the Press Combine why America should be allowed to deprive the allies of their just reparations; and Dainton assured me profoundly that the task of winning the war was child's play compared with that of winning the peace.

"Damned obstinate fellow, Wilson," he grumbled. "If he thinks we're going to let him throw away all that our gallant boys fought for, he'll have a rude awakening."

Later still, he ceased to speak of the president altogether. Remembering Limehouse, he could not give implicit trust to the prime minister; but the gossip that floated from Paris to London convinced him that M. Clemenceau was the only statesman in Europe and he was content to leave himself in the hands of a man whose rare, sardonic utterances embodied the ferocity which Dainton had expressed so much less concisely in his election speeches. Members of parliament, he told me, had duties nearer home. Labour menaces were more important than quibbles about frontiers: coal strikes and railway strikes, both leading through nationalization and civil war to ruin and the disruption of the empire, were the proper study of political mankind.

Sir Roger no longer spoke of the British working-man as one of "our gallant boys"; and I was invited to penetrate the disguise that sheltered a Russian communist. Before I could do justice to this conception, he had found new duties even nearer to the hand of a patriot. "Bolshevism" was bad, but it soon ceased, in Dainton's eyes, to be quite so bad as "profiteering"; and neither, by the middle of the summer, was so exasperating nor so tenacious of life as Irish irreconcilability.

"If I could hold the wretched country under the sea for five minutes!," he exploded.

Fed on political catch-words and instructed by safe cartoons, Sir Roger Dainton, coalition-unionist member for the Crowley Division of Hampshire, would explain Ireland on alternate days by reference to the incurable dourness of the north and the ineradicable savagery of the south. He was the 'pendulum voter', the representative of all that is unstable, ill-informed and irresponsible in public life. For that I was prepared; for that Bertrand had sent me to study him. I was not prepared, however, to be accepted as a disciple and an ally. Dining weekly in Rutland Gate, I wondered whether the little man had ever before found any one who would listen to him: obviously, pathetically, he looked forward to our "good pow-wows"; and, when he saw me to the door and gave me a fresh cigar, still more when he said, "Then, next Tuesday as usual?", I felt that I was being sent back to school with a sovereign in my hand and being invited to Crowley for my next leave-out day. My embarrassment was increased by a sense of black ingratitude. Sir Roger always made these meetings "an occasion within the meaning of the act", as he called it, and opened his best champagne for me. When Barbara deserted me on the plea that we wanted to talk business and she would be in the way, Dainton redoubled his hospitality and became increasingly confused in speech. As I watched the clock, I would ask myself how such a man was admitted to the board of a company or tolerated in parliament; then, in a flash of revelation, I saw him as the type of all the class on which Sir Philip Saltash exercised the wiles of his publicity. Saltash was a logical inference from Dainton.

"Now you see why I told you to study him," Bertrand chuckled, when I announced that I would resign my editorship before I submitted to another spell of Dainton's political conversation.

In despair, I asked how our little office in Fetter Lane was to overtake and undo the work of Saltash and his forebears of the popular press. To this, however, my uncle had no answer.

Though he continued to speak of us as a chosen people, our mission of enlightenment was established on a paying basis by the success of our literary editors, who made of *Peace* the most feared and least loved review in London. As Hancock confined his criticism to novels and Mattrick to poetry, they could not be charged with rolling their own logs or obstructing a rival, though I noticed that Mattrick's sweeping condemnations stopped short of "Mr. Hancock's true lyrical genius" and Hancock's devastating onslaughts on modern fiction made an exception in favour of Mr. Mattrick. My conscience became unquiet when books were sent out for review and I heard Hancock choosing critics who could be trusted to "sit on this sort of rot"; but, as the "rot" was usually written by men who seemed to be making a substantial income, I hoped that they could afford an occasional attack and console themselves with the knowledge that, in the Penmen's Club, fifty yards away, a league of disgruntled novelists and poets was plotting the destruction of "the Hancock-Mattrick gang".

"All the same," Bertrand expostulated after a month or two, "we're not running this paper so that one ill-tempered young gentleman can read what another ill-tempered young gentleman has said about a book he hasn't troubled to finish. We're not in touch yet with opinion. You don't mix with enough people, George: it's all the office, or the club, or Barbara's parties."

"But where am I to find your new men?," I asked. "You say politics are no longer manufactured over a week-end party at Woburn. The political clubs only harbour your Tapers and Tadpoles. Where do men like Saltash and Wister and Foreditch do their work?"

"They take their pleasure at the Turf and Stage," Bertrand answered sourly.

"I'm dining there with the O'Ranes to-night," I said, as we began to walk home.

"Then you'll probably meet them. New men, new meeting-places." My uncle laughed mirthlessly. "If Pam or Johnnie Russell . . . It's the rising tide of democracy. Agricultural depression and death duties have slowly strangled the landed classes; their social influence is tottering. Before the war, Asquith was almost the only prime minister, bar Dizzy, who wasn't drawn from them; but the prime ministers of the future will come from the middle class . . . till they come from labour. And the stage changes with the actors," he continued in a deep rumble that carried from the one side of Fleet Street to the other. "*Circumspice!* When the masses had been taught to read, Newnes gave them *Tit-Bits*; Pearson and Harmsworth followed with the

cheap daily press; headlines took the place of news and arguments. The focus shifts to the newspaper office."

We were passing a flamboyant, white-and-gold building described as a "Super Electric Palace de Luxe"; and I asked Bertrand if he thought pictures were coming to take the place of headlines.

"It's not the instrument that matters, but the man who handles it," he answered. "Does Saltash play on Ll-G. or does Ll-G. play on Saltash? You'll know better to-night when you've seen the new stage with the new men on it. Your modern prime minister doesn't waste his time with duchesses at Ross House or with dukes at the Carlton. He has suave young secretaries to feed the press; he has rich friends to provide him personally with the sinews of war. He has his publicity agent. And, if he's wise, he has a chain of intermediaries running through the country, somebody always knowing somebody who knows somebody else, so that he can draw any one into his net at a moment's notice." As we crossed Waterloo Place, Bertrand glanced contemptuously at Mr. Gladstone's old house in Carlton House Terrace. "There'd be no end to the buzzing if Ll-G. spent a week-end with Sir John Woburn: he *must* be trying to collar the Press combine! But if my Lord Lingfield entertains a few actresses and a jockey or two and a prize-fighter and if Woburn happens to come along . . .? That's how politics are manufactured nowadays; and the Turf and Stage is the sort of place to see them manufacturing."

5

Such a preparation was almost inevitably a preparation for disappointment; but the unexpected end of my first evening at the Turf and Stage left me no time to define my expectations nor judge whether they had been fulfilled. As Barbara had a headache, I entered the resplendent club-room off Hanover Square under Sonia's protection; and, for all the scars that the last five years had left, I could have fancied for a moment that we were back in 1914 when the "Cottage Cabaret" and "Blue Moon" were tentatively opening their doors. I observed the same mirrored walls and plush sofas, the same small tables surrounding the same polished floor, the same high gallery and beaming, southern band. From the atmosphere I inhaled the same desolating quality, only to be rendered by the desolating name of "smartness".

I found no hint, however, that my rigidly standardized neighbours were powers behind thrones. Apart from a passion for dancing that grew ever more feverish as youth receded, they were severely domesticated. Men

brought their wives to supper, I was told, their sisters to dinner and their mothers to luncheon; I should not have been surprised to hear of a nursery upstairs or to see Gaspard, the incomparable manager, devising quiet games with the children in their parents' absence. Most of the men that night were young and exceedingly prosperous financiers; the rest, exemplified by Laurence Hunter-Oakleigh and Johnnie Gaymer, had at least the appearance of prosperity. Born to rule, they had all done well in the war; they were doing well in the peace; and their women dominated the situation as shrewdly, as calmly and as confidently as the men. Some trick of memory sent my thoughts back to the "Duchess of Richmond" ball at Loring Castle on the eve of the war. I remembered standing in the hall with Puggy Mayhew, watching the lithe girls and hard-trained men mounting the stairs with their magnificently English self-possession; and, though Mayhew filled a grave in Mesopotamia, I could hear again his tone of startled discovery as he murmured: "There's nothing to touch them in any country *I* know." . . .

I had been invited to meet a girl who aspired to that career of mendicancy and private blackmail which is known to women with a friend in Fleet Street as "freelance journalism"; and, while O'Rane waited in the hall for the rest of his party, Sonia led me downstairs for a cocktail.

"I have a standing invitation from Gaspard to come here at his expense," she confided. "He considers me rather a draw. And, as Lorrimer is always good for a dress if I'll wear it in public, I can usually kill two guests with one free dinner. If Johnnie Gaymer would only give me one of his firm's cars to be seen driving about in, David would get a perfectly good wife below cost."

As we descended to a more intimate room, with smaller tables half hidden by plates of oysters, I suggested that the assistant-almoner of the Lancing millions could afford to buy his wife a car.

"Then you don't know David," she rejoined with a touch of petulance. "He's working himself to death; but, if any one tries to pay him for what he does, he thinks it's charity. Let's talk of something else. You've not met this Maitland child? She's very pretty and very silly, I should think. Just what I was at her age . . . or at my own, I suppose you'd say if I gave you a chance. Finished? Then let's go up," she continued with the restlessness that characterized the age or at least the women of it whom I met that night.

One and all, they sat down and jumped up again like marionettes that would collapse if their wires slackened; they looked at one page of a paper and then tossed it away; they clamoured for cigarettes and laid them aside.

Finding that her other guests were not yet arrived, Sonia hurried into the dining-room, snatched a youth unknown to me from his protesting party and danced with him till a voice, peevish with hunger, cried: “Bertie, you little beast, come back and order dinner.” She then attached herself precariously to another party, stole some one else’s portion of caviare and rejoined us in the hall with her booty.

O’Rane, I thought, was looking ill and overworked.

“Stornaway’s gone down with pneumonia,” he explained; “so I’ve had all his work to do. It’s a bigger thing than I contemplated. I wonder . . . I wonder very much . . .”

“Whether you can carry out the schemes we discussed at Cannes?,” I asked.

“No! Whether we’ve any place in our present civilization for these colossal fortunes . . . Ah, that’s Ivy’s voice. Come and be introduced.”

I have never known for certain who constituted our party that night. Four of us met in the hall; but we mislaid Sonia as we went to our table; and John Gaymer invited himself to join us until his own friends arrived. Between the dances, some twenty to forty people surged into our corner; during them, I was usually left with one compassionate neighbour. As in a dream, I talked to O’Rane with grave absorption about shell-shock treatment; then I listened as Sam Dainton was convinced against his will that he had spent the previous night in the hall of his hotel, because he could not remember his bedroom number nor his name; then Sonia plunged me in a morass of domestic finance, demanding how any one could keep herself, her husband and child on the pittance which David allowed her.

“And now I’m going to have another,” she added, as the saxophone uttered a warning bleat.

“Dance?,” I asked.

“No, baby, of course. . . . Do knock some sense into David’s head. . . . Good-bye-ee.”

As she slipped away, I found myself alone with a pretty little dark-eyed girl, precocious and unbalanced, whom I remembered with difficulty as Ivy Maitland; and for another five minutes we talked gravely of work and life and careers for women. Ivy must have been younger by several years than any other woman in the club; and in that setting she seemed a human note of interrogation, scored by the present on the threshold of the future. She also seemed sadly out of place. Her friends were too old for her, most of them

were married, some were living apart from their wives and others were not living far enough apart from the wives of other men.

At the end of five minutes, forgetting her concern for a career, she darted off to dance with John Gaymer; and her place was taken by Sam Dainton, lately returned from Paris and full of gossip about the conference. The unruffled Gaspard conjured one more chair to our ever-lengthening table; and a basket of plover's eggs for Sam appeared simultaneously with O'Rane's chicken and my savoury, while heated revellers lolled over chair-backs with coffee and cigarettes. A warning of indigestion assailed me as I changed my place for the fourth time; intellectual dyspepsia had prostrated me from the moment when these five-minute conversational turns began.

"You look a bit out of the picture, old son," Sam told me candidly.

"I'm a spectator," I said. "My uncle feels that I should study the great movement of men." . . .

"Paris is the spot for that," he chuckled, with his mouth full. "They call it a peace conference, but I should say it was a full-dress parade for the next war." . . .

He broke off as Sonia danced up with shining eyes to whisper her discovery that one of our neighbours had married a second husband in the premature belief that the first had been killed. By the time she had done, Sam had finished his plover's eggs and was in the thick of a discussion with my cousin Laurie, which was to enrich them both if they could only find an out-of-work capitalist to launch them. Ivy concluded an audible disagreement with Gaymer, who I thought was more sodden than his wont, and dragged me headlong into a conversation that seemed to begin as startling indecency and cooled to the temperate obscurity of psychoanalysis.

"You should read Freud," she told me. "Psychoanalysis explains everything. You *are* behind the times."

From the little knowledge which I had been compelled to acquire in the hope of understanding the novels and plays of the period, I should have said that psychoanalysis defiled more than it explained; but I was chiefly interested to distinguish this night as the first on which the old reticences between men and women were torn away.

"Not bored, I hope?," murmured a voice at my elbow, as Ivy flitted away for the second time.

I turned to see O'Rane sitting huddled with fatigue.

“Bewildered, rather. This . . . this is the generation you’re undertaking to educate,” I said.

“You must expect some kind of reaction.”

“It’s been going on for six months now. . . . However, I’m more concerned with the shepherds than with the sheep.”

It was only as the theatres emptied that I appreciated my uncle’s sardonic wisdom in sending me to study “the great movement of men” in the Turf and Stage. The government was then represented by Lord Lingfield, who danced —for exercise rather than pleasure—with Miss Maud Valance, of the Pall Mall Theatre, and by the Right Honourable Wilmot Dean, who refrained from dancing on the principle that a man must learn to walk before he can run and must be in a condition to stand before he can dance. What weight Mr. Dean and Lord Lingfield contributed to cabinet councils I am too ignorant to guess; at the Turf and Stage they demonstrated that ministers, in spite of a nonconformist head, were not killjoys; and those who did not get many chances of hailing convivial privy councillors by their Christian names took the opportunity when it came.

“It’s about twenty-one years since Gladstone died,” I murmured to O’Rane. “It’s ‘new men, new manners’, with a vengeance.”

In strident conversation with Wilmot Dean, I could hear ‘Blob’ Wister roaring the latest of his political creeds. For three months he had won consequence by purchasing in succession the *People’s Tribune*, the *St. Stephen’s Times* and the *Daily Echo*. No one knew whence the money had been collected; no one that I ever met could tell me whence Wister himself sprang. He burst upon London like Sir Philip Saltash, like Wilmot Dean, like a third of the new men inside the government and on its outskirts, in response to the prime minister’s known desire for business talent. I was still watching the unsteady antics of Lingfield, when Sir Philip Saltash himself rose with a well-remembered lurch and bore down on us with the customary unlighted cigar swinging like a semaphore from the one side of his mouth to the other.

“Come to inspect my bunch?,” he enquired, with a careless nod and a less careless scrutiny of our liqueurs. Then, as I hesitated for an answer: “You’re too dam’ superior for these times. When you’ve been in the game as long as I have . . . Funny thing! The first slogan I ever heard in the States was that politics was not a job for a gentleman; ten years later I heard it in Canada; I’ve heard it in Australia; and, from what I’ve seen of your rag, you’re sighing for the great days of Salisbury and Pitt and all that lot.”

“I should hardly expect to find them here,” I said.

“They wouldn’t be in a state to come here! Old Pitt was a rare one for the booze. People don’t change much. You remember the old Limehouse days? Lloyd-George said that an aristocracy was like old cheese; and the aristocracy answered that Lloyd-George was a dirty little Welsh attorney: ‘Oh, how *vulgar*!,’ you cried. Was that worse than your old Salisbury’s nicknaming Joey Chamberlain ‘Jack Cade’?” He looked round with a fuddled but tolerant smile, as a miller might look when his wheel stopped suddenly, at the corner where startling silence had fallen on the conspiratorial, closely grouped heads of Dean, Wister and Lingfield. “The war opened up a place in the sun for people who hadn’t been brought up to your kid-glove ideas of public life.”

The whispering group was joined by Sir Rupert Foreditch, whose chief claim on his country’s gratitude is that he sacrificed the dilatory chance of promotion on the staff in order to race home after Neuve Chapelle and offer himself for a place in the first coalition. It was by an accident of geography rather than through any lack of zeal that others were before him; but he and the group that broke the first war-administration have the comfort of knowing that all decisions at the Dardanelles were postponed till an embarrassed government could decide which of their willing swords must be declined.

“Would you say,” I asked, “that there was a touch of the adventurer about some of them?”

“A man,” enunciated Saltash, “is only an adventurer till he arrives; then he’s a pioneer. Nobody minds new men when they’re like Asquith. Nobody minds rich men when they’re like Derby.” . . .

“For one reason, because the Stanleys don’t drift from one country to another, seeing which they can turn to their own greatest profit.”

Saltash shook his head incredulously:

“Don’t try to pull any stake-in-the-country stuff on me. That’s well enough for your father-in-law. I sat next to old Crawleigh at a city dinner last week; and he didn’t know what to make of things. I did. And I told him. ‘The aristocracy,’ I said, ‘has been swamped by the middle-classes. Well, if the aristocracy couldn’t keep its end up against men like Chamberlain and Asquith and Lloyd-George, it was best out of the way.’ D’you mind if I bring Foreditch over here? He’s just back from Germany; and I want to know how the land lies there.”

I could not repel such a man at a time when my sole function in the Turf and Stage was to study the new leaders in our political life. When I first met Sir Rupert at Oxford, he was an unbending radical; but the 1906 election brought into the world more radical mouths than there was bread to feed, and, when I took my seat, Foreditch was spaciously enthroned in the wastes of opposition. As a hired assassin, his tale of Budget Leaguers' scalps won him the deputy-leadership of the Die-Hards when the Parliament Bill came to be fought; and, in the Home Rule controversy, he preached rebellion in Ulster with a gusto not exceeded by Mr. Bonar Law, Sir Edward Carson and Mr. F. E. Smith. An incautious declaration that the kaiser could be trusted to save Ulster from a false Hanoverian, as William of Orange had saved her from a perfidious Stuart, kept Foreditch from reaping the reward of his shell-intrigue in 1916; but, if he missed cabinet rank, he achieved a greater position as the unofficial plenipotentiary who was always being sent, with the easy informality introduced by a 'business' government, to make overtures and arrange deals. His ambition, I think, was to play the part of Colonel House to Mr. Lloyd-George's President Wilson: in the last years of the war he was always vanishing mysteriously to Stockholm or Berne; and, two years after this date, I heard that he was visiting, in disguise, the leaders of all the parties in Ireland.

"The present condition of Germany . . .," he began; but, before I could hear what it was, an unknown woman bustled up to our table and began to make notes for an article which informed the world two days later (1) that anybody who was anybody would be found dining at the Turf and Stage, (2) that "Lucile"—as she confided to her "darling Betty"—had seen good-looking Bobbie Pentyre dancing with Lady Clackmannan's girl, (3) that Lady Barbara Oakleigh—"Babs Neave, as we must still think of her"—had been at the table next to "Lucile's" and (4) that her husband would certainly stand again for parliament when opportunity offered. In its slangy pertness and familiarity, the style was the woman; and, as accuracy was less important to the *Daily Picture* than snappy diction or a knowing air of intimacy, it would have been idle to correct her statements or to reprove her manners. No doubt she had a livelihood to earn; and those who create a demand have to bear as heavy a responsibility as those who furnish the supply. When I had recovered from my first exasperation, I felt that the loud-voiced lady was less to blame than "Blob" Wister, who owned the paper for which she wrote, and the two million readers (the circulation of the *Daily Picture* was certified by an impeccable firm of chartered accountants) who liked to think of Miss Murchison as "Lady Clackmannan's girl" and of Lord Pentyre as "Bobbie". Those who had no chance of seeing for

themselves whether he was good-looking must have been grateful to "Lucile" for lifting a corner of the curtain from the world of beauty, rank and fashion.

"Another section of the public you propose to educate," I told O'Rane.

"And you," he retorted. "You heard what Sam Dainton said about the state of Paris. Everybody hating everybody else." . . .

I looked round to make sure that we were not being overheard. Lucien de Grammont, I knew, was somewhere in the room; but I fancied that he was avoiding me.

"That's only these damned French," I said. "Instead of thanking us for pulling them out of the mire, they think *they* won the war single-handed and our job is just to foot the bill. Hang it all, Raney, we spent more money and provided more ammunition than any one else; we raised about five million men; we stayed on to clear the Germans out of France when it was all we could do to keep the French in the war at all; and, when our papers were gushing about the splendid unity, the French government was making us pay rent for the trenches our men occupied to defend their miserable country. They're the meanest hounds on earth. During the war, one couldn't say these things . . ."

"Does one do much good by saying them now? The Americans bring pretty much the same charge against us. You've an organization, George, and you should make it your business to fight the hatred-epidemic." . . .

He broke off, as the bland Gaspard presented himself at our table with the announcement that a lady was waiting outside. When I read Yolande Manisty's name, I guessed that Raymond Stornaway was worse; when I met her, I knew—without being told—that he was dead. As I came back to the blaze and blare of the dining-room, I felt that this was my first contact with reality that night. The financiers and wire-pullers and propagandists, the glittering *corps de ballet*, the punctual scribe who chronicled their movements, all belonged to a world of masquerade. I cannot say what lesson Bertrand had sent me there to learn; the lesson which I carried away was a doubt—the first since 1914—of victory.

I drove O'Rane to his house in Westminster and left him to think over Yolande Manisty's message. By the terms of her uncle's will, he had—for better or for worse—inherited unconditionally an estate of more than twenty million pounds.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE RED ACCOUNT

Countess of Montesquiou:

> So much for the Congress!
> Only a few blank nobodies remain,
> And they seem terror-stricken. . . . Blackly end
> Such fair festivities. The red god War
> Stalks Europe's plains anew!

THOMAS HARDY: *The Dynasts.*

1

Those who had never before heard of Sir Aylmer Lancing or of Deryk are no more likely than I am to forget the excitement of the week that followed Raymond Stornaway's death. That it lasted no more than a week was due to the number of competing claims on the public attention; but, between the Bloomsbury cocaine-prosecution and the Dawlish murder, half the papers were calling O'Rane's heritage "romantic" and the other half "sensational", while the conversation at every dinner-party that I attended came by divers ways to the unanimous conclusion that Sonia would now spend twelve hundred thousand pounds a year on feeding her friends. Before she had recovered from her first shock, I observed that she was considering bigger houses in other parts of London; on the morrow, when I dined—for the last time, as I vowed to myself—in Rutland Gate, Lady Dainton told me that she had never entertained any idea of selling Crowley Court; and, when I visited O'Rane to enquire if he needed help, he shewed me a pile, waist-high, of begging letters.

2

It was my first visit to the offices of the Lancing Trust; and I retain the memory of a vast, wind-swept barn on the edge of Hampstead Heath, with an old red-brick cottage and pent-houses of tarred wood attached. There were a great many box-files, a gigantic set of loose-leaf ledgers, a fair-sized

reference library and a large number of typewriters. On one wall I recognized the map which Aylmer Lancing used to keep in his study to remind him of the stages by which his grip had spread over the earth's surface. In all other respects, the building might have belonged to a poor-law relieving-officer; and Sonia, who obviously expected to find a double row of bankers smoking long cigars at a gleaming mahogany table, was no less obviously disappointed.

"I came to see if I could help you in any way," I told O'Rane, who had rather frightened me the night before by his air of physical exhaustion.

We found him now with one of his secretaries in Raymond Stornaway's private office, fidgeting with the will. I learned that the money was to be spent "for the good of humanity"; and in the construction of that clause he had already received so much contradictory advice that he had closed his office to chance callers.

"I didn't expect Stornaway to die so soon," was all he would say when I asked him his plans.

"I doubt if time will make your problem any easier," I answered, as I joined Sonia in front of the tattered wall-map.

There, from the centre of what Lancing had bought as a burnt-out town-site, the Lancing influence spread in extending circles. A name and date in faded ink marked the advance of his railroads, the acquisition of his forests and mines, the linking of lake to ocean for the transportation of his grain. Dotted lines, leading to vague infinity, shewed where Lancing had splashed out of the union into the Atlantic, the Pacific and the Gulf of Mexico.

"You must move to a decent office," Sonia put in. "And we can't go on at The Sanctuary if you want to entertain properly. People will expect us to live up to our position, you know."

O'Rane smiled grimly as he ushered us compellingly to the door.

"Whether that's for the good of humanity . . .," he murmured.

After this single meeting I resolved not to break in on his contemplation until I was invited. Very soon my attention was to be claimed by troubles of my own, for I was not satisfied with the state of Barbara's mind or body; I, too, wanted to think; and, though I treated O'Rane to an unsolicited misgiving whenever I remembered his new estate, I will not pretend that I thought of him much after the feverish seven days in which every one I met said: "You've heard about it, of course? That's the sort of thing that *would* happen to Sonia. What d'you suppose they'll do with it?" . . .

It was in these days that the last touches were being given to the great peace-treaty which was to make an end of war; and, but for that, I should have handed Bertrand my resignation and taken Barbara abroad. Until we saw the terms, however, we could not tell how far his gloomy predictions at Cannes would be fulfilled nor how far any one could undo the mischief that was reported from Paris. If we could believe a quarter of all we heard, the butchery for which Sanguszko and Boscarelli clamoured in Lucien's verandah-parliament was taking place in one country after another; as I warned Saltash, three discontented Alsace-Lorraines were being created for one that was pacified; and the mood of the December election seemed to return as the public realized the helplessness of the defeated enemy. Outside the now notorious "Oakleigh gang" I found few to admit that any country but Germany had been responsible for the war; and on that foundation each man erected his own standard of retribution. My father-in-law went the length of collecting a party at the Eclectic Club to reason with me and to check the wrong-headed doctrines that poured forth, week after week, from Fetter Lane.

"You really seem to live in a world of your own," he explained wearily. "*I* don't hope to convince you; but, if you take a poll of your friends, on a question like indemnities . . ."

Before he had time to finish or I to answer, John Carstairs put his own case with alluring brevity:

"The Boche made the war. The Boche must pay for it."

"What would have happened to our colonies if we'd lost?," pursued Crawleigh, who seemed to regard the empire as a dumping-ground for the viceregally-inclined members of his family. German West Africa was below his dignity, but he had three sons. "These people mustn't complain if they're served in the same way."

I recalled and quoted Bertrand's dictum that no lasting peace could be established on a sense of grievance.

"I feel no tenderness towards Germany," I said, "but aren't we making another war inevitable?"

"You will make it inevitable," said Mr. Justice Maitland, "if you let the last war go unpunished. No one will deny that the Germans broke a treaty, that they robbed, tortured, violated and murdered, not in the heat of fighting but as part of a terrorizing campaign ordered from headquarters. If acts like these go unpunished, every nation will know that it can take 'frightfulness'

as its starting-point. Rape and mutilation will become sanctified usages of war. There will be a precedent."

"That's unanswerable," I told the judge. "But, if this war proves anything, it proves that war doesn't pay. I want to make that the great contribution of this war to history. If we impose a peace so unendurable that even war is no worse . . ."

Maitland interrupted me with a smiling head-shake:

"I have to try murderers in the course of my duties. Their state would be no better than that of their victims, if vendettas were permitted. You might say truly enough that murder doesn't pay. I should be sorry to see the death-penalty abolished on that reasoning."

"If you could hang every German," I said, as I left to dress for the opera, "I might accept your argument. As it is, a punitive peace will set them thinking of revenge; and, the moment they're strong enough, they'll take it."

"A good reason for keeping them weak," said Carstairs, "which—quite rightly—is all Clemenceau cares about."

I might have multiplied, almost to infinity, the number of similar opinions, held by the most dissimilar people. I heard them at the club, I was inundated by them at my office and I wrestled with them at Barbara's parties.

"I wonder whether Bertrand thinks we're making any headway?," I asked that night at dinner, after venting my despondency on my wife.

I am not sure whether she heard me; her only answer was to look at her watch and to ask which opera was being played.

"*Louise?*" she repeated. "Then we can miss the first two acts. I suppose you wouldn't care to go alone?"

"Aren't you feeling up to it?," I asked.

Barbara turned her back on me and busied herself with the wad of her cigarette-holder:

"Oh, I don't know! Yes, I'm all right! And, anyway, I shan't do any good . . . I don't know what I'm talking about!," she cried with sudden loss of control. "I'm going to lie down till we start."

"I'll take you up," I said.

"No!," she answered, with what I can only call a suppressed scream.

Her look and tone took me aback as though she had struck me in the face. For some weeks I had fancied that her nerves were disordered; but, as I finished my cigar in solitude, I felt that this night marked a subtle change in my relations with her. To this day I cannot tell when it began. We had been married little more than a year; before that, for ten years, we had been excellent friends. At first I believe she told me every thought in her heart; and there were times when I wished for both our sakes that she would think less and say less about what could not be mended. As though I had put my wish into words, her manner changed at the armistice: we were to make a new start, she was to forget her love for Eric Lane; and, after that, an onlooker would have said that she belonged to me, soul and body. She and I alone knew that, in some way, we were becoming strangers. Though she was bored with Cannes after the first week, she never told me; she might be bored with the life of a political hostess, but loyalty or lack of confidence kept her silent. She would not admit that she was ill or unhappy; but something now tortured her beyond bearing.

And I was afraid to ask her. In all that touched her soul, I was a stranger, an amateur and a bungler. Something of this must have revealed itself in my expression, for on her return to the dining-room she put her arms round my neck and told me not to look so worried.

"I'm worried about you," I said.

"But I swear to you I've never felt better in my life! Come on; or we shall miss the only act worth hearing!"

I followed her, more worried than ever. If I said nothing, I should seem callous; if I said anything, I might inflame her misery. I knew her too little for any idea what she wanted of me; and she trusted me too little to help by a hint. At this rate, she would become every day more uncommunicative; and each unanswered appeal for understanding would separate her farther from me.

"If *ever* there's anything the matter," I said, as we got into the car, "I hope you'll tell me, Babs."

"Everything's *perfect*," she answered. "A darling house, a darling husband." . . . Her voice suddenly lost its false ring of assurance. "No, the fault's in *me* somewhere. There's something missing. Don't let's talk about it."

At the unexpected quaver, I caught her fingers in mine; and she brushed away a tear with the back of my hand. Though no more was said, I felt that

something more ought to have been said and that I was a moral coward for not saying it. In the silence and darkness of the car, I wondered whether Barbara was unhappy because she had been given no sign that she was to bear children. For all I knew, she did not want them or was afraid; for all I knew, she wanted them and could not bear them and was afraid to tell me. And we were both afraid to confess our fear.

3

When we reached the opera-house, the second act was over; and, on the way to our box, we ran the gauntlet of a dozen friends, who invited us to meals, and of a hundred staring strangers, who turned to their neighbours and whispered: "There's Lady Barbara!" with the mingled triumph and awe which the English display when they recognize any idol of the illustrated papers.

"One gets used to anything, even the manners of the well-bred," I murmured, as we struggled towards the stairs.

"If any one else asks us to lunch, I shall say we've given up eating. . . . Oh, I *must* speak to Marion! You go on."

I ploughed slowly into an open space by the entrance to the pit-tier boxes, then came to an involuntary standstill. Face to face, too near for either of us to escape, I found Eric Lane smoking a cigarette and looking over my shoulder to the place where Barbara was talking to Mrs. Shelley. Unless she had already seen him and was lingering behind till I had made myself a screen, they must meet in another moment. Eric never had much colour to lose, but even his lips now seemed bloodless. When our eyes met, I could not have said which was the more uncomfortable. I enquired after his father, I believe; and he asked me, as he had been in Japan at the time of our wedding, to accept his belated good wishes now.

"When are we to have another play?," I asked.

"This autumn, I hope," he answered.

"Good for that. Well, Eric, I little thought in the old Phoenix Club days that we were entertaining a genius unawares."

"They were g-good days," he sighed.

Then there was a pause; and the cordiality which old habit had brought to life wilted. As he glanced in Barbara's direction, I fancy he was charging her with making our friendship impossible; this second sight of her seemed to incapacitate him; and we stood stockishly silent. When she joined us,

there was, indeed, a smile on either side, a high and rather breathless "Oh, how do you do?" Then we hurried to our box; and Eric strolled across the hall. His hand was shaking as he tried to relight his cigarette; and the hollow eyes and cadaverous cheeks seemed ten years older for the ten seconds' encounter.

Was it a presentiment of this meeting that had unnerved Barbara? I had no time to speak before we were surrounded by a new throng. It was her first appearance at Covent Garden; and from the boxes and stalls we had opera-glasses trained upon us until I seemed to be looking at a tank of lobsters; a queue formed outside our door and we were flattened against the side of the box. The acclamation was not confined within a ring of our friends: I felt the atmosphere of the whole house warming in the greatest tribute to personality that I have ever seen.

"I watched you coming in to-night," Dr. Gaisford told her at the end. "It was like the sun breaking through. . . . How are you, my dear child? As you don't come to see me professionally, I hope that means you're well and happy?"

"Everything's *perfect*," Barbara cried, with a conviction that had been lacking when she used the same words earlier. As we settled ourselves in the car, she added joyously: "How sweet every one is! Marion wants us to choose a night for dining with her next week. And I've committed you to the Pinto de Vasconcellos the week after. And Bobbie Pentyre wants us to go to Croxton one week-end. Can you remember all that? And will you come?"

"Anywhere you like," I promised. "You seem to have had rather a success to-night, Babs."

"It's a good world! I've got back my grip on life. . . . I feel *free*," she went on with a note of wonder; and her hand stole shyly into mine as though we were composing a quarrel: "George dear, I'm sorry to have been unsatisfactory, sorry to have worried you. I promised on Armistice Day that I wouldn't speak of certain people. You can't help thinking of them, but since to-night I'm not . . . haunted. *Seeing* Eric has broken the spell. . . . I can meet him now. I'm going to. Madame Pinto said he was coming to her party."

Remembering Eric's look of anguish when he caught sight of Barbara, I felt that the greatest kindness she could shew him would be to prevent further meetings. It was folly, I thought, for her to invite him to our first reception, it was madness to expect that he would come; and, if I said nothing at the time, it was for fear she would imagine that I was jealous.

"Make things as easy as you can for him," I recommended.

"We can give him the opportunity of being friends again."

"And don't be hurt if he doesn't take it. Men of that kind, imaginative and highly-strung . . . In his way, he is a bit of a genius." . . .

"I gave him that," she murmured with a pride which I thought ill-timed. "He had only talent before."

To judge by appearances, Eric had paid dearly for his goddess' kiss.

"They feel things more intensely," I continued, "than dull, matter-of-fact people like me."

Barbara made no answer for several minutes; then she looked straight ahead and asked:

"Wouldn't you feel it as much if you lost me?"

"I should feel it more than anything in the world."

"It's broken Eric. He'll never be mended. But it wouldn't break you?"

Faint though the challenge was, I fancied, for the first time in my life, that Barbara was trying to drag me into a 'scene'.

"We won't talk about it," I said.

"I don't think anything would break you. And you may take that how you like."

The words may have been her tribute to flint-like resolution or her criticism of wooden insensibility. The way that I decided to take them was in silence. Barbara hid her face in the great nosegay of carnations which she always carried, then held them out, like an impulsive child, for me to smell. As she walked, slender, tall and radiant, into the house, I felt that this was the day which I had waited fourteen months to see dawning.

"Yes, I had quite a success," she murmured to her reflection, when we paused in front of a mirror halfway up the stairs. "You seem surprised, George."

"I don't know how any one could hope to resist you," I said. "*I* never can."

The South American dinner to which Barbara had committed me marked our grudging surrender to a lady whose hospitality was rapidly breaking the *morale* of London. Madame Pinto de Vasconcellos, if her ambitions had

been examined before the judgement-seat, must have confessed a resolution to force free wine, food and tobacco on a larger number of victims than had fallen to any other Brazilian. Setting out with an introduction to the Duchess of Ross and a system of snowball terrorization for every one else, she secured B for her parties by playing on his fear of hurting A's feelings.

"She is a stranger to London," the duchess explained to Lady Crawleigh in a tone that hid natural exultation under less natural pity. "I should like to shew her a little hospitality."

Lady Crawleigh had been caught too often in similar traps to forget that, while Herrig Castle and Ross House remained unlet, no one was secure; but, like every one else, she tried to shelter herself behind a substitute. Madame Pinto, she told Barbara, had heard so much of her "beautiful daughter"; it would be only a kindness to accept one of her many invitations.

When I pointed out that the whole English-speaking world had heard so much of Barbara, my mother-in-law rejoined wistfully that it was a small thing to ask, that she did not ask much and that she would not have asked now if she had imagined we should make difficulties. Remembering the unsteady concordat which was the best that a heretic and a radical could ever hope to establish with the Crawleighs, I urged Barbara to capitulate before I knew that Eric Lane was to be our fellow-guest. Had I now urged her to refuse, Lady Crawleigh would have had a grievance; and Barbara might have thought that I had a personal interest in preventing another encounter.

Though the dinner passed off pleasantly enough, it had one wholly unexpected result which changed the course of history for two or three of Madame Pinto's guests. Had we refused this invitation, I might not have seen John Carstairs for another month; had I not seen him, I should not have asked him to tell me about his recent tour of the Ross estates in Connemara; had he not told me, I might have contentedly played my part of absentee landlord for years to come. Carstairs, however, succeeded in frightening me with his stories of impending Irish trouble. The precarious peace, he said, might break down at any moment. As trustee for his half-witted brother, he was anxious to sell at any sacrifice and advised me to do the same. Whether I sold or not, I should be a fool if I did not at least visit an estate which I had neglected since the Easter rising of 1916.

Our chance conversation was the cause of my first serious disagreement with Barbara. Before parting with a property that had been in the family for three hundred years, I told her that we must explore the conditions of the County Kerry for ourselves. In my suggestion that we should go to Lake

House for Whitsuntide she acquiesced at once, only stipulating that she should be allowed to stay behind at the last moment if the crossing threatened to be very rough. Next morning I reserved our sleepers and arranged with Spence-Atkins to postpone his own holiday and to take charge of our paper till my return; in the evening she warned me, rather fretfully, that she might not feel well enough to come. I asked if she would care for me to send for Gaisford; but, after a night's rest, she assured me buoyantly that she was all right. I telegraphed to warn my agent of our coming; and, when I read out his reply, Barbara exclaimed with almost hysterical passion that, well or ill, in fine weather or foul, nothing would induce her to come with me to Ireland.

"Well, do you mind my leaving you alone here?," I asked, when I had recovered my breath.

"No. Bobbie Pentyre has arranged his Croxton party for Whitsuntide."

"But why didn't you tell me that before? I could have gone another week. Now I've made Spence-Atkins cancel his own plans . . ."

"Oh, you'd better stick to your present arrangement," she answered. Then, for some reason that I could not guess, she broke into wild weeping. "I'm so miserable! I'm mad! I don't know what I'm saying! George, I'm sorry I was rude."

"You weren't rude," I assured her.

"I've not slept for nights and nights," she gasped. "You've been very patient with me. Go on being patient, go on loving me! I'm so miserable." . . .

This time I determined to be a moral coward no longer:

"But why?"

"Oh, I've told you! Because I'm a damned soul. I told you that when you asked me to marry you."

"And I told you that I'd make you happy or die in the attempt. There's nothing I won't do . . ."

In her first convulsion of grief, Barbara had allowed me to take her into my arms; but, as she became more composed, I felt her struggling gently to be free.

"You really mean that?," she asked, with her head averted. "If it meant your honour, your life, your happiness, you'd give all that to see me happy?"

I fancied again that she was challenging me and that, if I made unguarded reservations, I should be told that I did not love her as Jack Waring and Eric Lane had loved her. The second, as she believed, was paying with his life; the first had already paid with his soul. "I don't know what I'm saying!" she cried, with her hands pressed to her temples. "I'm worried . . . No, I won't see a doctor. You go off as you arranged. I'll go to Croxton if I feel in the mood. When you come back, I may be all right; if not . . ."

She stared distractedly round the room in a way that reminded me of the sad, mad time when Eric first went out of her life.

"But you *will* be all right," I assured her.

"If I'm not, remember you married a lost soul, George; I warned you. I kill whatever I touch." . . .

4

It is hardly to be imagined that I carried a light heart to Ireland. And the state of the country at this time was not of a kind to cure any private depression. In 1916 I entered Dublin as an academic nationalist, who had voted year after year with the staunch, self-effacing Redmondites; I left as a perfervid Sinn Feiner, when the men who had played with me as boys five-and-twenty years before were shot off their crazy barricades or done to death by a mockery of legal forms. Then for the first time, face to face with a people cheated of its promised independence, I too said that no trust was to be reposed in English honour and no sane leadership expected from men who believed in English pledges. Through weary years we liberals had fought constitutionally for our Home Rule Bill; it was inscribed on the Statute Book in spite of intrigues and intimidation; but treason triumphed over constitutionalism on the day when Germany made war in the belief that an Irish guerilla would keep Great Britain from taking part.

Melancholy memories and uneasy forebodings were my companions on the familiar road to Holyhead. I was dining with my uncle Bertrand on the night when the Home Rule Act was suspended; he at least had protested and perhaps he was a little self-righteous, but in 1916 I was to remember his grim prediction that from the breach of that undertaking, which every party in parliament helped to repudiate, would follow inevitably the discredit of the simpleton nationalists and the rise of Sinn Fein. The rebellion, which he foretold so accurately, was succeeded by a repression, which he and every one else knew would continue until the next rebellion. Sinn Fein, in these first months of the armistice, was penetrating the country peacefully; but

even John Carstairs, who usually advocated the use of machine-guns and aeroplanes against political opponents, recognized that there would be war if the present army of occupation interfered. As yet there were only sporadic outrages on both sides, followed by reprisals, followed by counter-reprisals. As always happens, the non-combatants, squeezed by both sides, suffered most.

On this score, when at last I reached Lake House, I had no personal complaint to make. My agent told me that certain Sinn Feiners had been billeted on me and certain stores of food commandeered; my gun-room had been emptied; but both my cars, after a short period of detention, were returned with a permit from republican headquarters. This, I believe, made them liable to seizure by the forces of the crown; but my agent warned me that any license which recognized the authority of Dublin Castle would cause the cars to be taken and not restored. And nothing in Kerry tempted the Castle to send its emissaries so far into hostile territory. If I abstained from provocative acts or speeches, I should be left in peace.

"They like you," my agent was good enough to tell me; "and it's what they're all saying, that you should be living here."

"Are the tenants paying me any rent?," I asked.

"They are."

I drifted away by myself to see how well the house would suit Barbara. The lake was like a sheet of glass, in a frame of dense green wood, hanging from the gardens by the red ribands of the fuchsia hedges. Here and there I saw thin spirals of smoke: it was turf smoke, though I could not smell it. From Castlemaine, in the west, the air blew soft and salt from the Atlantic. I cursed the malevolence of man that disturbed such peace and desecrated such beauty. I cursed, too, the fate that had sent me to an English school, because there was none good enough in Ireland, so robbing me of one home without giving me another.

"I'm a married man," I told my agent, "since last I was here. I don't care to bring my wife over till things are more settled."

That, he assured me regretfully, was what every one said; but I should be comfortable enough if I did not make trouble. He was himself an avowed republican, not from any hostility to the king, whom he admired, nor from devotion to the forms and spirit of republicanism: he wanted peace; and, whether Sinn Fein would achieve it or not, no other party had succeeded. Sinn Fein was feared, if not respected; and the English only remembered

Ireland when they were frightened. If Redmond and his lot had put the fear of God into the English one half as well as the others, they would be lords and ministers and the rest now, like Mr. Law and the man who prosecuted Roger Casement. My agent disapproved of Sir Edward Carson's politics but admired him as the Irishman who had put more fear of God into the English than any one since Parnell.

The one sentimental relaxation that this hard-headed, soft-spoken man allowed himself was that Parnell was still alive and would come back to lead Ireland.

"If I could find a purchaser . . ." I began.

"An Englishman? The house would be burnt over your honour's head if the whisper of it ran round!"

"Then," I said, "I may as well be getting back to London."

My agent protested with touching fervour, but I was uneasy at being separated from Barbara. Two days after I landed at Kingston, she telegraphed: "*Missing you dreadfully hope you arrived safely and are coming back immediately all my love bless you*"; and, if her language seemed still a trifle neurotic, she had almost recovered her tranquillity by the time she wrote to describe the Whitsuntide party at Croxton Hall. The week-end had been uneventful; and, though Eric Lane was in the house, I could not read any embarrassment between the lines that described their meeting. The nervous excitability, however, of which I had seen too much evidence in London, betrayed itself once in a comment on a rumour: "*You remember the Miss Maitland you met with the O'Ranes? She's here. A pretty little thing! Obviously in love with Eric. I'd give anything to see him happily married, but I hope he's not serious about this child. She's too hopelessly young, she'd send him mad in a week. It'll be too tragic if he lets another woman make a mess of his life.*" The next day Barbara telegraphed again, telling me once more how much I was being missed and offering to join me at Lake House.

I returned to London as soon as I had finished my business and was met at Euston by a shivering form in a scarlet tea-gown and an ermine cloak.

"You crazy child, you'll give yourself pneumonia!," I cried as I hurried her into the car through a double line of smiling porters.

"That's a pretty way to greet me when I've stayed up all night for you!," Barbara laughed. "I *am* glad to see you again, George, though that wasn't

why I came to meet you. It's your little friend Ivy Maitland: she's gone down suddenly with appendicitis."

"Well, I'm very sorry, of course . . ." I began.

"Yes, dear, but we must do something about it. You know she was acting as Eric's secretary while his own girl had a holiday? Yes! And this child has collapsed in his flat. Dr. Gaisford's attending her; and he says she's not to be moved on any consideration whatsoever. When I heard about it last night, I felt we *must* offer Eric a couple of rooms till she can return home. Things being as they are, though . . ." Barbara faltered and turned away. "It's all such a muddle that I thought I couldn't ask him without your permission."

From her consulting me, I surmised that she doubted the wisdom of her impulse. From my knowledge of Eric, I imagined he would sleep on the Embankment before he accepted a bed from us. If Barbara wished to make a sign of friendship, however, I would not check her.

"You don't need my permission," I said. "If you think it will do any good for us to invite him . . ."

5

We received our answer before the invitation could be sent. At the end of breakfast, Lady John Carstairs telephoned to say that she had herself placed her house at Eric's disposal, but that he preferred to remain in Ryder Street till the girl was out of danger. On my way to Fetter Lane, I left some flowers and a card bidding Eric to let us know if we could be of any service; but we heard nothing till a week later, when O'Rane telephoned to catch me for five minutes before I went to bed.

"I couldn't get round before," he apologized, "and I thought you ought to know. Poor old Eric! He's getting all his troubles in a lump. Where's Babs? I'm afraid she ought to hear this, too."

I was under the impression that she had gone to bed half an hour before; but I heard sounds in the drawing-room, almost as though she had expected news of Eric and was staying up because it was bad news.

"What's happened to him now?," I asked, as we went upstairs.

"He's been ordered abroad immediately," O'Rane answered. "California. Lungs."

I do not know whether Barbara heard more than the last word; but she seemed to rise from her chair and cross the room in a single movement.

O'Rane's expression changed to wonder and then softened to pity as she caught and gripped his hand. No name had been mentioned in her hearing; but I think we both realized that he and I and all the world—with one exception—might be ordered to California for our lungs without striking an equal terror into her heart. In that moment I knew how far I had always been from winning her love.

O'Rane, I feel, atoned for want of sight by keenness of hearing. I fancied that a little of the pity in his expression might be intended for me.

"Is he . . . dying?," Barbara whispered.

"Not yet awhile." O'Rane withdrew his hand to feel for a chair. I thought I saw his expression changing again, this time hardening slightly as though to keep the flash-point of her emotions low or, perhaps, to douse them with a single chilling jet. "He can get all right if he wants to. You may imagine, he's rather bowled over at present." As he turned to me, I felt that he wanted Barbara to hear his next announcement without being watched. "It came quite suddenly," he told me; "and, but for this, you'd have seen him happily married to Ivy Maitland." If Barbara gave any sign of interest, I saw and heard nothing. O'Rane took time to let his announcement sink in; and I fancied again that he was tacitly advising her to close her side of an account which Eric had already closed against her. If she chose to think that he was still in love with her and that his engagement to Ivy was an act of despair, no argument would cure her; at least there was now no reason why this shadow should force its way between us any longer. "It's rather a facer," O'Rane continued, "when you lose your wife and your health on the same day. I've been telling him all evening that no woman in the world is big enough to spoil a man's life, but at the moment he's in the mood to creep into a corner and die. He's too good for that. I want you to see him before he starts, George; and write to him while he's away."

Naturally, I promised without hesitation. If Barbara sent a letter of farewell, she said nothing to me about it; when I told her next day that I was going to Ryder Street on my way to the office, she nodded abstractedly but made no suggestion of accompanying me; and, on my return, she sat like a spirit of tragedy, refusing to ask me the result of my mission, till I volunteered to tell her.

"By the way, I missed Eric this morning," I said.

"Oh? Had he gone already?," she asked.

“The maid said he was not at home,” I answered; and, mercifully for me, Barbara did not enquire further.

A less diplomatic version would have recounted that, as I hurried round to Ryder Street, I saw Eric getting out of the taxi in front of me. His front-door slammed as I was halfway up the stairs; and, when I said something to the maid about being one of his older friends, I was informed that Miss Maitland was still seriously ill. Divining that Miss Maitland could not be occupying all the rooms in the flat, I scribbled a note in which I begged Eric to see me for two minutes. A verbal message apprised me that Mr. Lane was engaged; and I went away, more hurt, I believe, than ever in my life before. Since his interrupted romance with Ivy, the fellow could bear me no grudge for marrying the woman he had tried so long to win; our friendship went back, sixteen years, to Oxford and the dinners of the Phœnix. There were not too many survivors from those days; and, coming to sympathize, I had seen my sympathy flung back in my face. I made every allowance for his illness and misery; but I could not write to him, at least for the present and, when a letter from him, several months later, hurtled like a flask of vitriol from California to England, I was too nearly blinded to attempt an answer.

“Will you call again?,” asked Barbara perfunctorily.

“I don’t suppose he wants to be bothered,” I said.

There was a long silence; and Barbara’s shoulders moved in a slight shrug:

“I don’t suppose he wants to be friends. I tried, when we met at Croxton; but, when there’s been love, I don’t think you can go back to friendship.” She looked at me almost guiltily; and for an embarrassed moment I feared that I was to be drawn into yet one more unwanted confidence. Then, changing her mind, she walked slowly to the fire and stood with the dancing flames reflected in her sombre eyes. “I’m . . . *glad* he’s going,” she murmured at last. “I’ve not really been myself since I met him again, whatever I told you about feeling free. When you wanted me to come with you to Ireland . . . I was mad. I’ll go with you now, if you like . . . anywhere. We’ve talked so often about a fresh start: I can make it now. I *do* want our life to be a success. If there’s anything I can do . . .”

“You can’t do more than you’re doing at present,” I said.

With a sudden turn, Barbara flung her arms about my neck and hid her face against my chest.

"Is there nothing more that you want?," she asked. "Don't say 'your happiness'! I know you want that, darling. Don't you want anything for yourself? Don't you want me to be like other women? Don't you want me to have children?"

"Most men want children," I said, "but women have to bear them."

"Yes . . . I've always wanted children and I've always been afraid of them. I'm still afraid, . . . but I'm going to have one now, George, . . . for your sake. You're pleased? Hold me tight, darling, and promise me one thing. If anything goes wrong . . ."

"But, good God . . .!," I began.

"It *may*. If anything *does* go wrong and one of us has to die, promise you'll let it be me!"

I was dispensed from answering by Barbara's sudden surrender to hysterics. When she was recovered, I put her to bed and sent for Gaisford; as soon as he allowed her up, I took her to Crawleigh Abbey and left her to recuperate from something which the doctor described enigmatically as "a nervous breakdown that didn't come off".

"I've been expecting this for years," he told me. "And for years I've felt that she'd be a healthier, happier woman when she had some brats to look after. This business about Eric Lane must have been a shock to her."

"Well, thank Heaven, that's all over," I said.

"At last," Gaisford grunted. "If you're going down to Crawleigh . . ."

"I shall stay here, except for week-ends, unless I'm sent for," I interrupted. "This is going to be a busy time. The peace terms are to be signed within the next few days."

"I wonder what kind of mess they've been making out there," Gaisford mused.

"You're convinced it *will* be a mess?"

"My dear George, when two human beings get together, they always make a big mess," he answered with more than his usual misanthropy; "and I've known human beings who could make a fair-sized mess with their four unaided paws."

The peace of Versailles was celebrated in London with thanksgivings by day and fireworks at night.

"I wonder why," said Bertrand sadly.

"Lady Dainton wants me to bring you to her party at the Excelsior," I said, though, when he repeated: "I wonder why", it was not easy to find a convincing answer.

"Are *you* going?" he asked suspiciously, as though I were revenging myself on him for my dinners in Rutland Gate.

"Yes," I answered. "I wonder why myself; but I'm a bachelor at present and I must dine somewhere."

"All right," sighed my uncle; and, on that, we drove to the office and sat until seven o'clock considering the terms and discussing, with Spence-Atkins and any one else who drifted in, what the future policy of our paper was to be.

For several weeks the dearth of news in Fetter Lane and the claims of outside interests had brought our fragile bantling to the verge of death by starvation. Ministers, I thought, revealed a shrewd knowledge of mass-psychology in denying us all news of the conference.

"Kid asks for a thing," explained Sir Philip Saltash, when I loosed a grumble in his hearing; "you refuse it; kid screams. Go on refusing it; kid goes on screaming. Go on refusing still; kid thinks of something else."

By July, even the press had almost ceased to scream; parliament had long been silent; and the country was probably thinking of a prize-fight. My own record was representative of the vast majority: I went to my office six days a week, I continued the farce of exploring London to find what people were thinking, I supported a wall at the parties which my wife gave to please my uncle; but such intellectual energy as I possessed had been devoted at one moment to my private affairs in Ireland, at another to O'Rane's inheritance and again at another to the havoc which poor Eric Lane's return had wrought in my life with Barbara. At our editorial dinners I was chiefly concerned to see that we had enough readable matter of any kind to fill twenty-four pages. Like the child in Saltash's parable, I was now indifferent; and, when at last the great secrets which we had screamed to know were flung to us in bulk, we were mildly bored.

"I warned you at Cannes how it would be," said Bertrand; then he lapsed into unhelpful silence.

"You heard what they were saying in Paris?," asked Spence-Atkins. " 'The seeds of a great and durable war'."

"Meanwhile," I said, "as our first article will be on the treaty . . .?"

We had reached no decision by the time my uncle and I adjourned for dinner with the Daintons; if seventy men out of London's seven millions understood what kind of peace had been made, I do not believe that seven men of the seventy cared by now whether it was a good peace or a bad.

"Indifference! Indifference!," Bertrand sighed. "If you compare this night with the day of the armistice . . . We said 'never again!'; and we meant it. Now, though half the world's still in mourning, we're racing along a road that will put the other half in mourning."

"I suppose you can never repeat your emotions," I ventured, as I followed his gaze over the packed restaurant. "The war ended at the armistice; people say 'All right! It's *still* ended.' "

"And they're not interested to see whether the present world is built on quicksand."

"No one can say *we* haven't done our best to warn people," I said wearily, as the Daintons came into the lounge.

"No one but a fool would say that any one had paid the slightest attention to our warnings," Bertrand rejoined. "The harm's done now. That phase is over."

As we went in to dinner, Lady Dainton told me that the scene was quite like 1914. From a long and intimate acquaintance with her no less than from the ring of pleasure in her voice, I realized that this was her return from exile: for thirty years she had lived and laboured to enter what she considered the "right" houses and to secure the "right" people in her own. The war had thrown her out of work; but she could begin again now. One of her sons had been killed, the other wounded; her daughter had disappointed the family by marrying O'Rane and shocked it by running away from him; for the Daintons, who had worked as hard as any one, it had not been a pleasant or an easy war; and now Lady Dainton was dismissing it as a regrettable incident, least said, soonest mended. She was not wanting in affection for her dead son nor for the son who would be among the first to die if another war came; but she was by now too inelastic to remodel her daily life, still less to attempt improvements on the scene of 1914 when there were no 'profiteers', no 'temporary gentlemen', no six-shilling income-tax, no bloated wages for insatiable domestic servants.

"You think it will last?," I enquired.

"I feel sure it will," she answered. "It's to *all* our interests, don't you know?, to keep the big houses open, to have plenty of employment, money circulating. . . . Of course, if the socialists had their way . . . but I don't think there's much socialism in England, George. The war has thrown people together so much. The agitators simply wouldn't be able to make a living if they weren't paid from abroad. There's a little book I must send you on the Jewish peril." . . .

A new taste for spreading scares was the only change that I could detect in my hostess. Whereas she had occupied herself before the war by sitting on endless committees, she reached a larger public now by sitting at home and inundating her friends with pamphlets on bolshevism, prohibition, the white-slave traffic, secular education and every other danger that threatened, day by day, to sap the security of England. Sir Roger, I fancy, had changed even less. Whereas he had formerly jobbed in and out of wild-cat industrial securities, he now dabbled in the more chaotic of the European exchanges. Sonia danced; Sam had left his firm of contractors in Hartlepool for a vague "agency-business" of his own in London; Tom Dainton's widow had married again; and I believe this single family could have been reproduced, in every detail of history and circumstance, in almost every town and county throughout Great Britain and Ireland.

"George not being pessimistic, is he?," Sir Roger enquired genially, as we settled into our places.

"I confess I don't like the outlook," I said; and for the life of me I could not imagine how any one enjoyed the prospect of a peace abroad that was nothing but a silent war. My volatile host had been sufficiently dissatisfied a few days before when the labour party, realizing that the government was properly contemptuous of its servile supporters in the House of Commons, threatened the "direct action" of a general strike. Dainton knew; and I knew; and every man with a smattering of economic history knew that the present boom would be followed by a disastrous slump. "Things seem too good to last."

The flow of geniality ran suddenly dry.

"You'd be the first to complain if they did," said Dainton; and his tone surprised me out of a reply till I noticed his flushed face and watery eyes. "My friend George has great qualities," he continued, with malicious jocularity, to the table at large, "but he's no great shakes as a prophet. Before the war he told us there would be no war; when it came, he said it could

never end one way or the other; now that it's ended, he says it *must* start again. Cheerful customer, George."

I might have reminded him that in the nineties he was prophesying an inevitable war with Russia, in the nineteen-hundreds with France. I might have asked him to reconcile the treaty of Versailles with the fourteen points. I might have enquired whether he would keep his promises of the December election that the kaiser should be hanged and the whole cost of the war covered by a German indemnity. In the interests of a quiet dinner, I said nothing; Dainton, as a political barometer, was more valuable to me than Dainton as a political controversialist. I realized for the first time that the class which he represented would be our most aggressive antagonists when we worked to secure a sane peace. Thanks to the determination of the French prime minister and the vacillation of our own, he was enabled to go back impenitently to the mood of his election address. No longer speaking of "Wilson, *le bienvenu*", he had discovered in the president an insidious agent for strengthening Germany and weakening France. Forgetting his earlier lip-service to the League of Nations, he paraded comparative populations and, in my hearing that night, based his hopes of enduring peace on "bleeding Germany white and keeping her white".

I had not, for several months, mentioned the inflammatory fourteen points: had I done so, Dainton might have retorted that President Wilson had himself departed from them by throwing his lot in with M. Clemenceau and Mr. Lloyd-George. I did not discuss the equity of the peace terms. I discussed very little with Dainton; but I tried, as I had been trying all day, to envisage the new world which circumstances and the efforts of the peace conference were labouring to bear. Russia was in the grip of revolution, civil war and famine; Germany, Austria, Hungary and Italy might follow at any moment; the map of Europe was dotted with strangely named, new, self-governing republics, alike only in their complete ignorance of self-government; as we were soon to see, there was no European police to restrain the Italian who might be inspired to seize Fiume or the Rumanian who was tempted to march on Buda Pesht; the League of Nations had been invested with no power; and the world outside Europe, from India to Egypt and from Ireland to the Philippines, had been taught the magic word "self-determination" and had realized its possibilities more vividly than those who coined it.

In an unguarded moment I did ask Dainton whether he imagined that the Germans could ever pay the indemnity which he had so sternly demanded. He believed it confidently. How, I asked him; but Dainton told me that he

was not in the mood to split hairs: if they could pay it, they should (and the allies would remain in occupation till the last penny had been handed over); if the Hun ruined himself in the attempt, as I seemed to think likely, it would be something to feel that he would never again menace the world.

"And if he ruins us too?," I asked. "Economically, the whole world is knitted together. If the Russian revolution spreads to Germany?"

"It won't spread here," Dainton answered in happy forgetfulness of earlier speeches against the corrupting influence of those Russian and German agents who controlled British trades unions. "Our people are too sensible. You're very gloomy, George! This won't do at all. Drink up that cocktail and let's begin our dinner."

As I looked round on the scene of peace, now officially proclaimed, I reflected that five years, all but a few days, had passed since I strolled on to the valley-terrace at Chepstow, to smoke a cigarette between dances; it seemed less than five weeks since Colonel Farwell walked diffidently out of the darkness to say that, while war had not yet been declared, it was prudent for all officers to be in touch with their depots. They had gone, those first, in a spirit of routine enlivened by adventure; they were followed by men who went in a spirit of bewilderment clarified by sacrifice. The bewilderment passed; and the sacrifice turned to resignation. Soon the resignation became fatalism: every one went because every one else was going; none expected to come back, and, of those who went first, few were cheated of their expectation. Now we were celebrating the end of a war that dwarfed the campaigns of Napoleon to so many intermittent brawls.

I must have spoken the name, for my uncle caught at it eagerly:

"Seventeen-ninety-three, eighteen-fifteen," he murmured. "Nineteen-fourteen, nineteen-nineteen. Napoleon ended the middle ages and changed the map. Have we begun anything, ended anything, changed anything? We spilt a paint-box over the atlas; but will the colours stick? Germany and Russia cancel out; the rest of us have to play for pennies instead of shillings; but have we ended war, have we ended the nineteenth century, have we done anything but lose a few pawns in the first moves?"

"We'd won *everything* at the armistice!," I exclaimed. "The world was ready and willing to be disarmed, ready and willing to accept arbitration in place of war . . ."

"What election-cry has a chance against 'revenge'?," Bertrand demanded, with a glance of contempt towards the end of the table, when

Dainton was arguing heatedly with the wine-waiter. " 'The red account is cast'; and Germany must pay. You and I know that we shall be the first to suffer. You and I know that these dolts are laying the foundations of the next war. You and I know that we have some misty world-vision and that we must work for a united states of Europe and a brotherhood of man. People won't listen to us . . . yet. I shall be dead before you've cleared the first unbelievers out of the temple. *Si monumentum requiris* . . . George, George, this is a blacker day in the world's history than the fourth of August."

I have forgotten almost everything about that dinner except the sense of depression that grew deeper with every advance to gaiety on the part of my neighbours. We were spared speeches; but at the end our host called us to our feet for some toast which I did not hear. As I sat down, a kite's-tail of coloured paper floated to us from the next table. A giant bunch of air-balloons was divided among eager hands. Crackers exploded; and a blare of tin trumpets punctuated the cheeping of wooden whistles. Perhaps I had spent too many hours that day in discussion that led nowhere: I suddenly felt that I was not in the mood for such artless merry-making.

"*Si monumentum requiris* . . ." Bertrand repeated.

At the table from which that tail of coloured paper had been thrown, I observed my old ally, Sir Philip Saltash, entertaining a party of friends. Dainton, in acknowledging a bow, informed us that Saltash had "done as much as any one to win the war"; and, in examining Saltash's guests, I felt that the same tribute could be paid to each. Wilmot Dean, representing a government of new men and new methods, was resting a flushed face on the bare shoulder of a beautiful and, I should imagine, wholly brainless mannequin. Lord Lingfield, whose inclusion in the cabinet shewed that ministers were not indifferent to rank and lineage, was deep in conversation with a Balkan millionaire who had been naturalized in time to become private secretary to the needy holder of a sinecure. And any one with attention to spare had it unpityingly claimed by Mr. 'Blob' Wister, who had won the war by purchasing papers for the government.

I did not know the rest. I did not greatly want to know them. If I had been asked who won the war, I should have named David O'Rane rather than Wilmot Dean, Lord Loring rather than Lord Lingfield. Saltash's guests may have given body and soul to victory; but their material position was founded on the war. After fine winnowing, we had arrived—in these 'new men'—at the governing class of the immediate future: borrowing the name from 'Blob' Wister, they called themselves "realists", and the coalitions of 1915 and 1916 had certainly intrigued the "sentimentalist" in politics to his

extinction. Peace was too welcome for me to complain if it had been ushered in by ministers with more ambition than scruple. An obsolescent administration may have needed business brains to fit it for war; a democratic country cannot ignore its press-man and publicity-agent; and the rich hangers-on of a government only prove that bricks cannot be made without straw. Of the men who had won the war I only felt what Bertrand expressed bluntly:

"They look as if they'd made a damned good thing out of it."

"Seventeen-ninety-three, eighteen-fifteen," I replied. "Nineteen-fourteen to nineteen-nineteen. We have changed our rulers."

"It's about all we *have* changed," Bertrand rejoined.

Then we stood up as a waiter begged leave to push our table away from the dancing-floor. Sir Roger, unexpectedly on his feet, exhibited symptoms of impending oratory, which was checked, at the instigation of Wilmot Dean, by a well-directed crust of bread from the hand of the mannequin. The band, for the first time in several years, played the national anthems of all the allies. Our host ordered more champagne and then called for his bill. Sonia led off the dancing with Lord Lingfield; and I invented an excuse to go home to bed.

The streets round the hotel were too crowded for driving. I told my chauffeur to get home as best he could and walked with Bertrand into the quiet backwaters north of Piccadilly. At the door of Loring House we met my cousin Violet, who insisted on our going the rest of the way in her car.

"I've missed all the celebrations," she told us. "I've been unveiling the memorial to Jim at Chepstow."

"You've not missed very much," I answered. "Are you satisfied with the memorial?"

"Yes. It's only a medallion in the chapel; and you can only see it from the corner where I sit. I have . . . rather a horror of the war-memorials that are being put up everywhere."

"They're the easiest means of forgetting the dead with a good conscience," Bertrand suggested.

"But not the only means," I said, as a dishevelled vagrant steadied himself against the bonnet of the car and invited us to a confession of political faith.

Its form consisted of question and answer: "*What's the matter with Lloyd-George? 'E's orl right! And what's the matter with Winston? 'E's orl right. What's the matter with Beatty?*" . . .

"That fellow is surprisingly like our friend Dainton," said my uncle.

PART TWO

CHAPTER ONE

THE NAKEDNESS OF THE LAND

> "Nothing except a battle lost can be half so melancholy as a battle won."
>
> DUKE OF WELLINGTON: *Despatches*.

1

On the day after the peace-treaty had been signed, my uncle sent me to make a political survey of England. If it brought no benefit to England or to our paper, it provided me with a pleasant holiday and a welcome break.

Looking back on my two years' labours in Fetter Lane, I feel that the first six months were given to creating an atmosphere. As Bertrand proclaimed at our inaugural dinner, no lasting peace could be established on a sense of grievance; and, until the terms of peace were published, we tried to deflect public attention from crude thoughts of triumph and cruder hankerings after revenge to a frank desire for mutual forgiveness and good-will. For twelve months after the treaty was placed in our hands, we laboured to demonstrate that it was unworkable. And in the six months during which the peace coalition was tottering to the fall I received my answer to the old question whether those who could neither keep peace nor make war were competent to make peace.

"It won't do," Bertrand declared summarily, when we met to discuss our public attitude to the treaty of Versailles. " 'Revision' must be our battle-cry. Revision of the treaty."

I fancy I was expressing what Spence-Atkins and Triskett and all of us had long felt, when I said:

"Thank God we have a battle-cry at last."

"It will not be popular," predicted my uncle, with his usual love for being in a minority. "The fools who shouted that we were 'letting the Hun off' will shout more than ever that we're making the treaty 'a scrap of

paper'. . . . And yet, if we try to enforce it, all central Europe will go the way of Russia."

"I'm afraid it will be another unpopular cry," added Jefferson Wright, "but it's time we drew attention to the economic position at home. We're pouring out money as though the war were still going on."

"Our battle-cry, then," said Bertrand, "must be 'Produce more and consume less'."

"We shall be told we're trying to enslave labour. And there'll be no end to unemployment when the 'consuming less' begins."

"We're here to tell people the truth, even if it's an unpleasant truth," Bertrand rejoined with stern virtue; and our shorthand-writer looked up encouragingly to see if this also was to be a battle-cry.

Then, as Wright and Spence-Atkins had been given their orders, he packed me out of the office to collect material for six articles on *England in Reconstruction*.

"The great pulse of the people," he ordained as my objective. "London's a hot-house: abnormal."

2

My last duty, before taking the road, was to attend little Ivy Maitland's wedding.

She had wasted no time, I thought, in consoling herself for the loss of Eric Lane; but the quick decisions and quicker changes of this period were a conspicuous part of the "abnormality" which my uncle found devastating London in the first years of peace. We attended the ceremony, on O'Rane's entreaty, to support Ivy, who was out of favour with most of her friends; and we went on to the reception in the hope of comforting Mr. Justice Maitland, who was deriving a morose satisfaction from prophesying the inevitable misery which his daughter was laying up for herself. I seem to possess an irresistible fascination for elderly bores; and the first chapter in my survey of England might have been headed: *Maitland on the Decay of Faith and Morals*.

"It would break your heart," he told me, "if you listened to some of the stories I have to hear in the Divorce Court. If young people thought less of themselves and more of their elders . . . The churches have lost their grip. Young people don't take us into their confidence."

"Did they ever," I asked, "where marriage was concerned?"

The judge pursued his denunciation without a check:

"Headstrong children like Ivy rush into it quite cynically. Their deepest affections are not engaged, so they have little to fear from failure; as for the scandal, none of their friends think the worse of them."

"It's a reaction from the cramping discipline of the war," I answered. "The people who find their way into the Divorce Court are taking their revenge, in private lawlessness, for long submission to a machine that had neither body to be kicked nor soul to be damned."

If my explanation was heard, it was not answered.

"One woman, my dear Oakleigh," the judge recalled sombrely and unseasonably as his daughter drove away for her honeymoon, "actually asked me—in court—what was to be done with a husband who insulted her in public: it was not, she explained, as if they had not a home where he could do that. It's terrible!"

I agreed; but, as I could suggest no remedy, I took my leave and motored Barbara to Chepstow for a week before we set our hand on the great pulse of the people in Scotland. Most of the houses where we stayed had been closed for five years or turned into hospitals; and, as they opened their doors, I felt that the interrupted play of 1914 was being resumed on a stage from which all the old actors had departed. The new avenue at Loring Castle seemed no taller; if the dogs were older, they were for the most part the same dogs; but the present marquess was a four-year-old boy whose father was reported missing some eight-and-forty hours before he himself came into the world. The terrible emptiness of those days returned to me when I saw Violet walking by herself along the valley-terrace, where I had walked with her husband on the last night of peace.

I wondered how much of Jim Loring's world would survive into this child's manhood. The servant who unpacked for me confided that he was marking time till he heard of an opening in the colonies. The house-carpenter, who had married one of the maids, told me that he was setting up in business with her savings from a munition-works. The stud-groom engaged me unexpectedly in a discussion of the Pyramids, which he had visited since last I stayed at Chepstow. At first I thought that in his blood, too, unrest was stirring; but I discovered later that the war had only changed his outlook by convincing him of the literal truth of the Old Testament.

“Moses . . . and them Pharaohs,” he murmured to himself, looking dreamily towards the junction of Wye and Severn as though it were the Red Sea waiting to pile up its waters and let the children of Israel through.

He at least had no desire to roam. Grandfather, father and son, the family had lived and died in sight of the Castle stables; and he would have repudiated his king before he defaulted in his allegiance to the Lorings. In Gallipoli, I gathered, there were frothy, worthless fellows—the scum of midland factories and the dregs of South Welsh pits—who were ready enough to criticize their betters. Firebrands and hot-heads, they maintained that their betters had muddled them into the war and that, if the politicians and the generals had known their job as well as the hewers and fitters, the flower of an army would not have been sent to its death in this way. Their “betters”, according to these critics, had been found out.

I suggested that the French, in spite of their scientific training, and the Americans, for all their democratic upbringing had also made blunders; so, I added, had the Germans; but I was preaching to the converted. This criticism was the yapping of town-bred curs; and, if anything exceeded my friend’s devotion to his feudal head, it was his scorn and hatred for the thieving upstarts of city streets.

“Then you don’t think anything will come of all this talk?,” I asked.

“Not while their lazy bellies are full, sir,” he answered.

How long that would be was one of the problems that Bertrand had sent me to solve.

“So long as the price of wheat stops where it is,” one of Violet’s tenant-farmers told me, “I can make a living. Of course, if her ladyship raises my rent . . .” He complained of the wages that had to be paid nowadays to old men and boys for a third of the work that was done before the war. “I can’t reduce them,” he added. “Why, d’you know, sir, what a pair of good boots costs you in Chepstow to-day?”

I have forgotten the figure; but, when I had occasion to make a few purchases, the shop-keepers apologized for their charges. The cost of labour and materials had gone up; but you could not reduce them when living was so expensive.

“A loaf of bread nowadays . . .” began the bootmaker who was oppressing the tenant-farmer’s labourer, who was keeping up the price of bread.

Then he muttered something about “middlemen” and “profiteers”.

At the other end of the scale, Violet Loring deferred making any improvements on the Chepstow estate until her tenants paid a rent commensurate with the high cost of labour and material. She was a rich woman, by the standard of gross income; but she had three houses in England, a palace in Scotland and a derelict barrack in Ireland. The greater part of her income was derived from coal; and the latest strike-cloud was being illuminated terrifyingly with lightning-forks that spelt 'nationalization'. In one paper I read that some Angevin king, with more generosity than geography, had granted to Sir Humfrey de Loringe certain lands that were his by right of seizure alone; the paper—and I with it—knew of no service by Sir Humfrey to the community at large that justified this grant in perpetuity; and, if right of seizure was the basis of the Loring estates in one century, right of seizure—it was suggested—might be the means of expropriating the Lorings in another.

"I don't think there'll be any confiscation in my time," said Violet, "but I have to think of Sandy."

And her surplus income was therefore being invested in various securities of various foreign countries, in the hope that all would not default at the same moment.

As I moved to houses less well endowed than my cousin's, I found the uneasiness more marked. The Knightriders, taking early advantage of the boom in real estate, had sold their house in Raglan to a rich colliery-proprietor; John Carstairs, when we went to stay with him at Herrig, said that, after this experimental year, he would have to let the shooting; and our visit to Philip Hornbeck in Yorkshire had to be cancelled because his wife had suggested a general reduction of wages and his servants had left her in a body without notice.

"*Insecurity is the first, universal quality of the times*," I wrote to my uncle.

3

At the beginning of the autumn, a railway-strike assailed the country with partial paralysis.

"*It may help*," wrote Bertrand from the security of London, "*to bring people to their senses. They think they're rich because the printing-presses keep 'em well supplied with depreciated notes. As usual, Spence-Atkins prophesies a tremendous slump; and that will be just as unreal as the boom.*

If people would think in terms of commodities and services instead of chattering about money!

"*But this is not the worst of the trouble. The triple alliance is a political engine. Direct action is a political method; the reply of organized labour to a government that represents no one in particular and organized labour least of all. This is the first protest against the 1918 election and I've been torn in pieces by the tory press for asking what else any sane man could have expected, when the present House never tries to control ministers.* 'Vous l'avez voulu, Georges Dandin.' "

Barbara and I turned south on the first day of the strike; and, by the time we reached Crawleigh Abbey, it was over. In the tone of my father-in-law, however, I detected a new rancour such as I had not met since the almost daily strikes and lock-outs before the war. Neave had been warned for duty; and, as he changed out of uniform, I fancied that father and son were like a pair of reluctant game-cocks, as difficult to drag out of a fight as to urge in.

"I regret nothing," said Crawleigh on the first night, "that shews labour it can't hold the country to ransom. If I'd been the prime minister, though, I'd have recalled every man jack of them to the colours . . ."

"And if they refused to come?," I ventured to interrupt.

"After being ordered to mobilize?," asked Neave with the aloof patience of a Guards officer in teaching a civilian his A.B.C.

"Yes," I answered. "In 1914 the regular officer threatened to resign if he were ordered to put down rebellion in Ulster. That's never been quoted, but you may be sure it's not been forgotten. And if you ever try to use troops against an industrial strike . . ."

"I should use troops to protect life and property," Crawleigh interposed. "A very few days without trains, and the babies in every city would die for want of milk. One hopes that these drastic steps will never be necessary. One hopes the lesson's been taken to heart."

"I hope so too," I said; but I knew Crawleigh to be only one of many who regretted that the strike had not been fought to a finish.

As I began my articles, I noticed sadly that neither he nor Neave, neither the capitalist press which called our paper "bolshevistic" nor the labour sheets which damned us with faint, patronizing praise suggested that strikes and lock-outs ought to be as impossible in a civilized state as a wheat-corner or that, whoever was to blame and whoever was punished, the noncombatant majority suffered most.

“Human nature being what it is . . .” began Sir Roger Dainton, with a fine affectation of political wisdom, when I put this view before him.

I had driven Barbara to luncheon at Crowley Court; and throughout the meal our host droned of high taxation without considering the capital loss of a strike.

“Every one’s the poorer for a struggle that has changed nothing and proved nothing,” I said.

“In time, perhaps, the agitators will see that,” answered Lady Dainton, who had been expatiating, from the other end of the table, on class-hatred and proving in alternate sentences that the man Thomas was responsible for all this unrest and that Mr. Thomas really seemed the only person who would stand up to these bolshevists.

It was at this time that the secret funds on which labour disturbances throve were discovered—by her—to come from Irish organizations in America and Jewish societies in Russia; perhaps her brain was tired, but in the course of one brief conversation the Indian home-ruler, the modernist in religion, the eccentric in music and the individualist in dress were all found to be tainted with “bolshevism”. Their predecessors, I recalled, had all been anarchists.

“I must send you a little book on *The Soviet Peril*,” promised Lady Dainton, who at other times and in her untiring search for whipping-boys had sent me pamphlets on *A Short Way with Profiteers*.

I refrained from commenting on her husband’s incautious boast that he had increased his capital twenty *per cent.* since 1914.

“Are these agitators actually to be found in England?,” I asked.

Lady Dainton assured me that they were, though neither she nor any one she knew had actually met one. Not content with fomenting revolution on earth, they were unseating religion from on high. Communist schools were springing up to poison youthful minds with secularist literature. So far as I could make out, she accounted it for enlightenment when her own friends paraded their scepticism; but, if there had been no god, she would have invented one for the poorer classes. It was no defence that the secular propagandist might be a sincere secularist; so long as he was paid, he stood condemned.

“By the same test,” I asked, “would you call the clergy of the Established Church or the officers of the Employers’ Defence League ‘paid agitators’?”

"Certainly not! Good gracious, why . . .?" she asked in a voice that faded into the silence of stupefaction.

The pulse of the Dainton family was the last that I felt before returning to London and presenting Bertrand with my report on the first phase of reconstruction. Looking over this review later, I noticed a *diminuendo* in the rather robust optimism with which I began. England was still enjoying superficial plenty; and yet I heard a mutter of misgiving. Some of the factories were over-producing; finished articles, of material bought at war prices, had to be sold at post-war prices; credit became harder to obtain from the banks; and, as the first year of peace hastened to its close, other people than the Daintons woke to the unpleasant discovery that income-tax would have to be paid as though the war were still being waged and that they had for a year, in disregard of Bertrand's battle-cries, been producing less and consuming more than they could afford.

It was a time to draw in horns. Barbara and I had ordered a new car; and in a spirit of prudence we decided to cancel the order. Sam Dainton—I hope, without his mother's knowledge—gave me £300 for my place in the waiting-list and made another £300 within two days by selling it to one of the Jews against whom I was so indefatigably warned. After this one experience of practical finance and of an "agency-business" as conducted by Sam, I went back to the unassailable heights of theory; and for the next six months, until other cares claimed my attention, I watched the unreal boom of 1919 changing to the unreal slump of 1920.

The one was no better justified than the other. While the country clamoured for houses, the building trade clamoured for work; domestic servants were not to be procured, and the figures of unemployment rose steeply. Every other country, I read, was working overtime; and our own exports threatened to dry up.

"Ever heard of a man called Keynes, George?," my uncle asked on my return, tossing me *The Economic Consequences of the Peace*.

"Yes. I sent my copy to your friend Dainton. It was the least I could do after the literature that his good lady has been pouring in on me."

"What Keynes preaches from inside knowledge is what I've been preaching to you since the armistice."

"It's what our worthy Wright and every other economist would have preached, if he'd had the figures before him," I answered. "But have you

seen Keynes' reception in the press? This country's still drunk from armistice night. *People won't listen.*"

And then I told Bertrand of the psychological discovery that impressed me most in the whole course of my tour. On the minds of men who had taken part in the war the printed word had ceased to exert its old spell. In the first recruiting of 1914 the boys in my old Wiltshire constituency were forbidden to pluck the blackberries by the roadside, because a mysterious red car had been abroad, before daylight, sprinkling the hedges with what was believed to be a strong solution of typhoid germs. The story was printed in the papers and believed because it was in print. Five years later the same story—with a Russian or a Sinn Feiner in charge of the car—might have been believed until it was published; then it would have been relegated to the teeming limbo of "newspaper lies". The captain of the Loring yacht, who had served for most of the war on an auxiliary cruiser, told me of his amazement on reading that the *Pelion*, which was at that time his home, had been sunk by a mine in the North Sea; he was less surprised, though more aggrieved, to read a year later that his ship, which had lately been sunk by a torpedo in the Irish Channel, was still convoying troopers in the Mediterranean. He accepted my explanation that the Admiralty was of malice aforethought misleading the newspaper-readers of England in the hope of misleading the German intelligence department; but his faith was shattered beyond repair. If the press lied to him on matters which he could check from his own experience, how much more easily it would lie about defeats and casualties, wages and prices!

"And in future," I told Bertrand, "we have to reckon with this incredulity in addition to all the apathy that's been breaking our hearts."

"*And* the misrepresentation," he sighed with a sensitiveness surprising in so scarred a fighter to the charge of the Woburn press that he was selling the French for thirty pieces of German silver.

"There are times," I said, "when I feel that only the logic of events will convince people. Aren't we wasting our energy, Bertrand? I've given the experiment more than six months' trial; now I want to get away. Barbara's going to have a baby." . . .

I could have piled argument on argument if my uncle had resisted me; but he sat without speaking, his hands crossing and uncrossing themselves tremulously over the ivory knob of his stick and his eyes set gloomily on the fire.

"The logic of events?," he repeated at length.

“I don’t believe we shall do any good here till we have a revolution,” I said, with bitter memories of my battle-piece in its three panels. “A revolution; or another war.”

“Our intention was to avert it,” he reminded me.

4

Because Bertrand made no effort to detain me, I stayed in London—sullenly protesting that we only bored the converted and exasperated the inconvertible—till the end of the year. Looking back, I suppose the autumn brought with it the first signs of returning reason, though Sir Roger Dainton—more in sorrow than anger—burnt the *Economic Consequences* and left me—with anger and sorrow nicely balanced—to buy myself another copy. It was one thing, however, to concede that the peace terms were unworkable; it was something quite different to precipitate a general election in the hope of mending them. The coalition survived the Paisley election, when Mr. Asquith was drawn to Westminster through an avenue of cheering crowds; it survived the awkward questions which the average voter was beginning to frame. And, so long as it steered clear of another war, it could disregard the academic questions of sentimental leader-writers who asked if any one was a penny the better for war and victory.

“You’ve had a year to get your new heaven and earth into working order,” said Philip Hornbeck, when I visited him at the Admiralty on the anniversary of the armistice. “I’ve been tied here so much that I’ve entirely lost track of the millennium. It’s arrived, I suppose?”

“A number of people haven’t heard of it yet,” I answered, with my thoughts on the filibustering expeditions of the last three months. D’Annunzio had revived memories of Garibaldi by seizing Fiume and defying the great powers to turn him out; admirals and generals of the old *régime* in Russia were being supplied by amateur strategists in England with arms to crush a revolutionary government in a country that had never been successfully invaded since the coming of the Tartars. “If the allies had an agreed policy . . .”

“You can’t have an agreed policy when you’re not on speaking-terms with a single one of your neighbours,” Hornbeck retorted. “I invited your friend Lucien de Grammont . . .”

“He won’t come if he knows I’m here,” I interrupted. “And I don’t know that I’m very keen to meet French people at present.”

It was twelve months, to a minute, since Violet Loring pointed out to her boy the men who had come from Rhodesia and Japan, Portugal and Vancouver to die in a common cause.

"I offered van Oss as a bait," said Hornbeck with a grin. "If you three high-minded idealists can't make a millennium, you mustn't get impatient with the rank-and-file."

It was a matter for congratulation that a party so rashly collected could meet and scatter without a scene of violence. Clifford expected, quite obviously, to be castigated because America would not sign the covenant of the League; Lucien, no less obviously, looked only for a chance of castigating me because I criticized the treaty in every issue of *Peace*.

"I don't quite know what we're celebrating," he muttered provocatively, with a morose eye on the gathering crowds in Whitehall. "The loss of the war?"

"We haven't lost it yet," I said, "but some of us are doing our best. I wish you'd explain to me, Lucien, how you expect to make Germany pay for the war when you're standing with your foot on her throat."

"I am sorry if we are keeping you from trading with her," he answered with icy politeness, "but security is as necessary to France as trade is to England. You made *yourselves* secure when you took the German fleet. Now, when France is left alone . . ."

He glanced malevolently at Clifford van Oss and turned again to the window.

"But, hell, Wilson had no power to commit us!" Clifford protested. "If you'd any of you gotten down to the constitution of the United States . . ."

"I fancy America signed the treaty?," said Lucian coldly.

"We'd best quit talking about bad faith," Clifford recommended, without, however, following his own advice. "Clemenceau and Lloyd-George let up on Wilson over the fourteen points; they let up on the Germans . . ."

I turned to Hornbeck, whose square face was alight with malicious enjoyment.

"What are you supposed to be doing nowadays?," I asked, as we strolled up and down the room where we had worked so long together.

"I'm adviser to the secretariat," he answered. "What does that mean? Well, you may say, if you like, that I'm preparing for the next war."

"It's a pity there's no one to bang all our heads together," I murmured, as a new wrangle broke out between Clifford and Lucien. "The German menace has gone, but there's a French menace coming. Nine or ten months ago I told Lucien in Paris that his people were at the top of their prestige; now they're the most hated, feared and despised people in Europe. A mad war, a mad peace . . ."

"And nothing to prevent another war as mad," Hornbeck began. Then we stood without speaking, in a silence that spread over London, freezing sound and movement. The customary rumble of traffic receded to a distance and faded away; the blare of horns, the ringing of bells, the click of typewriters, all the shouting, speaking and whispering that made up the unceasing drone of a great city now, for two minutes, ceased. Then, very far away, the rumble of traffic began again. I felt as if I were recovering consciousness after an anæsthetic. Nearer at hand I heard voices, then the scuffle of feet; a typewriter clicked interrogatively, as though wondering if the two minutes were over; then a telephone-bell rang; and the city heaved and roared its way back to life. "We're no better off," Hornbeck resumed. "Only you sentimentalists ever thought we should be."

I had been indescribably awed by that sudden silence and by the spectacle of those many thousands all stricken motionless at the same time. The street was a solid block of devout, bare-headed humanity; from the Victoria Tower to the National Gallery a single mood of gratitude and reverence bowed those myriad heads. Far from Westminster, far from London, the same silence had fallen, the same devotion had risen from a myriad other hearts.

"Spiritually?," I asked.

"Not in the very least! A great many people were very brave in an emergency; a great many people always are very brave in an emergency. A great many people have suffered . . . shall I say, on behalf of civilization? A great many people always suffer on behalf of civilization, which is a wasteful and cruel business, George, only one degree less wasteful and cruel than barbarism. This wasn't the first war in history; people like you have always looked for a spiritual regeneration; you've never found it."

"I should be content," I said, "if one man in ten out of all that crowd would join me in making future wars impossible."

“I should be content if one man in all the world would tell me how that’s to be done.”

5

I reached Fetter Lane in a chastened mood; and for the rest of the morning we talked of the year that had passed since Armistice Day.

There was to be no United States of Europe, still less a United States of the World. The peace-treaty, to the view of us all, indicated the swiftest and surest way to another war; and there was no influence, outside parliament or within, to modify it. Trade depression was attracting attention to unemployment and taxation; but, of a hundred men who said “We must cut down expenditure,” ninety-nine added “You can’t touch pensions, of course; or the army and navy; or the air force.” . . . And, after nine months, the one political organ that looked beyond the cheap scores and cheaper promises of the 1918 election was read by a growing literary public for the sake of its musical notes and dramatic criticism.

“Are we addressing the right people?,” asked Jefferson Wright.

“Any person who’ll listen is the right person for me,” said Bertrand sententiously.

“Then why not speak to labour?”

“Because it’s no more opposed to war than any other class,” grunted Bertrand. “If it were, there’d have been no war in ’14. When your German workman mobilized, the British workman had to mobilize against him.”

“The labour party kept us out of a war with Russia,” Wright interposed.

“Would the labour party keep us out of a war with France if the French turned nasty? If you’ve the guts of a louse, it’s human nature to resist a threat,” said Bertrand with more rhetorical force than biological accuracy. “How can we stop people putting pistols to other people’s heads?”

The discussion, like so many in these inconclusive months, ended with the evaporating discovery that we were all late for a meal. I drove to the O’Ranes’ house in Westminster with the now familiar feeling that we should waste our strength and temper until some force more potent than our mild and scholarly articles came to rouse the country out of its drunken sleep. My uncle reminded me that we had been through one period of incredulous apathy for half-a-dozen years before 1914. Then the only people to think a war possible were the militarists who, with the best intentions, precipitated it with their preparations and their talk of “inevitability”; the Disarmament

League alone tried to make it impossible, as duelling was made impossible, by taking away the privilege and the means of private vengeance. What we had done then we must do now.

"But in 1919," I said, as we parted, "I am older and more easily discouraged than I was in 1909."

Barbara had come up from Crawleigh Abbey to make the acquaintance of Sonia's new baby; and, as I strolled up and down the long library with O'Rane, I asked him how he enjoyed being the richest commoner in England.

"I can't say I've noticed any difference," he laughed, "except in the number of people who think they've a right to be supported by some one else."

"And the millennium?," I pursued in a fair imitation of Hornbeck. "The civic conscience? Man's natural right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness?"

"What would you do in my place?," he asked. "I'm almost certain to follow your advice."

As he spoke without irony, we beguiled the first part of luncheon with the sort of conversation that is affected by somnolent house-parties on wet afternoons. As at Cannes, each of us spent his money in dizzy flights of imagination; but now he brought us to earth with the criticism that we were not spending "for the good of humanity".

"Which was Stornaway's condition," he reminded me.

And, in O'Rane's hands, it was a condition that we could not fulfil. When Barbara spoke of the incurable cripples left by the war, he enquired why humanity should be relieved of its obligations. When I talked, as so often before I had talked with Deryk Lancing, of universities and institutions for research, of libraries and museums, of travelling fellowships and exploration funds, of subsidized opera and national newspapers, of model cities and a country made perfect, he applauded my enthusiasm and asked what I was doing to give it effect.

"I do my modest share," I said.

"And, if I take that responsibility off your shoulders, you'll only have more money to . . . *waste* on yourself."

I cannot recall that the tone or choice of language was more vigorous than I had long been accustomed to hearing from O'Rane. Certainly I should

have taken up the challenge without concern, if Sonia had not rushed superfluously to my assistance. Her indignation, however, in demanding why personal expenditure should be called waste, warned me against taking sides in a family quarrel.

"David's *impossible* about money!," she cried. "So long as I have *one* crust of bread, *one* dress that would disgrace a scarecrow . . ."

"If this is how the poor live, let's join them!," interposed Barbara pacifically.

In spite of herself, Sonia laughed as she saw us admiring her frock. The house was unpretentious, but it was enviably comfortable. I never wish to be given better food or wine. And, on a lower plane of morality, whatever she lacked from her husband was made up by the munificence of her friends.

"It's so difficult, when every one thinks you're rich . . ." she began.

"But it isn't our money," O'Rane objected.

Another explosion was threatening; and, at a sign from Barbara, I ranged myself beside Sonia.

"You're entitled to pay yourself a salary," I told him. "As chairman and managing-director of a trust-company with a capital of twenty-five millions, I think five thousand a year . . ."

"I'm pretty sure Sonia will do less harm with it than I shall," he sighed. "Is that *all* the advice you can give me, George?"

"Well," I reminded him, "I told you at Cannes not to touch the money with a pole."

"And, as I told you ten minutes ago, I should almost certainly follow your advice if you repeated it. Sonia won't let me talk about that, though . . . Tell me your plans for the winter. The south of France again?"

By the time we left, the last echo of discord was hushed. On our way home, however, Barbara warned me that new trouble would break out if some one did not create a diversion. I hardly know what difference Sonia and her friends expected O'Rane's inheritance to make; but she was bitterly and undisguisedly disappointed by what she regarded as a life of wasted opportunities.

"Get your mother to invite them out to Cannes," Barbara suggested; and I sent an invitation that night on my own responsibility.

It was refused, rather tartly, on the ground that David, as we might have known, would not leave his work and that Sonia, as we might have guessed, would not come, "trailing clouds of infants", without him. I comforted myself with the reflection that, whatever her provocation, she would not try to repeat an effect by running away; and then I dismissed them both from my thoughts till the crisis in my own life should be passed.

The word, I think, is not too strong for a moment and an event that were to test the union of two people who, on any reasoning, ought never to have married. Good friends though we were, Barbara had never pretended to be in love with me; I could judge of all that she was withholding when she forgot to hide her love for Eric Lane. Though he was five thousand miles away, she was still haunted by him; and I sometimes wondered whether anything short of his death would cure the obsession. Then, on the day when she told me that she was going to have a child, I took hope again; what I had never been able to achieve was to be brought about by our son. She had decided that it would be a boy; we had even chosen his name; and I had begun to love him, before he was quickened, for drawing us together.

As Lady Crawleigh wanted Barbara in the country, I spent most of the early spring by myself in London; and at the end of April I went down for a week to be at hand if I were needed. It was the twenty-first of the month when I arrived; and, though the date is of no interest to any one, I am unlikely to forget it; my car crossed the bridge into the abbey precincts at twenty minutes past seven in the evening, and I am not likely to forget that either. I shall not forget the eerie silence in which the abbey was wrapped, nor the scared faces of the servants, nor the darkness of the rooms, nor the atmosphere of disaster impending. I hope I am as self-controlled as my neighbour, but I seemed to feel a hand of ice on my heart as the butler helped me out of my coat and murmured that he believed his lordship was in the garden.

"Everything all right?," I asked as carelessly as I could.

"Yes, sir. Lady Barbara is in her room. I believe her ladyship is with her."

When I went upstairs, Barbara was in bed. The blinds were down, and a closing door hinted that my mother-in-law was for some reason hurrying away to avoid me. As I crossed the room, Barbara told me to stop; and, as I tried to ask how she was, I was waved into silence. Then she covered her eyes and turned away:

"You've not been told? It'll be a shock, but I wanted to tell you myself. I'm sorry, George . . . I . . . I did my best. You mustn't be *too* dreadfully disappointed. Dead . . . He was born dead. If only it could have been the other way round!"

Mercifully, as though she had been listening at the door, Lady Crawleigh came back to say that my father-in-law wished to see me. Together we drafted the announcement for the press; and I asked whether it would be prudent for me to go upstairs again. He said "yes" and "no" alternately, concluding on a "yes" in the frantic hope of getting rid of me. As I tapped on Barbara's door, I heard Lady Crawleigh scuttling through another; and it was Barbara, undaunted and indomitable, who hid her own agony under a gentle concern for me.

"I suppose people will want to sympathize," she began. "May I have all my letters sent to you, George? Open them, answer them. I shall have to be here for some weeks, I'm afraid, but I'll make up for deserting you when I come back to London. I'll give some lovely parties for you. We shall be so busy we shan't have time to think. I *want* to keep busy." . . .

And, on that word, her dead child, her suffering and her disappointment were banished from Barbara's life. Three years have passed since that April evening of 1920 when we made our compact of silence; and, with a single exception, we observed it with equal scruple on both sides.

CHAPTER TWO

THAT WHICH REMAINED

No doubt, there's something strikes a balance. Yes,
You loved me quite enough, it seems to-night.
This must suffice me here. What would one have?
In heaven, perhaps, new chances, one more chance—
Four great walls in the New Jerusalem,
Meted on each side by the angel's reed,
For Leonard, Rafael, Agnolo and me
To cover—the three first without a wife
While I have mine! So—still they overcome
Because there's still Lucrezia,—as I choose.

Again the Cousin's whistle! Go, my love.

ROBERT BROWNING: *Andrea del Sarto*.

1

Before we settled in London for the summer of 1920, I asked Bertrand whether he was prepared to run our paper without me if I could persuade Barbara to dull the edge of her grief by coming round the world with me.

"You'll be leaving us," answered my uncle rather blankly, "just at the moment when life is becoming normal after the war. We've hideous labour-troubles in store; unemployment . . . From all I hear, there's going to be an explosion in Ireland."

"And this," I interrupted, "is what you describe as normal conditions after the war?"

Bertrand nodded slowly over his clasped hands:

"I do. A peace-treaty you may regard as another aspect of war: the last chapter, if you like. Then you come to that which remains: the bill that's still unpaid when you've counted your dead and disbanded your armies and

dismembered your empires. All the complications of our spiritual convalescence are before us. Still . . .”

I might have spared him my importunity until I had approached Barbara. With the choice of six months in London and twelve on a steamer, she had no difficulty in making up her mind; and I soon found myself studying, in her company and from a somewhat different angle, “that which remained” in London after eighteen months of armistice and peace. If the life was a little bewildering and sometimes more than a little uncongenial, that—as Bertrand would have said—was part of the unpaid bill.

2

“One swallow may not make a summer,” said my cousin Laurence, when his long-suffering sister banished him from Loring House to the admittedly inferior amenities of Seymour Street; “but one duchess is going to make a season. Eleanor Ross has decided that London is again to be the metropolis of England.”

“For that,” I said, “you must blame the prime minister. It’s one thing for her to keep open restaurant in Paris, it’s quite another to play round-the-world-in-eighty-days with an international conference. San Remo, Hythe . . .”

In a few months I might have added Boulogne, Brussels and Spa, so swiftly did one final settlement follow on another. The hangers-on, meanwhile, had abandoned the pursuit and returned to London. A season, of some kind, was opening; and poor Barbara was giving the first of those “wonderful parties” which were to make her forget our recent tragedy.

“Any one who ever had any money seems to have spent it,” said Laurence with irrelevant regret and an appraising glance round the table. “I suppose *you* don’t know of a decent job? Something with a bit more money and a bit less work than the bar?”

If I had, I told him, I could have filled the position fifty times over with the men who were being thrown on to the labour-market as the last regiments returned home and the last war-departments were dismantled. I hesitate to say how many men like my brother-in-law Gervaise I helped into lucrative billets in the first six months of peace; I can say without hesitation that in 1920 I looked vainly for a single position that I could recommend to the pathetic, unspecialized men and boys who sent me testimonials beginning: “*Public school and university ex-service officer*, 1914-1918, *wounded*.” . . . If others received half the appeals that came to me, the city

was packed close with them; and the only man of my acquaintance who benefited by this congestion was the enterprising Sam Dainton, who expanded his agency-business into a colourable imitation of highway-robbery by making a corner in empty houses. The premiums which he imposed and the commissions which he accepted light-heartedly from vendor and purchaser would probably have landed him in the dock if he had remained longer in this kind of business; but vaulting ambition tempted him to compete with more experienced brigands in buying surplus stores from the government, and the blackmail which he levied on the homeless may have been balanced, with poetic justice, on the day when makeshift houses were erected below cost-price from the forced sale of his unmarketable stocks.

"Nobody could want *less* work than you do at the bar," Philip Hornbeck pointed out.

"I call that mocking a feller's misfortunes," replied my cousin with dignity. "I've a good mind not to tell you now." . . . As we said nothing, Laurence pulled his chair close to mine and helped me to a glass of my own madeira. "These devastated areas, George: they'll need the hell of a lot of building material. If you've any capital lying idle . . ."

"My trustees see to it that I haven't," I answered.

"Ready money's gone out of circulation since the millennium," explained Hornbeck; and for once I almost agreed with him.

In these months I was indeed reminded of the embarrassing first days of hostilities, before the Treasury began to issue its own notes. Houses, land, stock-in-trade were visible and tangible; we could have rubbed along somehow under a general system of barter; but no one seemed to be blessed with cash. The owners of big fortunes made in the war, so useful a year earlier in buying unmanageable estates, disappeared as suddenly as they had emerged: a few, I fancy, were frightened by talk of a retrospective levy on their profits, but most of them derived their wealth from industry; and industry at this time was being attacked by creeping paralysis. Sir John Woburn's group of papers set up a cry for economy; the 'coupon' system of electioneering was thrown into its first practical discredit by the success of independent 'anti-waste' candidates; and, when my political barometer told me that all this talk of 'reconstruction' was well enough, but that we must reconstruct the whole of Europe, I felt that the logic of facts had done what the pleadings of *Peace* would never do.

At my own table, though I had achieved an ingenious double revenge by placing Dainton, who feared my uncle, within earshot of my uncle, who despised Dainton, I did not feel justified in pointing political morals; and it was with outward cordiality that I listened to his diagnosis and treatment of international prostration.

"The *whole* of Europe," he repeated. "No good tinkering. Take Germany. Take Austria. *Take Russia.*"

And, with that, he lowered his voice conspiratorially and invited me to join a concession-hunting syndicate which the alert Sir Adolf Erckmann was forming. The proposal surprised me, inasmuch as a sense of personal unworthiness, stronger even than my impatience of Dainton's politics, had frightened me away from Rutland Gate since Lady Dainton chose it for her second blooming. Whenever I failed in an excuse to dine elsewhere, I seemed to pick my way through the melancholy ruins of fallen European dynasties. Starting with refugee Russian princes, the Daintons extended the net of hospitality to catch expropriated Poles and were only waiting for a change in public sentiment before opening their doors to the crownless heads of Germany. All were welcomed with the ceremony which England accords to the runaway scions of a kingly house: Sir Roger received his guests in the hall with a braver display of decorations than etiquette warranted; Lady Dainton curtseyed till I felt giddy; and, if the throne of the Czars remained empty, that was only because Moscow was so far from London.

I had heard so much of the coming royalist counterrevolution that I fully expected to find Dainton smuggling arms into Russia.

"Your foreign information is better than most," he began darkly; and then the plans of the syndicate were laid before me.

Listening with half of one ear, I seemed—with the other—to catch the thick tones of Sir Philip Saltash as he discoursed of the waters which he troubled and of the adventurous anglers who fished therein. My sleek tempter, I confess, appeared to me at this moment rather in the guise of a vulture; and, when I thought of the get-rich-quickly schemes that were discussed daily in my hearing, the heavens seemed to darken with these birds of prey. Sam, with his options on empty houses; Laurie, with his plans for holding the devastated areas to ransom; Dainton, with his gambling in marks and francs: all looked on Europe primarily as a place to loot. Yet two of these three had offered even their lives so few years before; and the third

had given away his cars and sold his securities to fit out Red Cross ambulances!

"Are you shaking the bloody hand of the soviet?," I enquired, with shocked memories of Dainton's attacks on 'bolshevism'.

"The soviet? Good heavens, why . . .?" he gasped with much the same perplexity as his wife had exhibited when I asked if ministers of religion should be regarded as paid agitators.

Dainton would have nothing to do with the soviet. Lenin and his gang would, with the help of God, be brought to book by Admiral Kolchak; but, without waiting for that consummation, he was ready to help the commercial recovery of Russia by pouring in goods, machinery and the material of a new transport-system. As he could not hope to receive commodities in exchange, he would be content with gold.

"Then you're recognizing the revolution?," I asked, as we moved upstairs.

"Recognizing . . .?," he echoed testily. "This is a business deal; politics don't enter into it. And I shall be obliged if you'll keep it absolutely to yourself."

I promised readily enough for the sake of sparing him the embarrassment of explaining how he could accept confiscated Russian gold by day and monopolize the despoiled Russian nobility at night. I did not feel, however, that Europe had yet been made safe for the amateur financier. After their last international flutter the Daintons had let their house in Hampshire; and I imagined that they, like many others, were trying belatedly to economize, though Lady Dainton gave another reason that night for their retirement.

"I honestly find no pleasure," she told me, "in the life people are leading in London. Perhaps I'm old-fashioned. The people themselves, don't you know? . . . I'm not criticizing *this* party, of course; but the tone . . . A gigantic beanfeast."

If she had criticized the party in words, as she was criticizing it with her eyes, I should have been constrained to side with her. Old-fashioned or no, I was bred in an age of strict formality, when Loring House still bore its hatchment. When I first stayed at House of Steynes, old Lord Loring hunted us into smoking-suits at eleven o'clock and assembled us furtively in the billiard-room, where he plied us with "weeds", negus and comments on current yearling-sales. My first London dinner-parties had the ceremony and

pomp of a *levée*. In 1920 we had no time for the ceremony, no money for the pomp.

"I suppose a beanfeast is all that people can afford," I said, as I contrasted this revel with the gaieties of a vanished generation.

The opera and the ballet were trying valiantly at this time to make us feel that we were back in 1914; but there was no public for both. The Crawleighs and perhaps a dozen others gave their balls and receptions according to the old tradition; but people who wanted to dance found the Turf and Stage less troublesome and more amusing. Those who wished to see their friends could collect them by telephone at the end of dinner and return from the theatre to see their houses converted out of recognition.

"Twenty people can find money to entertain," said Lady Dainton severely, "for one who can find time to be hospitable."

As we drifted uncomfortably about the house, I found it expedient to leave at least this charge unanswered. The smoking-room was given up to bridge, the dining-room to an endless supper; musicians, whom in time I came to suspect our butler of keeping on a chain in one of the cellars, were imprisoned on a landing: and both drawing-rooms were cleared for dancing. "*Solitudinem faciunt: pacem appellant.* I'm off," said Bertrand in bewilderment. "Promise you won't invite me again!" And I shared his bewilderment. The success of the party, as of the late war, lay in unity of command. Our butler was *generalissimo*; and Barbara asked only that I would leave him alone. If the men could not find cigars, they appealed to Robson; when an uninvited guest strayed into the hall, demanding who the guy was who was giving this show, Robson introduced him promptly to his hostess; I saw him supplying powder and carrying out repairs to torn dresses; and, when our musicians knocked off work for the night, Robson obliged at the piano, apologizing for the slow, melodious waltzes of my undergraduate days and regretting that he had no temperament for jazz-music.

"I *wish* I knew his history," Barbara murmured plaintively. "I daren't ask for fear of finding he has a wife. That would break my heart, because I'm determined to marry him if anything happens to you, George."

Lady Dainton, meanwhile, was going from strength to strength of disapproval.

"I would sooner give up society altogether," she announced, "than countenance its present form. This, of course, is different," she added

vaguely and without conviction.

Mentally, I acquiesced in her condemnation. And it was not worth while to explain that I assisted at these beanfeasts because I believed they amused Barbara.

3

"This is what remains," I told Bertrand, when he insisted on holding a *post mortem*.

"These people don't *amuse* you?," he cried.

"They interest me," I answered. "Looking on, listening . . ."

Since I had given up dancing on the outbreak of war and am one of the three worst bridge-players in London, I was thrown back on the delights of conversation; and, as every gathering included a contingent of Barbara's literary friends, I tried to discover what inspiration they had won from the war. It was soon, however, made abundantly plain to me that the dangers of this quest were more apparent than the delights. I was welcomed at first—I hoped for my own sake—to the little circles of young writers, who—for want of better accommodation—camped on the landing and stairs outside my dressing-room. Soon, however, I found myself being used as a stick to beat my literary editor for having beaten one or other of my bitter-tongued guests. When I refused to help, they took the beating into their own hands. The "top-hat school of fiction" was flayed by the "sham-corduoroy school", the "high-brows" by the "pin-heads", the "best sellers" by every one. Shocking tales of self-advertising were exchanged for dire revelations of log-rolling; and critics who had been unanimously condemned a moment before were unanimously reprieved on condition of their taking service against yet another school that did not happen to be represented in our symposium.

"Aren't you perhaps exaggerating the importance of contemporary opinion?," I asked as soon as I could make myself heard. "If the men who praised and blamed twenty, forty, sixty years ago could read their notices now, they'd find they hadn't spotted one winner in five hundred. If you're suffering at the hands of irresponsible reviewers, you're suffering in the company of Meredith and Hardy."

And then I left the rising generation of writers, who had slain more reputations in half an hour than my staff could hope to scotch in six months. Truth to tell, I felt rather unworthy of their too discriminating society. Hampstead was so suspicious of Chelsea; Chelsea was so contemptuous of

Bloomsbury; and all three were so scornful of Mayfair that I thanked Heaven my house was two hundred yards north of Oxford Street. The few names that these exotics praised were always unknown to me; and I was ashamed to admire publicly the work which they damned so comprehensively. If the war was to produce a new Elizabethan splendour of imagination, I saw no sign of it at present: perhaps we should have to wait a generation till the stench of blood and the shriek of shells had been forgotten.

"Are your very modern friends doing any good?," I demanded of Barbara, when our party had dispersed. "If you were analysing the effect of the war on art . . .?"

"D'you get any reaction from their work?," she asked. "In art there's no such thing as absolute good."

"I don't understand it."

"And I'm thrilled by it!," she cried in unaffected rapture. "All the violence and horror and madness of the war are reflected in the art of to-day. It's not pretty, but it's true. This party, which dear Lady Dainton hated so much . . . The restlessness, the hysteria . . . Jazz, in itself . . ."

"That which remains," I murmured, in Bertrand's phrase.

I was reminded of the days before the war when revues and ragtime first established their empire in London. Then, as the curtain prepared to fall, principals and supers, the latest beauty and the last comedian, a scene-shifter or two and the prompter all jigged and shuffled to the haunting syncopation of the *Honeymoon Rag* or *That Ol' Mason-Dixon Line*. The audience jigged and shuffled up the gangways; the men were still humming, the women still working their shoulders when they drove away. '*Oh, honey, I feel funny when dat coon begin to play* . . .' Now they jigged and shuffled through the streets and into the houses; they could not stop; life was become an endless syncopation.

I wondered when our friends would settle down. If the art of the day seemed, in my philistine eyes, epileptic, it was at least faithful to the epileptic contortions and fitful mood of the times. Reviewing these stupefying parties, I see men and women in a high fever. The girls all wear the same short skirts and exhibit the same bare backs; they have achieved the same flat figure; and, granted an upturned nose, they bob their hair in the same way. Very young, very pretty and very full of high spirits, they think the same thoughts and express them in the same jargon with the same loud

assurance. Their sameness makes every party the same. I see myself talking feverishly of films with some star from Los Angeles and being told, by little Ivy Gaymer, of the latest divorce; I see young poets discussing a recent lampoon and young actresses describing their last triumph. There are financial groups and political caves; my cousin Laurence, who has cultivated a knowing and shrewd manner, runs feverishly from one to another, nodding, whispering, waving a vast cigar and, I fancy, rather modelling himself on Saltash. Sam Dainton, who is beginning to look dissipated, engages in feverish pursuit of one woman after another. This fever has infected the women; the divorce-court does a flourishing trade; no one can remember who at any moment is allied with whom; and Sam makes overtures to all in the sure belief that some—and, perhaps, most—will prove to be complaisant. Sir Rupert Foreditch spreads the fever among the young politicians.

I can understand that Lady Dainton is too inelastic for the universal syncopation of these days. I could wish, in this season of comprehensive toleration, that I were far more tolerant or far less, for many of these women would not be received by Violet Loring or my mother, many of the men would be roughly handled if their business records were examined by unsympathetic counsel. And no one can for long live comfortably in a state of delirium. The clatter from the dining-room and the din from the musicians' corner are unceasing. Every one is moving, talking, smoking at top speed. And Robson holds all the threads in his capable hands; he is, to my house in Seymour Street, what Gaspard is to the Turf and Stage. My house is indeed a small and noisy club.

It is to be hoped that our guests enjoyed themselves; I believe that they, like Barbara, were only concerned to be so busy that they could not think. I should not be surprised to hear that, like Barbara, some of them broke down before the end. We had intended to stay in London until I went to shoot with the Knightriders; but early in July Barbara collapsed suddenly and was ordered to the country. Though there was nothing organically amiss with her, Gaisford threatened to throw up the case if she remained in London.

"When I die, you can tell people I was the only honest leech you ever met," he muttered with a frown. "I'm never afraid to say I don't know; and I don't know now what's wrong with that child. She's very ill indeed; and there's nothing the matter with her. I have my suspicions. You'll go with her?"

"If I can arrange things at the office," I answered.

"Office be damned! If she wants you, go!"

More than a little frightened, I took Barbara to Crawleigh next day and for a week tried to run our paper by means of special messengers and an indistinct telephone. Then I returned to London. The explosion which Bertrand had predicted four months earlier took place at a moment when the office was entrusted to the learned and wholly unpractical Spence-Atkins; and I judged—God knows how rashly!—that Ireland called to me the more urgently. I suppose our lives would have been different if Barbara's rest-cure had been postponed till September; if Bertrand had taken his holiday in August, I a month earlier.

"If you *must* go, you must," sighed Barbara. "Will you open all my letters, as you did before? I'm not to be worried; and my letters are always so uninteresting that they send my temperature up two points."

"I'll do anything if you'll only promise to get well," I answered.

4

London, on my return, was in what Bertrand called "its tadpole condition: all head and no body". The residential streets and squares were deserted; the clubs and newspaper-offices were thronged.

"I had to cancel leave all round," he explained, as we left our dismantled house for dinner at the Eclectic. "Now that the peace-treaty's out of the way, the government is looking for fresh triumphs. Happy thought: an Irish policy! I felt it was time for us to define our attitude."

"Hasn't it been defined for us," I asked, "by the impetuous gentleman who invented 'self-determination'? What's good enough for Czecho-Slovakia should be good enough for Ireland."

"How do you propose to apply it?," he asked.

Literally, I told him: by electing a constituent assembly on universal suffrage and then by enforcing on all Ireland whatever constitution the assembly framed.

"But that," said my father-in-law, who had invited himself to dine with us, "means coercing Ulster."

As I felt we could hardly have too many opinions in our symposium, I urged Frank Jellaby and Carstairs to join us; and every party was represented by the time that Roger Dainton pulled a chair to the end of the table.

"I detest coercion," I said; "but, if it has to be applied, I'd sooner coerce the few than the many. Because ministers refused to coerce Ulster in 1913, the rest of Ireland has been coerced ever since. And I never know why a thing should be called coercion in one country and 'maintaining law and order' in every other."

Having propounded my own policy, I was free to listen while others propounded theirs. Our speeches, at this date, would make melancholy reading, for every one said precisely what was expected of him and precisely what he had said a hundred times before. Writing now at two years' remove, I believe and hope that Ireland is on the road to a settlement; and this dinner two years ago lingers in my recollection as one more heart-breaking proof that, if the Irish were incapable of governing themselves, the English were no less incapable of governing them. Crawleigh, a former viceroy; John Carstairs, a retired diplomat; my uncle and Dainton, Jellaby and I, with some hundred years of parliamentary experience between us, all talked with the white-hot irreconcilability of Capulets and Montagues. It was this temper, I reminded myself from time to time, that kept me exiled from the County Kerry: it was this temper that tore me from Barbara's side. In the years that followed, when I tried to mark the rock on which my life split, I always thought of this fatuous debate and of the pale, angry faces round our echoing table.

It was something, I suppose, that no one prayed for a new Cromwell, though I attribute this moderation to a doubt whether even Cromwell could now "reconquer" Ireland and to a fear that those who had drawn the sword might be the first to perish by the sword. In the last six years Ireland had made the dire discovery that the north had won an advantage by threats of violence and that, if the south wished to redress the balance, it must employ the same means.

"Can't we cut out ancient history?," I suggested, as my patience wore thin. "We need a policy to meet the present position; and the present position is an evenly matched civil war."

As the phrase left my lips, I wondered whether the war was any longer an even match. Two days before, I heard from Hornbeck that a mail-train had been held up and the contents of the lord lieutenant's bag forwarded, after perusal, with an endorsement "*Passed by the Censor I. R. A.*"; my agent reported that stores were being looted and ammunition seized. If attacks on private persons and on property were still rare, this was due to prudence on the one side and to intimidation on the other. Some one, however, would soon be shot because he refused to be intimidated; the

shooting would be avenged; there would be reprisals against the avengers; and, worst fate of all, no one would be allowed to remain neutral.

"It's begun already," said Dainton. "That man they murdered in Limerick . . ."

"That spy they shot?," Jellaby substituted.

"You call a man a spy for saving British troops from being butchered in an ambush?," Crawleigh enquired acidly.

"You called Flaherty a spy," boomed my uncle, "from your place in the House of Lords. He gave exactly similar information to the republican troops."

"Who were in armed rebellion against the king," said John Carstairs.

"Whose king?," asked Jellaby.

The dialogue tripped on with the ease that comes of practice; and most of us were tried players in the farce or tragedy of mistranslating an opponent's terms. In the interests of peace I begged that we should avoid the more flagrantly question-begging labels; but by now, grown men though we were, each owed himself the satisfaction of just one more stab before he laid down his arms.

"You know who's at the back of all this?," enquired Dainton, carefully avoiding my uncle's eye.

"The bolshevists?," Bertrand asked indulgently. "You said it was the Germans in '16. It was the Americans before that. Good God! I'm old enough to remember O'Connell: it always *has* been somebody else! Will you English never learn that an Irishman's feeling is for his *own* country? The more you're pleased to call a man 'loyalist', the more I'd call him 'traitor', as I'd say 'traitor' to a Pole who boasted of his 'loyalty' to Russia or Germany."

"As your people *do* say 'traitor' to the loyalists who fought for you in this war," muttered Carstairs. "You'll hang them all as traitors, of course, when you've got your republic?"

My uncle was understood to say that he wished to hang no one; but this laudable restraint won no favour from the rest.

"I should hang Carson and Bonar Law," said Jellaby, as though he were ordering a well-considered dinner.

"Then you must hang Asquith and Birrell for not hanging them," said Crawleigh, partly from proconsular devotion to firmness, but chiefly from hatred of liberalism.

"I," said Dainton, "should be quite content to shoot de Valera as Casement was shot. Like a dog. Hanging's too good for him. President of the Irish Republic, indeed! It's treason to the king."

"If you're going to hang for treason, you must hang for constructive treason, for constructive mutiny and for acquiescence in constructive treason and mutiny," I pointed out: "that brings in the covenanters, the Curragh people and the Asquith cabinet." Dainton, I knew, was a covenanter; and I wanted him to see the implication of his wholesale executions. "Personally, I don't think hanging or shooting ever does much good . . ."

"It would have been a good thing," Bertrand interrupted, "if you'd shot the entire 1914 House of Commons."

"But as a policy for the government in 1920?," I asked.

I have thought over this dinner a dozen times since; and, when ministers were attacked for permitting the slaughter and reprisals that followed, I would sometimes ask their critics if they could do better than the reasonably intelligent, reasonably well-informed and reasonably sane men who shewed themselves so crass, ignorant and mad at this meeting.

"For all the good we've done," I told Bertrand, as we walked home, "I might as well have been in the country."

"Don't leave me yet," he begged.

And throughout the late summer and early autumn I was torn between Barbara's entreaties that I should come back to Crawleigh and Bertrand's reproach that I was deserting him when he most needed me.

As a study in "that which remained" I suppose these barren passions claim their place: in our politics, as in our work and play, our gettings and spendings, our crimes and insanities, we lived more rapidly, more violently. The growing disorders of Ireland were ascribed to a "murder-gang"; in the spirit of the age, they were met by irregular troops, with general instructions to give at least as good as they received. Under the reign of reprisals, there was inaugurated an organized terror for which there had been no parallel since the first French revolution. Burning, looting, killing and torturing were paid back, with interest, in the same currency. Mysterious and fatal lists of names were passed up and down the country; the mails were now intercepted at will; and, when far-scattered, unsuspecting men and women

were done to death by simultaneous blows, a whisper of "spy" and "counter-spy"—words that had lost their meaning—explained this opposing secret carnage which no man had power to stop.

Face to face with this slow bleeding to death, I could not shrug my shoulders and drift away for a holiday with Barbara. The peace of the world seemed a madman's dream when we could not stop this butchery at our doors. Day after day Bertrand and I wrote and talked, interviewed and argued. On one set of lips or another, every public man was by now branded as a traitor who had threatened rebellion in Ulster or a traitor who had broken faith with the South.

"If our own statesmanship is bankrupt, we must look elsewhere," my uncle pronounced.

For a week he laid siege to the League of Nations, then to the Foreign Office. Simultaneously I went as a suppliant to Crawleigh in the hope that he would forward my petition to the Vatican. On the same day, in almost the same words, we were told that there was no precedent to guide a sovereign power in summoning an arbitrator to settle differences between a government and its subjects.

"You can't run an empire on those lines," said my father-in-law.

"You're not running an empire on your present lines!" I retorted.

He was impregnable. Until the republican leaders came, like the burghers of Calais, barefoot, in their shirts, with ropes round their necks, he would not parley with them; and, unhappily for him, no one was strong enough to compass an unconditional surrender.

As I walked empty-handed away from Berkeley Square, I met Hornbeck returning home from the Admiralty.

"Making a nice, tidy world for heroes to live in?," he enquired with a grin.

Though his tone was bantering, it was free from malice. Philip Hornbeck had no political predilections and less than no belief in the perfectibility of man. Government, for him, always came back to a whiff of grapeshot, which he was always ready to discharge, always without passion and always without error.

"The problem's *not* insoluble," I maintained. "We settled Quebec; we settled South Africa. We could settle Ireland, if we wanted to; but, of a

hundred men who talk of settlements, ninety-nine will only settle on their own terms."

On reaching Fetter Lane, I found my uncle at work on an appeal to the nation.

"The Foreign Office," he told me with frozen rage, "wanted to know what business this was of mine. Perhaps we can shew them."

While he wrote, I hardened my heart to the unpleasantest duty that had befallen me since my marriage. After the usual enquiries when I was coming down to Crawleigh, Barbara let fly such a cloud of reproaches that I was ashamed to finish her letter. A delicate wife was no doubt a nuisance; but ought I not to have thought of that before marrying her? Engrossing as my work was, did I—as a matter of academic interest—rate it higher than her reiterated request that I should come to her when she was more ill and miserable than ever in her life before?

I was halfway to the station when my secretary overtook me with an hysterical telegram: *If you love me destroy letter unread*; and I should be hard put to say whether telegram or letter was the more disturbing. Crawleigh and the local doctor assured me that she was progressing famously; Bertrand urged me to go with a vehemence more inhibitive than the strongest veto; and, in the end, I lamely begged Barbara to be patient and promised to come at an hour's notice if she really needed me.

"Peace," I reminded my uncle, "is only another aspect of war. 'The last chapter, if you like' . . ."

"Please God it may be!," he answered with emotion.

5

And, as we spoke, the last chapter was opening. Though neither of us had paid much attention to the report that certain political prisoners were being removed to England, we awoke next day to find that public interest had been deflected to another part of the battle. As a football match is suddenly suspended at sound of the referee's whistle and the players stand apart to watch one of their number who has been injured, so the armies in Ireland, the factions in England, the spectators all over the world now stood apart to watch one man slowly dying. The lord mayor of Cork, arrested and imprisoned, refused to take food. For a week or two, while life still ticked loudly, we debated over our dinners whether he had been rightly condemned, whether the government would let him die of starvation, whether he and his cause would not be made ridiculous if he were fed

forcibly. Then the contest became more determined: the government would not yield to a hunger-strike; and Terence McSwiney, with life ticking now less clearly, would not yield to the government. It was a question of endurance.

"*Do come here next week-end if you can possibly manage it*," wrote Barbara. "*This business about the lord mayor must be decided one way or the other by then.*" . . .

I could give no promise. The papers were at this time recording the days of the fast and hunting for stories of men who had lived for three, four, five weeks without food. The ticking became feebler; and, one press-night, when I sat shuffling an obituary, an appeal and a face-saving leader on McSwiney's surrender, we heard that the strike was over. The report was contradicted before I reached the composing-room. A week later, as the unwound spring stopped, jerked and stopped again, we were told that the lord mayor was dead. He was still alive next day, next week. Sympathy flowed and ebbed. The government was entreated to spare a game fighter; the public grew angrily unhappy at being made an accomplice in this slow torture. Then a gust of impatience blew against such crazy stubbornness; there followed a flash of illumination, and Dainton, who would have shot McSwiney out of hand two months before, asked dubiously whether an Ireland of McSwineys would be easy to "reconquer".

At length the dying prisoner became an institution. His name was tucked into inconspicuous corners of the daily papers. There were other claims on the public attention. At last he died; and we realized that, as the injured player no longer obstructed the field, the match must go on.

On the day of the funeral procession I received an unexpected call from O'Rane, white-faced and enigmatic. In all the years I had known him I doubt if we had talked of Ireland a dozen times; but this day stirred passions older than any he could remember, and I felt that the taut, bare-headed figure who gripped my arm was saluting McSwiney's coffin in the name of his father, "O'Rane the liberator". The Irish of London were present in thousands; but the English watched or followed in tens of thousands. Some, I well believe, came to salve a restless conscience; some in homage to a brave man; most to gratify an idle curiosity. The republican colours fluttered unfamiliarly in English faces; the way was lined with English police.

"In any other country there would have been a riot," murmured O'Rane, when I described the scene.

“There will be all the riots you can use when this is over. . . . You’ve been lying very low the last few months, Raney.”

“I’ve been thinking. All Lancing’s money . . .”

“And ‘the good of humanity’?”

“Yes. I believe . . . I’ve decided . . . to save humanity . . . from ever touching it,” he answered slowly.

At the time he would say no more; and we spent the afternoon strolling along one embankment and back by the other. In the course of our walk, we had a good view of St. Thomas’ Hospital, if he wished to heal the sick, and of the Tate Gallery, if he cared to foster the fine arts; south of the river we walked through streets that were more sordidly grimed with poverty than any I wish to see again. There were, I pointed out, inequalities of wealth for a millionaire to adjust.

“But is all this for the good of humanity?,” O’Rane asked, breaking silence for the first time as we pressed into his house. The side-door of The Sanctuary was like the out-patients’ entrance to a hospital; his writing-table was submerged in appeals to his charity. “You can begin by adjusting the difference between yourself and those people outside.”

There was a sneer in his tone that roused my natural perversity. I distributed a handful of small change and returned to find him smiling.

“What did you give them?,” he asked.

“About a sovereign. Whether they’re deserving cases . . .”

“They’re more deserving than you, George. And, if I’d given Lancing money, I should have been handing *you* a sovereign. That’s my difficulty. Every time I give to a hospital or a gallery, I’m relieving prosperous people like you of your responsibilities. If the material good is outweighed by the spiritual harm . . .” He broke off to stalk up and down the darkening library with shoulders hunched and head thrust forward. “There’s still plenty of wealth in the world. Places like the Turf and Stage stink of it. And, if people want things badly enough, they’ll pay for them. If London had a smallpox epidemic, we should press money on our neighbours to get them vaccinated.”

“But, while you’re saving humanity from itself,” I pointed out, “the money’s increasing automatically.”

“I can find outlets farther afield. You wouldn’t let those people starve under your eyes; but you’ll let people starve to their hearts’ content if you

can’t see ’em.”

“With a million or two of unemployed here,” I began, “you won’t be popular.”

“If I could afford to consider my popularity!,” he broke out with a joyless laugh.

As Sonia was in the country, I brought him to dine with me in Seymour Street. We gossiped until nearly midnight; and, when I had sent him home, I settled to my daily duty of opening Barbara’s letters for her. She had been right, three months before, in calling her correspondence uninteresting; and, until this night, I had not been troubled with any doubts which letters to send on and which to destroy.

Now I encountered a problem for which I was unprepared. The first letter referred to an occasion eighteen months before, when my wife—according to the writer—had invited him to run away with her.

CHAPTER THREE

AS YOU SOW . . .

". . . The morrow brought the task.
Her eyes were guilty gates, that let him in
By shutting all too zealous for their sin:
Each sucked a secret, and each wore a mask.
But, oh, the bitter taste her beauty had! . . .

". . . A star with lurid beams, she seemed to crown
The pit of infamy: and then again
He fainted on his vengefulness, and strove
To ape the magnanimity of love. . . ."

GEORGE MEREDITH: *Modern Love.*

1

I hardly remember when the meaning became clear to me.

I was reading with but half my attention, when I met a reference to Croxton Hall, followed by familiar names. The letter was badly written, in pencil, and more than badly arranged. The writer had been ill; he was so ill at that moment that I could not make out the signature. I examined the envelope. There a different hand had traced the bold address; I noticed for the first time that the letter had been forwarded from the Crawleighs' house in Berkeley Square; then I saw an American stamp and understood the faint pencil scratching.

It was from Eric Lane; and he was dying as he wrote.

2

The shock numbed me; and I read again with so little attention that I had to turn back in the middle. Then a second shock drove the first from my mind.

Eric was dying: yes, I realized that. He was bidding Barbara farewell; and, in my first uncaring glance, I had seen so much that I must now see all.

After losing Barbara, he had found little inducement to live; and, though he had once hoped to marry little Ivy Maitland, John Gaymer had returned—almost on the eve of the wedding—to establish again his empire over Ivy's will. Eric had made his failing lungs an excuse to set her free:

"*Two years would have cured me; but I wanted her to choose for herself. And, when she too dropped out of my life, I didn't try to get well.*" . . .

There followed pages of apology, pages of explanation. Eric's love for Barbara was consuming him; and, as the flame died to a pale flicker, he forgot family, friends and self in desperate prayers for her happiness. Once more the name of Croxton Hall fell like a black shadow across his mind. There was an agonized reference to some rebuff that he had inflicted upon her. Then came the reason for the rebuff.

It was while I was in Ireland that Barbara had gone to the Pentyres. When the party broke up on the first night—Eric's apology could not have been more damningly circumstantial if he had been indicting her—, she had concealed herself till he came up to bed, then invaded his room, finally begged him to take her, take her away. Her marriage to me was a mistake; I should not want to keep her when I realized my mistake; I loved her enough to forgive her. . . .

I remembered, I now understood her distraught questions whether I should be broken-hearted if I lost her, whether I was prepared to sacrifice life, honour, everything to secure her happiness. . . .

In the heartlessness and abandonment of that moment, I knew, as well as if I had seen her, that Barbara was wholly mad. I recalled the telegram in which she said that she was missing me; I remembered her loving welcome, on my return; I heard again her promise that she was going to make a new start. And then I called up any self-control that remained to keep me from going mad too. The child that lay buried at Crawleigh was not Eric's. His letter told me that; and, when I found myself believing his letter, I felt that I was still sane. Barbara was innocent of everything but a whole-hearted will and intention to betray me; and Eric had saved her from that. After he had repelled her, she was innocent of everything but calculated hypocrisy, sustained triumphantly for fifteen months. I could never believe her again.

And what then?

A lust for revenge blinded me; and, though I could hardly hold a pen, I addressed an envelope to Barbara and thrust Eric's letter, without comment, half inside it. Then I thought of him dying in California, by now perhaps

dead. I burned the envelope. As it crinkled and scattered, I promised Eric's letter the same fate; then I hesitated for fear that my lust for magnanimity might prove more deadly than my impulse of revenge. Was my life, also, to be a calculated hypocrisy?

I paced up and down the room till a clock struck midnight. I had lost the post, I realized.

Then I looked at the other letters. The first was from Barbara. If I intended to take a holiday at all this year, would I not come down to Crawleigh? Thanks to this Irish trouble—how remote it all seemed!—I had refused all my shooting invitations; but now that the McSwiney chapter was closed . . .

I knew, unreasoningly, that I could not meet Barbara. Whatever happened to us later, I must have time to think. I telephoned to O'Rane and asked him to accompany me on a motoring tour. I believe I told him—I, of all people!—that he seemed overwrought.

"No holidays for me, old man," he answered with regret.

"I doubt if you'll find it a holiday," I said. "I want to discover what the great public's thinking about." . . .

"I wish I could manage it . . ."

And then my self-control left me:

"Raney, you must!," I said. "I'm going through the worst time of my life, something more awful than I thought could ever happen to me. If you *knew* . . ."

"You can lend me some pyjamas, I suppose?," he interrupted in a changed voice. "I'll have my gear sent round in the morning. I'm sorry, George. To the best of my poor ability, you know I'll see you through to the grave and beyond."

3

As I waited in the hall, I drafted a telegram to explain that I was being called away from London on business. O'Rane arrived in the middle; and I led him at once to his room. I could not unburden myself yet; and, as we drove out of London next day, I found it necessary to pretend that I was enquiring into unemployment.

"Bertrand's afraid the men will get out of hand," I explained.

I might have said that in some parts of England the men were already out of hand. It was at this time that the "Homes for Heroes" campaign was launched: as the government failed to provide sufficient houses, a homeless band of Welsh quarrymen seized a public hall and announced that they would stay there until cottages had been built for them. They were led by a man, then unknown, named John Griffiths, who followed up his first success by organizing similar raids on any convenient unoccupied land. No one was paying much attention at present; as Bertrand said, we were resigned to unemployment in London, but danger would march hand-in-hand with winter, when the government declared its housing-policy and when the official leaders of labour indicated whether they supported "Griffiths' landgrabbers."

"Where are you making for first?," O'Rane asked.

Until that moment I had not thought of any destination.

"We're half way between Reading and Hungerford. I don't know. . . . I've had a bit of a shock; and you'll find me rather disjointed. . . . God! I don't know what I should have done without you!," I broke out.

O'Rane's fingers rested for a moment on my arm:

"Old man, you knew I was always at hand if you needed me!" His unseeing eyes softened; and his voice fell to a whisper:

"*'I cannot come to you—I am afraid.*
I will not come to you. There, it is said.
Though all night long I lie awake and know
That you are lying waking even so:
And all the day you tread a lonely road
And come at sunset to a dark abode.
Yet, if so be you are indeed my friend,
Then, at the end,
There is one road, a road I've never gone,
And down that road you shall not pass alone;
And there's one night you'll find me by your side—'"

He paused; and I waited for the rime that should complete the couplet:

"How does it go on?"

"*'And there's one night you'll find me by your side—*
. . . The night that they shall tell me you have died.'

It's . . . Chinese, I was told. Two or three hundred years before Homer."

I drove on, staring drowsily ahead of me at the broad, unfolding ribbon of black road and the monotonous water-meadows on either hand. The tender warmth of the little poem made me forget for a moment the bleakness of the Kennet valley in late autumn; and, after a sleepless night, the rushing wind drugged my brain.

"*Though all night long I lie awake and know*
That you are lying waking even so." . . .

I murmured the lines to keep myself from falling asleep. What had Barbara's thoughts been when I lay waking the night before? Suddenly my sight was dimmed with a curtain of blood; and I stopped the car in twice its length because I could not see the road before me. If indeed I had fallen asleep, I had looked for a moment, through this red curtain, on a sun-washed verandah, where a dying man was gasping for breath.

"*And there's one night you'll find me by your side—*
. . . The night that they shall tell me you have died."

The vision faded before I could make out whether Eric was speaking to Barbara or listening for her voice.

The unexpected jolt had flung O'Rane out of his seat; and, as he pulled himself back into place, he could hear me stopping the engine.

"Is anything the matter?," he asked.

"Eric Lane's just died."

"Good God! When?"

"This moment. I . . . pulled up to avoid him," I answered without knowing what I was saying. "He's gone now. Poor devil! Oh, poor devil!"

If I was shaken, O'Rane was in no better case:

"Those lines . . . I had them from him."

"I know."

"You'd heard him . . .?"

"I heard him then . . . At least I think . . ." The road was once more stretching firmly ahead of me to a belt of leafless trees. In the meadows on either side I saw deliberate cattle splashing up to their knees in muddy water. "It's ten to two, Raney. Shall we see if we can find a place for lunch?"

"That'll wait. You're not fit to drive any more at present. . . . You'd . . . better tell me everything, old man."

"But I've told you! I knew Eric was dead or dying because I had . . . I saw a letter from him quite recently. My nerves are rather jumpy." . . .

"It'll break poor Lady Lane's heart," he murmured. "And it'll be a shock for Ivy."

Slipping his arm through mine, O'Rane led me into a field by the roadside. Though he must have guessed that Eric's letter had something to do with my frantic appeal the evening before, I could not speak at present for fear of breaking down. '*Boyish to cry—can't help it—bad fever—weak—ill.*' For many moments my head sang with Mr. Jingle's clipped phrases. A shock for Ivy? Some one had told me her marriage was all the failure that Mr. Justice Maitland had predicted. It would have been better if she had married Eric: she might have kept him alive. It would have been better if Barbara had married him, better if he had never left America, best of all if he and she and I had never been born. . . .

"Babs can't be ill," O'Rane murmured as though he were thinking aloud; "or you wouldn't be here. Sit down and smoke a cigarette."

When he returned with the basket, I was able to tell him. I wondered at the time, I wonder still, whether I did right; but I know that I could not help it. He let me talk myself out, only asking dispassionately at the end:

"What are you going to do about it?"

And I talked myself out a second time, until the fever left me and I lay back on the rug, almost too much exhausted to move or think. Physical infidelity, committed in a moment of passion, stood in relation to this long infidelity of spirit as a blow struck in hot blood stands to a calculated and artfully concealed murder. Had Barbara left me and come back, as Sonia left and came back to Raney, I believe I could have forgiven her. After deceiving me once, she could deceive me again; to get what she wanted, in her own way, she would sacrifice me as she had sacrificed Jack Waring and Eric Lane.

It was all over. And I wanted her desperately. And it was all over.

Hitherto, I had always pretended that there was something I did not understand in her tragic entanglements: Jack and Eric were straight as the day; if they both fled from the woman they both loved, I wished to think that they were parted by a lover's quarrel which both were too proud or obstinate to heal; I refused to believe that they had run from her in disgust.

"I'm here because Barbara will soon be coming back to London," I told O'Rane. "I . . . couldn't divorce her if I wanted to; but I can let her divorce

me.” . . .

“She won’t be very . . . happy alone,” he answered reflectively. “When Jack Waring disappeared, she turned to Eric out of sheer loneliness and misery; when Eric went, she turned to you. If you go, George, she’ll turn to some one else. A married woman without children, without a husband, more lonely and miserable than ever before . . . Well, you won’t have long to wait for your divorce.”

Four-and-twenty hours earlier, I should have called my best friend to account if he had warned me that Barbara needed watching. Now she had convicted herself and robbed me of all temptation to defend her.

“I don’t see much difference,” I said, “between the woman who runs away with a man and the woman who only stays at home because the man won’t run away with her.”

“There’s still a difference between the woman who keeps her reputation and the woman who loses it. When women become reckless . . . It’s a big responsibility to give them the first push down the slope.”

The short sunlight of late autumn was fading; and I busied myself with packing our luncheon-basket. As I had not asked for sympathy, I could not complain if none was offered.

“If I give her the chance of divorcing me,” I said, “I’m not accountable for anything she does after that.”

There was a long silence. Then O’Rane asked:

“What will you do?”

I had not thought; but, in that moment, I had a vision of the blue water, the close-packed green woods and the vivid fuchsia hedges of Lake House.

“Go back to Ireland, I expect.”

I was making enough clatter with plates and knives to convince the least attentive that my patience was exhausted; but O’Rane lay with his hands clasped behind his head, frowning a little at his own thoughts and wholly unmoved by my demonstration.

“Will divorce make for Barbara’s happiness?,” he asked in a maddening drawl. “You can’t quite wash your hands of a woman you’ve married. You weren’t content, you see, with somebody of your own mould. Your wife had to be brilliant, beautiful, romantic, tragic. . . . You married Babs when you

knew she'd been shaken to the depths of her soul by Jack Waring, when she'd been broken to the bottom of her heart by Eric Lane."

"I thought she'd had so much romance and tragedy that she'd be glad to settle down quietly."

"When she wasn't in love with you? Has any one settled down quietly after gambling with death for nearly five years?"

"I'd have forgiven anything if she'd told me!," I cried, as we went back.

We must have driven for an hour before he spoke again:

"Well, George, if you want my advice, I should recommend you to burn Eric's letter and pretend you've never seen it. Then begin again at the beginning."

"You imagine I can forget it?," I asked.

"If you think more of her and less of yourself. The bigger the crime, the more she must have been tempted: try to understand that instead of counting up the things a man has a 'right' to expect of his wife. Rights here, rights there! *Every one's* thinking too much of his individual rights, George! Every group of nations, every nation, almost every man and woman." . . .

4

After two years I can appreciate O'Rane's patience better than was possible at the time. I know now that he was distracted by a civil war of his own; but I was too much preoccupied to enquire why Sonia and the children were in Hampshire; I should have been aggrieved if any one else had presumed to be unhappy.

"I suppose it's all the same to you where we spend the night?," I asked, several hours later, as we paused at a sign-post.

In the gathering dusk I could distinguish nothing but the gloomy contours of Stonehenge and the sharp, black outline of innumerable government huts. Then I saw O'Rane prick up his ears at the tramp of weary feet.

"Anywhere you like," he answered, as a white-faced army advanced into the glare of my lamps. "I was in camp here in '14. It's a dam' bad step. Recruits, I suppose. We should have been given hell if we hadn't been smarter than that."

As the column approached, I saw fifty or sixty men in tattered civilian clothes. Two or three wore medals; the rest had a brave line of ribbons on their coats. At their head marched two standard-bearers with the adequate device: "*Wanted in 1914. Not wanted now.*"

"They've had their hell; and they're not through with it yet," I said.

It was the first time that I had encountered the searing reproach of that device; and, as I described it to O'Rane, I recalled—as in a dream of some other life—that I was the editor of a political review and that I had been sent to study unemployment. There was an external world, then. At this moment my uncle was probably taking the chair at our weekly dinner.

As the tramp of feet grew fainter, O'Rane half rose in his seat and then subsided with a groan:

"No, I *can't*! It's *not* my business to pay other people's debts. The state turned these men into soldiers, in a moment of blue funk; the state must turn them back into civilians. Sometimes I see so red that I want to hold this country to ransom. 'You've no use for these fellows,' I want to say. 'Well, now I'm going to shew you what would have happened if they hadn't come forward when they did.' After a week of Belgian atrocities, there'd be a marked increase in popular gratitude! And I thought this war would produce a . . . spirit of fraternity!"

I had hoped for it, even if I had not expected it after the first months of 1915. Quick conversions are never permanent: and permanent conversions are never quick. Our drive that day, past great estates and big manufacturing towns, might have been chosen as an object-lesson in the aggressive competition that strangles fraternity at birth.

That night, when we lay at Gloucester, and next day, as we drove through the soul-searching loveliness of the Stroud valley, we talked of education and the gospel of humanity, as we had not talked since our Indian summer at Cannes; and once or twice, for ten or fifteen minutes at a time, I forgot to think consciously of Barbara. H. G. Wells, after years of criticism, was turning teacher on his own account; and *The Outline of History* was conspicuous in every house and railway carriage I entered at this time. One man at least was pleading for the universal spirit; and his plea gave food for thought to the people who had shouted for blood and gold in the 1918 election. The havoc which Keynes had made in the economics of the peace-treaty was completed by the havoc which Wells made of its history and its spiritual trend.

"And yet," I exclaimed in sudden reaction, "those books have left things where they were!" The treaty, which could not be enforced, had to be modified: the British representatives had to explain why their crazy election-pledges could not be fulfilled. At regular intervals Germany threatened to default; France retaliated with a threat of further occupation; a flustered knot of prime ministers collected at the first convenient watering-place; and a punctual press announced that the results of the conference were wholly satisfactory. "I sometimes despair of education. . . . And, damn it, Raney, you haven't told me what to do when I get back to London!"

"You've not yet told me what you want to do. . . . It's strange how people can hold mutually destructive opinions at the same moment! Lucien de Grammont talks piteously about German 'revenge' at a time when the French are pouring Senegalese troops into the occupied area!"

"Roger Dainton will tell you that a restored Germany means a new war and that an unrestored Germany is losing us our best customer." . . .

At O'Rane's skilled prompting, we argued our way farther west and farther until, at the end of a week, we stalled the car and strolled on foot, because we had reached Land's End. Surrounded by water, in the spray and wind of the last rocky outposts of England, I felt my sanity and self-control returning to me; but a single day without the distraction of driving brought back the obsession. I flung myself into a voluminous report on *Unemployment and Public Feeling*, only to discover that my four folios might have been compressed into the single word "indifference". There was no question of class or party: every one flabbily deplored the breakdown of industry, flabbily pitied the unemployed, flabbily felt that somebody should do something. Accent and idiom might change, but the stale thought and worn expression changed only by becoming more stale: the wayside tap echoed the slipshod reasoning of an Atlantic liner; a benighted book-maker in a forgotten Cornish village talked of trades unions in a way that I had thought only possible in my father-in-law; and there were Roger Daintons manipulating beer-engines in every bar.

I reminded O'Rane of his scheme for endowing schools and buying papers till the education of an entire people proceeded from a single pair of lips.

"I still believe a press-monopoly is possible," he answered, "but who's to be trusted with it? Horatio Bottomley is a political messiah to several millions; but I'd never give a messiah the power of a messiah unless he were ready to die as a messiah."

“Talleyrand’s advice to those about to found new religions,” I said.

“ ‘Get yourself crucified’? Wasn’t he right? Since people began to doubt the old heaven and hell, the churches have been losing their power: they had less to offer, less to threaten; and their ministers became officials instead of martyrs. Christianity was born of one martyrdom; and it will only die when there are no more martyrs. There were martyrs in the war, if we could only make people remember them . . .”

“But the war’s over,” I interrupted. “How can you keep that exaltation alive in time of peace?”

The question was unanswered when I turned the head of the car, next day, towards London. We were both shirking our private difficulties; and, though we argued endlessly about the world as we wished to make it, the shadow of our own narrow troubles darkened that free, generous concern for humanity which we talked so eagerly of inculcating in people whose narrow troubles engrossed them no less blindly.

“I’d better tell Sonia we’re on our way back,” said O’Rane. “If you’ve any idea where we shall be to-morrow morning, I’ll say she can wire to the post-office.”

“Is she at Crowley Court?,” I asked.

“Yes. Remember taking her down there the night Tom’s death came through? She’d put her eyes on sticks for you over that, George.”

“She was at her wits’ end, poor child,” I began.

Then, whether or no he was spreading a snare for me, I thought of Barbara by herself at the Abbey, reading of a “well-known playwright’s death” and stumbling blindly through the dim, panelled rooms in vain search of some one to comfort her.

“We can go back by way of Crowley Court,” I said. “I’ll send Babs a telegram. If she’s still at the Abbey . . .”

“I’m entirely in your hands,” said O’Rane.

That night we lay at Exeter; and next day we headed for Southampton. As we got into the car, I was given a telegram from Barbara:

> “*All well here hope you are enjoying yourselves can you possibly return by way of Crawleigh I need you.*”

Only when I was committed irrevocably did I realize that I had not decided how I was to meet her.

"I can't pretend for five minutes," I said. "I never could."

"She's . . . entitled to see her own letters," O'Rane suggested. "You opened this at her request . . ."

"But, good God, man, she's my wife!," I broke out; and, remembering the sustained deceit of these fifteen months, I could not trust myself to say more.

We drove our last stage with heavy hearts. Southampton was shrouded in the first fog of the year; and, when it lifted on the confines of the New Forest, I saw bare trees, dead leaves and all November's decay. Every few minutes O'Rane asked me what point we had now reached; and I knew that for him too every turn of the road was marked by a memory and guarded by a ghost. Through eyes half-closed I could see Jim Loring and the Daintons striding, three abreast, on a leave-out walk from Melton to Crowley; I could see Eric Lane piloting me through Lashmar village to call on his father. . . . Strange! Though he was now dead, though I had almost loved him and though we had both been punished for trying to play a game according to its rules, I could not forgive him for flinging this last shadow across Barbara's life, I could not whisper his name without a shudder.

As we drove through a country that was haunted with the shades of our dead selves, I fell to thinking whether a man was happier in the discontent of eighteen or the disillusion of thirty-eight. I no longer aspired to Westminster Abbey and a nation's gratitude; but, like other men on the threshold of middle-age, I made the discovery, incomprehensible to a schoolboy, that I had no heir to shelter himself under the trees which I had planted; and love seemed almost to have been left out of my life.

In Crawleigh village, my nerve broke and I headed for London; then, for very shame in the reproach of O'Rane's silence, I turned, though I knew that no love was awaiting me here, and splashed through the floods to the Abbey. Neave was fishing perfunctorily by the bridge and volunteered to take the car up to the house if I wanted to look for Barbara.

"The guv'nor's in London for this Unknown Soldier business," he explained. "So it's only the four of us. Just right for a nice game of cards."

"How's Babs?," I asked, as unconcernedly as I could.

"Oh, fit as a flea," he answered. "She's wandering about the park, waiting for you."

I made a pretence of hurrying forward as the car shot ahead; then, as it passed out of sight, I leaned against the parapet of the bridge till the low grey line of the refectory wall deepened to black and was gradually lost in the oncoming tide of darkness. I was still there when the first rare lights twinkled at the windows and paled as the curtains were drawn. Then I heard a distant whistle and turned to the house before my impulse to hurry away got the better of me.

I was halfway to the gardens when I saw the white coil of Barbara's furs.

"Darling! I was expecting you hours ago!," she cried. "Did you have a breakdown? I hope I didn't upset your plans by asking you to come here, George: I wanted you most awfully."

I could not see her face clearly; but her voice thrilled me till I had to bite my lip and look away. I wondered how I had existed without her all these weeks. The long rest had given her back her old vitality. Her eyes, when we entered the hall, were shining; and for a moment I fancied that I was seeing her in a vision or that I was emerging from twelve days' delirium.

"My *dear*!," I cried; and she laughed with childlike exultation at my joy in her.

"Pleased to see your deserted and ill-used wife?"

"Babs . . ." Her cheeks were pink from the biting cold outside; her hair and eye-lashes were spangled with tiny raindrops. As she flung her coat aside and twined her arms about my neck, a familiar, faint, warm fragrance rose from the carnations at her waist. As she clung to me and our lips met, I could have fancied that no other man had ever made her heart beat so quickly. "I've never *seen* you like this before!," I cried.

"I've been getting well . . . for *your* sake, sweetheart. I've been so patient, so good. And I *did* miss you so."

"I've been thinking of you day and night," I answered truthfully enough.

"The next time you go away, I'll tell your secretary to send me a daily telegram: '*Missing you dreadfully best love George.*' You'd never do it on your own account. What's the matter, darling?"

Unconsciously I must have drawn away from her embrace. The delirium was returning; and I could only think of the telegram which she had sent me the day after she asked Eric Lane to run away with her.

"Some bad news, I'm afraid. I didn't want to spoil our first moment together, but you'll have to be told some time. I've not seen any papers . . ."

Barbara's hands fell from my shoulders; and she walked slowly to the fire.

"I . . . *have*," she whispered; and her head drooped as though I had struck her.

"You mean . . . what . . . what *I* mean?," I stammered.

As she turned, her eyes were blinded with tears; and her hands groped for support.

"Darling, if it had been any one else, should I have had to say 'I *need* you'? . . . When I saw the great cruel headlines, I hoped and prayed that I might die . . . till I knew you were being sorry for me. You're all I have; and I promised myself I'd repay you for all your patience." She could go on no longer; and her terrible tearless sobbing shook her till I feared that her heart must break. "I *can't* be brave any longer." As she once more hid her face against my chest, I could feel her whole body trembling in the last vain effort to restrain her weeping. "When . . . when . . . when did you hear?"

"Twelve days ago," I answered, as I led her to a chair.

"The day he died. You . . . didn't tell me, George. Did you think I shouldn't see?"

"Strictly speaking, I didn't hear for certain. I knew he was dying . . ."

"There was a long article in *The Times*. Oh, so *cold*! . . . I knew he was terribly ill. That's what made *me* so ill this summer, though I couldn't tell you before. I thought you might guess; the doctor did. I've been going up and down, up and down, as he got better or worse. The afternoon he died I fainted; and they all thought I was dead too. Now you understand why I wrote such horrid letters: as he slipped away, I couldn't bear myself. I *did* try to keep it all to myself. I knew how I hurt you by talking about him. But no one told me anything! . . . I couldn't ask Lady Lane for fear she'd say I'd killed him. And he died before I could ask him to forgive me."

Barbara was no longer trying to control her tears; and I was no longer thinking of anything but a means of comforting her.

"He didn't feel there was anything to forgive," I assured her.

"Ah, that was the way he talked!"

"It was the way he thought, Babs."

"Then he might have spared me this!," Barbara broke out. "Just one word!"

As her head fell forward, I knelt down and chafed her hands.

"He may have been too weak," I said.

"A message, then! I can't *bear* it! I didn't think he *could* be so cruel."

In furious self-scorn, I remembered telling O'Rane I could not pretend for five minutes that I had not received Eric's letter. Very little more than five minutes had passed since Barbara and I met.

"In justice to him," I said, "there *was* a message. I was paraphrasing it. He never dreamt you needed his forgiveness, he was begging for yours. He loved you as much at the end as he'd ever done. His last words—so faint I could hardly read them!—were 'God bless you'. And we must assume that he died at peace. You'd forgiven him so often, he said, that, if God was disposed to judge him, he believed you would intercede."

In her agony of spirit, Barbara's thoughts were reflected as clearly as if she had spoken them. Her eyes lightened for a moment in unutterable relief; they clouded as she looked suspiciously to see if I was inventing this opportune comfort; then she stared through me and past me to Eric's death-bed six thousand miles away.

"He . . . wrote to you?," she enquired after a long silence.

I half nodded; but, with Barbara's eyes on mine, I could not put a lie into words.

"The letter was to you," I said. "I opened it with the rest."

There was a single piteous whimper. Then she looked at me in perplexity:

"Where is it? Why didn't you tell me?"

"It's in my despatch-box. . . . I didn't want to harrow you, darling. I think he was delirious part of the time." . . .

"Will you get it for me?"

"I've told you all that matters. It will only make you miserable to read it."

She seemed not to have heard me; but a strangled laugh, more terrible than her crying, shewed the worth of my comfort:

"D'you think anything can make me more miserable than I've been these last twelve days?," she asked. Then she tore herself from me and stood with her hands pressed to her temples, staring at me in mingled

bewilderment and rage. “All the time . . .? And you . . .? The last thing he ever wrote . . . oh, I might have reached him while there was still time! When did you get the letter?”

“Just before I left London.”

“While he was still alive . . . Ah, God, the cruelty of kind people!” With the tears still wet on her cheeks, she forced a smile. “And you’ve been carrying it about ever since? George dear, you’ve punished me for all the crimes I’ve committed and all that I shall never have time to commit if I live to be a thousand. . . . May I have my letter?”

For an instant, as she stood limply drying her eyes, I thought of telling her that I had destroyed the letter; then I saw that this would never be forgiven me, even if I had not already told her that it was with my other papers.

“It will only hurt you to read it,” I said. “Forget it! Forget *him*, if you can. I’ve told you he had nothing but love for you . . .”

“Then why mayn’t I see it? George, I don’t understand! I’m not a child; and, if I didn’t know you were trying to spare me, I could almost kill you for your ghastly kindness. Pocketing it for twelve torturing days, as though it were a bill! Pretending he was too weak to write! Saying it was a *message*! You’ll send me mad if you’re not careful!,” she cried hysterically. “For the last time, please give me my letter.”

“For the last time please try to forget there ever was a letter. I’ve told you he must have been delirious when he wrote. I won’t answer for the consequences if you read it. All this time *I’ve* been trying to forget it.” . . .

My voice told her all that I was trying to hide. Her eyes were startled, then compassionate, then defiant. I thought I heard a whisper of ‘Poor George’. She raised her eyebrows as though to ask what I was minded to do. Getting no answer, she shrugged her shoulders and turned wearily to the fire:

“Was that why you left London?” I said nothing. “You told me it was on business. And you’ve been . . . sitting in judgement on me ever since.” . . .

I took a step forward and tried to catch her hand:

“It has made no difference.” . . .

“Put it down to my curiosity!,” she taunted. “It’s not pleasant . . . to be . . . *condemned* unheard; but I couldn’t *bear* to be acquitted. Your despatch-box, you said?”

"Babs, I implore you!," I cried, as she moved to the bell.

"You're afraid of being certain?," she interrupted scornfully. "I'm only afraid of sheltering myself behind a dead man. . . . Oh, Henry, Mr. Oakleigh wants his despatch-box. And will you see that there's a good fire in the tapestry-room and have his things moved in there? The . . . peacocks make so much noise on my side of the house," she added.

6

As I finished dressing, Barbara tapped at my door and came in with Eric's letter in her hand.

"If you want this, I must give it you back," she began. Her voice had almost left her; and the radiant vitality of an hour before had flown. "I hope you won't have to quote it, because these things are so terribly vulgarized in court. Do I . . . have to be unfaithful? I wasn't . . . with Eric," she added carelessly.

"I know you weren't."

"I meant to be, . . . if I must use that . . . unclean word. For one moment I had a vision of perfect happiness, I forgot everything else. . . . It would be generous of you to say you won't use this. Eric's dead. And people would think he was to blame."

"I certainly shan't use it. Barbara, why are you talking like this?"

Before she could answer, the letter had to be thrust into safety. Then, with one hand clutching it to her breast, as though Eric's heart were beating against hers, she looked up and forced her mind on to my question:

"Because father's coming down to-morrow, and we must decide what we're going to do. We had to fight him pretty hard to get married, but we shall have to fight much harder to get divorced."

"But no one has mentioned divorce."

"*I* have. You said you could never forget that letter. . . . It was a great risk for us to marry; but you were so sweet and I was so miserable. . . . I see now that the thing never had a fair chance while Eric was alive. I heard his voice in the streets, wherever we'd been together, when I knew he was the other side of the world; and, as soon as I had a chance, I rushed to him. When he wouldn't have anything to do with me, I *did* try once more to make a success of our life. You wished for a son; and I did my best, though Eric was the only man I wanted as father of my children. Perhaps that's why I . . .

couldn't keep him alive, poor mite. . . . It's funny that little things should cause such big troubles. If I hadn't asked you to open my letters, we *should* have made a success." . . .

There was a moment's break in her terrible composure; and she turned away with a single dry sob.

"Why didn't you tell me, Babs?"

"You wouldn't have understood; you don't understand now."

"If I hadn't understood . . . a little, should I have come?"

Unwittingly, I moved a step forward; and she held up her hand against me as though I were assaulting her:

"If you'd understood, you wouldn't have waited twelve days."

I was goaded beyond discretion by the scorn in her voice. I had understood and forgiven too little, it seemed, when I fancied that I had forgiven and understood too much.

"It was . . . a startling letter," I answered in her own measure. "Whenever you told me you'd try to forget Eric . . ."

"You wondered for twelve days whether you could ever trust me again." She did not trouble to look at me, but I felt myself flushing. "As though any other man could tear my heart out of me as Eric did! Why *did* you come?"

"Because *I* needed *you*."

Barbara's lip curled in derision:

"Your servant's too useful to discharge, so you pretend you haven't caught her stealing! When we met to-night, I noticed a difference. I thought you must have seen in the papers about Eric's death. When you kissed me so tenderly, my heart leapt; and I thought you really understood. Now I know . . ."

The incisive scorn cut deeper as her failing voice died away.

"Well?"

"You *need* me because I'm a woman. That's why you insult me with your forgiveness. And that's why you must divorce me, George. We're divorced in spirit; and we should both be dishonoured if we put your *need* in the place of love."

In the distance I heard the gong booming for dinner. Neave's door opened and slammed. A cautious footfall, accompanied by a warning whistle, told me that O'Rane was making his way downstairs.

"I shall not divorce you," I told Barbara, "even if I could. And I can't. You'll be as independent of me in Seymour Street as if you were on a South Sea Island. But we mustn't do anything irrevocable till we're more cool-headed."

"But . . . this is impossible!," Barbara cried.

"If we find it impossible, I shan't try to keep you." As I followed her down to dinner, I wondered whether we either of us realized what we were saying. "Coming here to-day," I told her, "I was thinking that life only becomes intolerable when there's no love in it. If I can get back to the state we were in a fortnight ago . . ."

"You'll never do that. You'll be very kind and attentive, as you always are; but I married you because I thought you understood. Now you've become like any other man who puts a cushion at my back or tucks a rug round my knees. I'm utterly, utterly indifferent to you!"

On this, the first night of what she called for two years our "life in a gilded cage", I was chiefly concerned that her indifference should be concealed from the sharp eyes of Neave and the abnormally sharp hearing of O'Rane. With the same intention or in her usual reaction to an audience, Barbara sparkled her way through dinner in a manner that set me wondering whether I had not waked from another nightmare; but, when we looked for her afterwards, she had disappeared; and, when I went—as a matter of form—to bid her good-night, she answered me through a locked door.

Neave had asked me at dinner how long I was staying; and, when I reached my room, I found a note from Barbara:

"*If I am to come at all, I had better come to-morrow. Mother has a big party this week-end.*"

I sat down in front of the fire and tried to picture our life on the day after to-morrow. Could Bertrand direct my paper if I found it necessary to live in Ireland? Was Ireland tolerable or even safe? Could I afford to keep two houses in commission if my wife refused to live with me. And how long would Barbara endure this spiritual starvation?

"*Utterly, utterly indifferent.*" I had never been the romance, the passion, the great love which she still demanded as of right; even with Eric Lane out of the way, I could not deck out my humdrum self as a fairy prince. If I

failed in the “understanding” for which alone she had married me, how was her indifference ever to be overcome? The whole of our life must be such an evening as this, when she donned a brilliant mask of gaiety for dinner and discarded it when she locked her door against me.

A sudden thought urged me from my chair and sent me pacing up and down my room. How many other masks did Barbara employ? She dramatized her life so richly that, though her grief for Eric was unfeigned, I doubted if she could resist the temptation to make a romance out of his death. Had she been still unmarried, she would have cast herself for a part of inconsolable bereavement; as I obtruded awkwardly into her scene, she chose a blend of remorse for the injury she had done him and of heroic endeavour to forget him in her devotion to me. Unconsciously, in that queer childish brain that could never separate sincerity from pretence, the phrases had formed themselves; the emotion that fed the phrases had been fed by them. Instinctively she had changed her attitude and improvised a new part when she heard of Eric’s letter; and this trick of dramatizing her life was now so much ingrained in her nature that within half an hour she was perfect in her lines, her expression and her whole reading of the part. Henceforward she would continue to regard herself as “a damned soul”, with the added damnation of being tied to a crass, unsympathetic husband and of conspiring with him to deceive her neighbours as she had deceived O’Rane and Neave at dinner.

I readily believed that Barbara had forgotten half the agony of Eric’s death in the joy of playing her new part.

“But how long is it to go on?,” I asked myself in despair.

The new part had in some sort been forced upon her; she could not relinquish it without abandoning her attitude of moral superiority to one who already believed her to be morally in the wrong and would believe her to be yet more deeply in the wrong if she admitted that even her grand romance had been a piece of play-acting. And play-acting it had been for half the time! She could have married Eric if she had dared to admit that Jack Waring was tired of her, instead of pretending that she was pledged to him. . . .

Next day the Crawleighs arrived in time for luncheon; and we returned to London in the afternoon. Our departure was on the border-line between farce and tragedy. Muffled in furs and bathed in the warm fragrance of her beloved carnations, Barbara took her place by my side; her eyes were shining as when I came back to her the day before; and her undemonstrative

mother was stirred to exclaim: “My dear, you really *do* look very lovely.” Crawleigh, who had recently met my uncle at dinner and was overcharged with repartees that had not occurred to him in time, stood with one foot on the running-board and emphasized his endless rejoinders with excited cutting movements of a tremulous forefinger. In the background stretched the low grey walls of the Abbey, unchanged since the days when the first marquis criticized the treaty of Vienna, unchanged since Lord Chancellor Neave cavilled at the peace of Utrecht, unchanged since some nameless political abbot pointed the significance of Crécy and attacked the staff-work at Poictiers. I can no more reproduce my father-in-law’s arguments than I can reconstruct those of his predecessors; but I remember being told that now, two years after the armistice, we were in a more parlous state than when the war was still raging.

“That’s what my uncle always tells me,” I answered, though it was not worth while to remind Crawleigh that this was what I had been preaching in despised *Peace* for fifteen months. “If you sow the wind, you must expect to reap the whirlwind.”

The reply probably bore no relation to the argument, but I wanted to get away; and I had not listened to the argument.

As the car turned out of sight, Barbara flung aside one mask and pulled another into place. Her eyes lost their colour; her whole body seemed to grow limp. Appearances no longer needed to be maintained.

So we returned home, to reap a whirlwind. My trite phrase haunted me. I wondered who had sown the wind.

CHAPTER FOUR

IN A GILDED CAGE

For remember (this our children shall know: we are too near for that knowledge)
Not our mere astonied camps, but Council and Creed and College—
All the obese, unchallenged old things that stifle and overlie us—
Have felt the effects of the lesson we got—an advantage no money could buy us!

. . . . . .

It was our fault, and our very great fault—and now we must turn it to use;
We have forty million reasons for failure, but not a single excuse!
So the more we work and the less we talk the better results we shall get —
We have had an Imperial lesson; it may make us an Empire yet!

RUDYARD KIPLING: *The Lesson*.

1

My return home from Crawleigh Abbey brought to my mind the reappearance of the small boy in *Punch*, who, finding his running-away unremarked at the end of one whole day, drew attention to it by observing that his parents had the same old cat. For a single moment, as O'Rane and I reached Salisbury Plain, I had remembered that the world was revolving in sublime unconcern at my private tragedy; then a starless night of misery enveloped me once more. In London, a fortnight later, I was amazed to find letters and messages, proofs and manuscripts from people who seemed still interested in unemployment or reparations, in the fate of Ireland or the coalition.

Now and for many weeks I thought only of new means to win back a woman who had become a stranger to me. After her first declaration of "indifference, utter indifference", Barbara never weakened the effect of her

action by talking about it; when I had influenza, she nursed me as she would have nursed any man who had the misfortune to fall sick in her house; when she caught my influenza and aggravated it with pleurisy, she allowed me to take her abroad to recuperate. No two acquaintances, sharing the same house, could have lived in greater harmony; and no woman could have devised a keener torment than by treating lover, husband or friend as an acquaintance.

Meanwhile, the external world was still revolving. . . .

"*I want to see you about these articles of yours . . .*", wrote Bertrand.

"There'll be a general election within six months," Sir Philip Saltash predicted.

"*I hoped to find you had knocked some sense into David's head*," Sonia lamented.

" 'I see you have the same old cat'," I whispered to myself in astonishment.

2

It is a tribute, I think, to our loyalty in public that my marriage to Barbara was commonly quoted at this time as one of the very few successful unions in an age of confessed failures and desperate escapes. Had I imagined at the beginning that our unreal separation could drag on for two years, the myth of our blissful harmony would soon have been exploded. As it was, we drifted. I thought by day, I dreamed by night, of a romantic reconciliation that never came. There were moments when I fancied that Barbara, with her passion for dramatizing life, forgot her boredom in the excitement of martyrdom. On some plea, which I do not remember, she gave up entertaining; and, while the young "London of the restoration"—in Bertrand's phrase—went leaderless, she had the barren pleasure of feeling herself wasted.

By degrees which I cannot recall I was driven to spend more and more time at my office and to dine more and more often at a club. Her indifference spread beyond me to all the men and women who in other days had interested her; it culminated in her dispassionate efforts to interest her husband in some other woman. I returned home one evening to be told that Ivy Gaymer had fled to us for sanctuary and that Barbara was waiting for me to say whether we should send her back to her husband or communicate with Mr. Justice Maitland or wait helplessly for something to turn up. As Ivy was already in bed, we could hardly prick her into the street at midnight; and

next morning she ruled out our first two courses by declaring that she would never again enter the house of a man who intrigued with other women under her nose and that her father's advice and sympathy were limited to the triumphant question: what else could any one expect?

We decided to wait for something to turn up. I did not want to be inhospitable, but I wanted still less to hear Barbara talking about my "little *protégée*". After a week or two I suggested that there were hotels in plenty and that Ivy was not without money. Barbara confined herself to saying that, as I had insisted on the creature's staying on in the first instance, it was now my delicate task to evict her. Following the cowardly expedient of writing what I was afraid to utter by word of mouth, I sent a note to Ivy's room one night, asking what her plans were; we should, I said, be going down to Crawleigh for Easter. By ill luck, she was still up; and her reply was delivered from the foot of my bed, where she sat, smoking cigarettes, in scantier clothes than women usually wear in public. If we kept the house open, she would not in the least mind staying on by herself; her solicitors were advising a divorce; it was saintly of us to take her in; and she would not have troubled us if she had not been in fear of her life. The interview was ended damagingly by Barbara, who came in to insist maternally that, if Ivy and I wanted to talk, she must put on a warm dressing-gown.

Though my door was locked against similar conferences in the future, my next attempt was no more fortunate. Ivy agreed that she must go and then broke into piteous weeping. I comforted her as well as Barbara's expression of scornful amusement permitted; and, when the weeping broke out afresh as Ivy began to pack, I recollected an overdue appointment at my office. On my return, our guest was still in possession.

"She's cried herself sick," Barbara told me. "You can say she must go, George, or you can say she may stop on; but it's cruel to keep making her cry."

"I want her to go," I said, without enlarging the field of debate.

"It was a pity you asked her in the first place, if you were going to turn her out."

"I fancy she asked herself."

"I thought she was a passion of yours," said Barbara in faint surprise. "You made me go to her wedding, when I hardly knew her."

"At O'Rane's request: because her father was being so difficult."

There was a pause; then Barbara shrugged her shoulders.

“I think she’s rather in love with you,” she murmured.

“That’s very flattering,” I said, “but it doesn’t make things any easier. Her affections are quickly aroused. First it was Eric, then Gaymer; now . . .”

“You don’t believe it? George, you’re sometimes rather unobservant. Why d’you think she came *here* of all places?”

“I should think she was banking on the softness of your heart or of my head,” I answered.

I hardly knew whether to be surprised or not when I found Ivy still with us next day, but I made no further attempt to dislodge her. At the end of the week Barbara went to Crawleigh and I telephoned for a room at the Eclectic Club. New developments in Ireland kept me tied to the office at the last moment; and I did not choose that my wife or Ivy’s husband should be able to say that the two of us had been alone together. After four-and-twenty hours’ solitude Ivy discovered that it was possible to live in an hotel without being tracked by her drunken and homicidal lord; and the incident closed when Barbara came into my room, on the night of her return from the Abbey, with a brief letter of thanks.

“You’d get tired of her very soon,” she said judicially, as though I still needed to be saved from myself. “So would any man. That’s why I begged Eric not to marry her. I believe you’d be happier, though, if you found some woman who really interested you.”

“That advice is more suitable for a bachelor than for a married man,” I pointed out.

Barbara walked to the door in silence, then paused with her fingers on the handle.

“And how long is this going on?,” she asked with a sigh of utter exhaustion.

“You alone can say that,” I replied.

The tragic farce had been running for six months and was to run for another eighteen before the farce was eliminated and only the tragedy remained. Without regular employment, I should have gone out of my mind; and I am thankful that my uncle’s increasing infirmities threw ever more and more of our work on my shoulders.

It was in the spring of 1921 that he despaired openly and finally of the existing government; it was in the summer that he called for a change.

“Though, mark you, there’s not another man who could have done what George has!,” cried Bertrand with the generous appreciation that Jack Sheppard might have exhibited towards Dick Turpin. “After two years of power he’s made a tumbledown peace that satisfies no one. He *hasn’t* hanged the kaiser; he *hasn’t* made Germany pay for the war. The League of Nations, which we were promised, *isn’t* functioning; he calls a new conference every few weeks to settle finally the problems which were finally settled at Versailles. If that isn’t an achievement . . .”

“Oh, admitted!,” I said. “I’m thinking about the day of reckoning.”

We were walking slowly along Knightsbridge on our way to one of the weekly editorial dinners; and, as we approached the French Embassy, I crossed the road for fear of encountering Lucien de Grammont. My shoulders were not broad enough to support the load of obloquy which he kept in reserve for our few, uneasy meetings; and, though I stated candidly that the French were now the chief obstacles to peace, I could not persuade Lucien that it was the prime minister and not the humble editor of an obscure review who had coaxed the French to open their mouths and shut their eyes at Versailles. Now that no sweetmeats were to be had, the French were threatening to undertake the search themselves.

This was the first bill to be met on the day of reckoning; but I was not prepared to say that it would be the last or the heaviest. In Ireland, the practice of wholesale murder and destruction was being met with reprisals in kind. Of India and Egypt it is enough to say that we knew very little, that all we knew was bad and that we were not allowed to print all we knew.

“That’s my point,” said Bertrand with cynical complacency. “Any one of these things would have brought down a government in old days. Take taxation! Take unemployment!”

“My one consolation,” I broke in, “is that *no* man, even if damned fools call him a ‘little wizard’, can cope with all that at the same moment.”

“I’ll write you an article on *The First Duty of Government*,” Bertrand promised. “And that, some of these gentry may be surprised to hear, is . . . to *govern*.”

3

My most vivid memory of my uncle’s subsequent diatribe was that I declined to publish it. In Ireland or France, where irony is understood, it would have gone with a swing; but we were unpopular enough already without assailing the cherished conviction of the English that they have a

natural talent for self-government. And this is what Bertrand attempted with artful citations from any convenient speech in which an English publicist had asserted that Dervishes, Hottentots, Andaman Islanders or even Irishmen were unfit to govern themselves. Could darkest Africa shew such a record of misrule as we had at our doors? Had Egypt plunged to bankruptcy with greater recklessness than we displayed? By the standard of our Indian crimes and blunders, was not Abdul the Damned unjustly damned? The English were mistaken, but it was not too late to repair the mistake; and my uncle proposed in conclusion that the United States should lend Mr. Herbert Hoover for six months to organize and run the British Empire Protectorate.

"It won't do, Bertrand," I said.

"But isn't it true?"

"It's too true."

That, however, was not to say that the English had enough detachment to relish the truth underlying the irony. Roger Dainton, on the eve of signing the Ulster covenant, told me—as an Englishman—that the Irish would never be fit for independence till they had acquired respect for law; I had seen Violet Loring whiten to the lips at the report of a lynching in some southern state and then regain her colour in a spasm of indignation that a Quaker had not been shot for refusing to enter the army. Collectively, I had watched the people of London—and, for all I know, the people of England outdid them—exhibiting, at the time of the Pemberton-Billing case, a ferocious credulity that was not exceeded by the French in the Dreyfus trial.

"Well, write your own damned article," said Bertrand. "If you think you know these people . . ."

I believe that in one respect I understand the English, among whom I was brought up, better than Bertrand, to whom they were always a race of despised aliens. What they lack in imagination they make up in a queer political instinct. Every one at the Eclectic Club was sublimely indifferent, in these days, to the case of Egyptian autonomy; the Amritsar sentences only provoked a desultory discussion whether "damned black men", as I heard them described by Sir Roger Dainton, would not be all the better for "an occasional dressing-down". When, however, national bankruptcy was threatened, I encountered an instinctive preference for solvency; and, when refugees from all parts of Ireland flooded England with tales of assassination and counter-assassination, the British liking for order at home grew clamant. I remember carrying back to Seymour Street an official poster in which recruits were invited to "*Join the Royal Air Force and See the World*"; an

unofficial hand had appended the grim warning: "*Join the Royal Irish Constabulary and See the Next World*."

"It's beyond a joke: that's what it is," said Robson, on whom I tried the last of my experiments.

For soul-deadening years, my butler's sentiment had been expressed, from different angles, by Crawleigh and Bertrand, by O'Rane and Dainton, by *Peace* and the *Morning Post*. I believe, however, that no change of heart can be effected by one man or one paper. England accepted the reformation and acquiesced in the decapitation of Charles the First when the Robsons of those days—inarticulate and irrational, for the most part, but numerous and determined—decided that the unreformed Catholic Church or the divine right of kings was "beyond a joke".

"I've written my own damned article," I telephoned to Bertrand. "I think it's an improvement on yours."

"You *would*," he replied.

"I don't think this government has very long to live," I added.

The oldest trick in the bag of a political journalist is to find out what policy is going to be followed, to insist vehemently that this policy must be followed and to take credit for having forced his own policy on a vacillating and apathetic government. During the war, Sir John Woburn preached conscription from the moment when his chief spy in the cabinet had revealed that ministers were agreed to bring conscription in: the Press Combine advertised itself for months as the mouthpiece of that opinion which demanded conscription; and, when the first military service act was passed, Woburn stood forth as the giant who had forced the government, in his own phrase, "to give Haig the men". I have to guard against the temptation to employ this trick in writing of our campaign in 1921. Independently of our prompting, every one was saying that ministers must govern or go; and I only realized how far opinion had swung, when I met the lately ennobled Lord Saltash at a public dinner.

"Well, things are moving," he began darkly, as he led me to the Turf and Stage and pointed from an unobserved corner of the gallery to Lord Lingfield's customary table.

I needed a few minutes to penetrate the familiar externals. My cousin Laurence Hunter-Oakleigh was entertaining a party of American revue actresses; Sam Dainton was dancing with Ivy Gaymer; and the inscrutable Gaspard was watching and ministering with his wonted resourcefulness and

address. It was like going back to a play at the end of a long run. I felt that they must all of them have been frozen in the same attitude since last I looked down on the top of their heads a year before. The band, which played unceasingly from the moment we arrived to the moment we left, might well have been playing for twelve months on end. It was impossible to think of these sleek heads and slim figures without their Turf and Stage frame, unless you thought of them as the brilliant, glossy chorus of mannequins and salesmen in a musical comedy at the Hilarity in old days. Had they homes? Had they private lives?

"I see Wister is withdrawing the support of his papers from the coalition," I said.

"Yes, he's out for an all-conservative ministry," answered Saltash. "Foreditch put him up to it; and you can see they're trying to nobble Wilmot Dean for their new ginger-group. The rank-and-file tories don't want to drive Ll-G. out, though, till they're sure of keeping him out. And Lingfield, who's leading the rank-and-file, doesn't believe they can do it yet, unless Bonar comes back. That's why he wants a centre party, to include Birkenhead, Winston and that lot. It's interesting, devilish interesting! The dying lion ain't dead yet."

"What line are you taking yourself?," I asked.

"A wise man wouldn't commit himself till the dying lion was much nearer his last kick," Saltash answered with refreshing candour. "If Lingfield's centre party falls down, he and Birkenhead and Austen won't get any mercy from Foreditch and the men who want an all-conservative ministry; and, if Foreditch wounds Ll-G. without killing the coalition, his die-hard tories needn't look for office from the centre party. It's too early to say. When I give you the hint . . . I'm here most evenings," he concluded with an affability that rather disquieted me.

"I'll remember that," I said; and, when the last of many political crises ended fifteen months later in the prime minister's resignation, I made it my business to dine nightly at the Turf and Stage. I was never a member; but Sonia, who also was not a member, introduced me to Gaspard; and Gaspard, bowing from the waist, assured me in the French of the Midi that Mrs. O'Rane's friends were always welcome.

4

She was not at the club on the night when Saltash took me to observe the signs of the times; but I found her husband talking to Barbara when I arrived

home. He was armed with the notes of an article and wished to use my paper for an attack on the entire English system of inheritance and property.

"We're hypnotized by 1914," he broke out stormily. "We treat the old world like a vast Pompeii, which we're uncovering bit by bit. People won't see that we're repairing from copies of old models." . . .

"I'd sooner live in old Pompeii than in new Turin," Barbara murmured.

"If Pompeii had been paradise in 1914, it would be an outworn paradise now!" O'Rane, I thought, looked tired and old, as though perpetual opposition was gradually wearing him down. "The world changes in seven years, especially if the inhabitants have spent four of them withstanding a stream of molten lava. Can you tell me a single idea we've put forward, a single effort we've made to improve on 1914 so that Pompeii shall not be buried again?"

I left Barbara to wrestle with his question while I glanced at the manuscript article. O'Rane's own contribution to the ideas of the new age seemed to be that the hand of every man must be against his neighbour so long as unequal wealth made the one arrogant and the other envious. As human capacities were unequal, wealth must continue to be unequally amassed for a single lifetime; but to perpetuate this inequality was to perpetuate the friction that ultimately lead to revolution and civil war.

"You're at least consistent," I said. "On the night Stornaway died, you told me there was no room in the modern state for these gigantic fortunes."

"I doubt if we have room for private transmitted wealth of any kind," he answered. "It debilitates the individual, it demoralizes society. I'm seeing that every day in my own work."

The subject was too big to discuss at midnight; but, as his article was avowedly the preamble to a declaration that he was bent at all costs on saving humanity from the poison of the Lancing inheritance, I warned him that the unemployed might break his windows if they heard that a million a year was going to feed distant Russians when they themselves had not eaten a square meal for twelve months. I asked whether his wife approved of the article, but received no answer. Finally, I returned him his manuscript with a reminder that I could not stultify my weekly predictions of insolvency by proclaiming of a sudden that we were all suffering from too much money.

"I'll try elsewhere," said O'Rane without resentment. "I'm sorry, but I'm not surprised. You're hypnotized by 1914, too, and you think you can avert another eruption by treaties and boards of arbitration. They didn't stop the

war in ’14, George; they never *have* stopped wars, they never will. If you’d change the course of history, you must change the heart of man.”

“The more I study the heart of man . . .” I was beginning.

“It changes daily,” O’Rane cried. “It changed when man turned sick at gladiatorial shows and slavery and torture. It will change again when men find that cooperation is more comfortable than competition. But you’ll have competition always—the competition of the rich with the poor, among individuals and nations, the inevitable forerunner to every revolution and war—so long as you crystallize an unequal distribution of wealth.”

“Write me an article on that theme,” I said, “and I’ll publish it gladly.”

My invitation and promise were forgotten by O’Rane, I imagine, as quickly as I forgot his demand that I should find a new spirit moving on the face of the waters. When I reached Fetter Lane next morning, I was greeted by Spence-Atkins with news which made Saltash’s predictions obsolete and O’Rane’s researches premature. With or without our reminder that the business of a government was to govern, ministers were hatching a new Irish policy. Like most Irish policies, it could be guaranteed to divide England even if it failed to unite Ireland; and I felt then and later that the decay of the coalition set in on this day. Like all new moves in the Irish game at this time, it was certain to keep me in London when I wanted to take Barbara to Scotland.

The result of the new negotiations has passed into history; and from first to last I was narrowly preoccupied with their effect on my own fortunes. If the south-west of Ireland became habitable again, I was resolved to make it my home; and, at the end of many months’ parleying, I was wakened by a telephone-message from my uncle to say that a settlement had been reached. After threatening reconquest, the government had ascertained that to “reconquer” Ireland would cost as much and take as long as the last South African war; those who had preached coercion changed their text to conciliation; and, as I passed through Inverness, the king’s ministers were meeting the ministers of President de Valera on equal terms.

“The treaty,” Bertrand’s message ran, “was signed in the small hours. Outside a portion of Ulster, Ireland is to be a Free State.”

“And now,” I answered, “and now . . . now perhaps we may see home-rule for England.” In 1906 I had brought a young man’s ideals to Westminster; thirty years before me, my father had done the same; and ten years before him, though he might now call his ideals illusions, Bertrand had

entered parliament with hope and vision. One after another, each in our generation, we had seen our vision clouded and our hope deferred by the shadow of Ireland. “May I go home now?,” I asked.

“I can’t spare you yet,” Bertrand sighed. “The trouble’s not over. There are thousands of Irishmen who’ve taken a solemn oath of allegiance to the republic for which their fathers and brothers laid down their lives. There are thousands of English who will say in every passing difficulty: ‘I *told* you so! Ireland is unfit for self-government.’ We must preach patience, George. We must try to sweeten the bitter taste that all this blood has left on our lips. Lake House can get along without you for the present.”

“I was only thinking Barbara and I should be the better for a change,” I answered with deliberate vagueness.

If I kept my disappointment to myself, I could not help being disappointed. This talk of peace had suddenly opened an unexpected vista of escape from the “gilded cage”; and my single glimpse of freedom convinced me that I could not continue the armed neutrality which Barbara had been imposing on me for a twelvemonth. We must be reconciled or divorced. If we could separate even for a short time, we might be able to decide what we wanted. I therefore told Bertrand that he must not count on me indefinitely; and the old man shewed the wisdom to give me my change by sending me to America for the Washington Conference.

“One of us ought to be there; and I’m too old,” he explained. “I don’t know what stuffing the new president has inside him; but this is the first serious effort to undo the harm of the Versailles treaty, and Harding is the first responsible statesman to say frankly that we’re all committing financial suicide. You’ll go?”

“I will,” I promised.

“And you’ll take Barbara?”

“I’ll talk to her about it.”

And that night I told her of my decision.

“Are you expecting me to come with you?,” she asked.

“It will be better for us both if I go alone. When I come back, you’ll have had time to think quietly . . .”

“I can picture you talking to your clerks like this,” Barbara mocked. “ ‘Your last chance, remember!’ . . .”

"To think quietly," I repeated, "whether you would prefer me to live in Ireland. Conditions are becoming normal there . . ."

"You must *really* decide for yourself where you want to live," she answered, without hinting whether she wished me to live alone.

A week later I sailed from Southampton.

If I had expected to find any striking change on my return, I should have been disappointed; but I fancy that I had by now ceased to look for the romantic reconciliations of the film-world. There was little enough change anywhere. My father-in-law had given me a farewell dinner on the night before I sailed; he gave me a dinner of welcome on the night that I returned. Tempers, I thought, were a little shorter; nerves a little thinner. The vague feeling that something decisive must soon happen reminded me of 1914, when the world expected a cataclysm and almost hoped for it.

"And certainly the conference has done nothing to avert it," I told Bertrand at the end of dinner.

"Not the French show-down?," he asked. "After this, we can talk frankly instead of gushing about our gallant allies. We all made grievous mistakes at the peace conference, George, but it's the French who are keeping us from repairing them."

"Which will coerce which?," I asked.

The question, I could see, was not palatable.

"They've the best air-force in the world and could lay London in ruins within a week," Bertrand growled. "It's immeasurably superior to anything we saw in the war. They can hold Germany down with aeroplanes and niggers; and, when you ask them why they won't reduce their submarines, you don't get a satisfactory answer. I can give it to you. They're going to make themselves masters of Europe before any one has time to stop them. They worked against us in Poland, they're working against us in the near east."

"How do you propose to make use of this knowledge?"

"It may lead to clear thinking. Why *we* should pay six shillings in the pound to relieve them of an income-tax, when they're amassing armaments . . ."

There was very little change anywhere. Lady John Carstairs hoped vaguely that we were not going to desert our late allies; Violet Loring whispered that it was all very well for dear Phyllis to preach at us, but

America had deserted every one. I provoked a passing storm by asserting that all international debts would have ultimately to be forgiven; and, had any one asked wherein the world was safer or happier than in 1914, he must have waited long for an answer.

An hour later, as we drove home, Barbara enquired expressionlessly whether I had enjoyed my holiday from her.

"I wanted *you* to have a holiday from me," I answered. "No, I missed you horribly. I should like to think you missed me."

"Oh, why say that?," she exclaimed with sudden petulance. "If I could have a holiday from myself so that I didn't see how my life has been wasted, if I could lose my memory . . . Dear God, if I could only die!"

There was no change in her; and I was driven to issue my ultimatum:

"If you'd like me to go away again, I will. And this time I shouldn't upset you by coming back. I've done my best; and I've failed. We can part friends. If you want a divorce, you can have it now.". . .

"Somehow, I don't see you in the divorce-court," Barbara murmured half to herself. "I feel you'd bungle it. When I wrote and begged you to come back, you *would* . . . by special train."

"Well, the matter is now in your hands," I said.

"I think you've a finer collection of worn-out phrases than any man I know," she cried, again without answering my question.

5

"No change of any kind!," I told my cousin Violet when we dined with her a fortnight after my return to England.

Barbara had not mentioned divorce again; and I believe we were summoned to Loring House with a view to mending the latest breach between Sonia and her husband. He, unchanging in stubbornness, had published the article which I rejected and was threatening to follow it with others; Sonia, unchanging in tactics, had announced that she would walk out of the house unless he yielded. Bertrand, unchanging in the beloved formula which he applied indiscriminately to cigarette-smoking, Christianity, *vers libre*, welfare-work, side-whiskers and "self-determination", explained that this was only a phase, which one or other or both would outgrow. And Violet, whose kindness of heart nothing could change, was playing counsellor and friend of all parties.

"We, I suppose," said Barbara, "are to be the object-lesson in domestic felicity. When women have married the wrong men, as Sonia and I did, it's rather a waste of time for any one to patch it up."

"If there's been a fair trial," I said, "you should end what you can't mend. Armed neutrality is intolerable."

From Barbara's thoughtful look I fancied she was wondering whether I wanted a divorce in order to marry some one else.

"The trouble is," she continued, "you never know who is the right man till you've married him. I always thought you had more perfect understanding than any man I knew . . . Funny!," she added, as I made no answer.

No answer seemed possible. There was now no change in our rare private passages, though I thought the reference to my want of understanding was dragged in to close the subject of divorce. There was no change in the atmosphere of this party. Nearly seven years had passed since Violet and I last dined together at Loring House. The noble line of portraits had been reinforced by a black-and-white sketch of Jim in uniform; Sandy was old enough for his mother to consult me about schools; but we were arguing now in the very mood and terms that we had used in 1914.

"I wish people wouldn't talk so much about 'the next war'," Violet muttered with a frown in the direction of Philip Hornbeck. "I've lost my husband; I'm not going to lose my son if I can help it."

The big, softly-lighted room reminded me of my interminable discussions with Jim and of his own admission on the outbreak of war that the old governing classes were played out. I was reminded, too, of the question that had haunted me in the first weeks of the armistice: if the order that was represented at this table could not keep peace or make peace, would it have to give way?

"We talk about the next war," I said, "because the combined wisdom of the world has done nothing in the last three years to prevent it."

"I suppose the prime minister *is* the only man . . .?" she hazarded.

"Every prime minister is indispensable," I answered, "till he finds himself on an opposition bench, watching his successor taking command. Five minutes after George goes, every one will ask why he didn't go before. Every one will discover then the vice of all coalitions: which is that there's no one to oppose them. You don't expect Curzon to admit that Lloyd-George's foreign policy is dangerous?"

"Can nobody do anything from outside?"

"The press does its best, but this government is stronger than the press. Otherwise, Woburn and his combine would have had George out in the street a year ago. Your best hope is an intrigue from inside. Ll-G. was at least equally responsible for the shortage of high explosives in '15; yet he put the blame on the others and broke the Asquith government. It may be done again."

My voice carried to Bertrand's side of the table and roused him from one of his now periodical lapses into slumber.

"If the House of Commons contained anybody one half as clever, Ll-G. would not now be prime minister," he answered.

No change; and no prospect of a change until it was forced upon us by another cataclysm. It was the public temper that alarmed me more than any concrete problem of unemployment or proved blunders of policy. On my first appearance in Fetter Lane I asked young Triskett for a sketch of the political position; and the tone of his reply reminded me disquietingly of the recklessness and exasperation of 1914.

"The prime ministers of the allies," proclaimed Triskett with the pomp of a toast-master, "have been meeting in discord and parting in harmony, without settling anything. The public, however, me lords, ladies *and* gentlemen, has by now ceased to expect settlements. We have had a new policy once a week to bring Russia back into what the poet so felicitously calls 'the comity of nations'; a protest once a fortnight against bolshevist propaganda in the far east; and winged words from the labour party once a month, when it thinks Winston has a new scheme for invading Russia. Reparations, my dear Oakleigh, are rather *vieux jeu*: we don't remind Ll-G. of his promises to hang the kaiser or 'make the Huns pay'; if we did, the French might try to catch us up for an invasion of the Ruhr. We're rather short with the French since the Washington Conference. At home, you'll find the prime minister has got a new wind, but everybody's very sick of him. Gawd, and I'm sick of everything!," he added with his first approach to sincerity.

The bitter, neurotic voice reminded me of a night, some eight years earlier, in my old room, a quarter of a mile away in Bouverie Street. Van Arden and Jack Summertown then burst in with the announcement that they were bored beyond endurance; we must break windows or light a bonfire in Trafalgar Square. "Sick of everything!," they repeated at short intervals. I could not join in whatever debauch they arranged: it was press-night, for one

reason; and, for another—unless my memory be at fault—, this was the Thursday following the Serajevo assassinations, when universal dissatisfaction sought practical expression. Arden and Summertown were now dead; but Triskett stood in their place. And Trisketts, multiplied to infinity, furnished the atmosphere, the fuel and the spark whereby the world was periodically set ablaze. The Triskett of an earlier generation had told his friends in Paris that a bit of a revolution would at least liven things; he had urged Lafayette to fire on the mob at Versailles "just to see what would happen".

I mentioned this fancy to Bertrand and O'Rane at the end of dinner.

"It's the revolt against peace, after the incessant excitement of war," said my uncle, who had been loudly regaled with private mutinies for the last hour. Ivy Gaymer was now in the precarious legal region "between the *nisi* and the absolute"; Sam Dainton had scandalized his parents by opening a cocktail-bar in Swallow Street; and Barbara was contemplating a volume of autobiography. "I'm afraid we're drifting . . ."

"We're refusing to admit there's been a war," Raney struck in. "You can't expect anything to be the same; and it's because I'm afraid to drift that I'm carrying out a new idea with this money."

We were not encouraged by O'Rane's tone to break the rather embarrassing silence that followed. I had noticed before dinner that he and his wife had not merely—in the language of stage directions—"come into the room"; they had "entered, conversing with animation". As we drove home, I asked Barbara whether Violet had effected a reconciliation.

"If he publishes any more articles, Sonia will repudiate them," she answered.

"And if he repudiates her repudiation?"

"She'll repudiate him."

"Um. I rather hoped, when I saw them together . . ."

"Husbands and wives who get on well in public always arouse my worst suspicions," said Barbara. "No, there's no change."

I was still pondering our hard-worked phrase when we re-entered our "gilded cage"; and Barbara had slipped away to bed before I could ask her whether a man erred more grievously by doing everything that his wife demanded or nothing.

CHAPTER FIVE

"UN SACRIFICE INUTILE"

". . . They say, the tongues of dying men
Enforce attention, like deep harmony;
Where words are scarce, they are seldom spent in vain;
For they breathe truth, that breathe their words in pain." . . .

SHAKESPEARE: *King Richard II*.

1

"On the turf," expounded my uncle Bertrand, "races are won by the intelligence of the individual backer. It is only when you lose that you divide the responsibility between the breeder, the trainer, the jockey and the horse. That is why the sporting tipster is the happiest of men. Why shouldn't we call ourselves 'the Brigadier' and run a sporting column in *Peace*? You and I, George, get neither pleasure nor profit from seeing our political forecasts being fulfilled." . . .

"Perhaps, if we'd backed our fancy . . ." I began.

"I've backed *Peace*," said my uncle grimly, "to a tune that would make an unsuccessful racing-stable seem like a safe investment. I pay tens of thousands a year for the privilege of casting myself for the part of Cassandra. We *can't* be so much cleverer than other people . . ."

"If we were," I interrupted, "we might make them believe what we tell them."

"The world believes what it wants to believe," said Bertrand.

"And is quite unabashed when it's proved wrong," I added, as I pocketed the article which I had brought to Princes Gardens for my uncle's *imprimatur*.

Many months had slipped away since we discussed the day of reckoning that awaited an opportunist government and an indifferent country. In the last four months of 1921 and the first eight of 1922 every storm that we had foretold blew against our doors or broke through our roofs. By the time that

the peace coalition fell, the great powers were at loggerheads, war was at a day's remove and the mutter of social revolution was heard in England for the first time since the Chartist riots. No one heeded our jeremiads; and there is little satisfaction now in recalling our prescience. Indeed, before presuming to lecture the public, I might well ask myself what hearing I won from my friends and what attention I paid to my own warnings. Did O'Rane listen when I told him that his stubbornness had already alienated his wife and would, as likely as not, encourage the unemployed to break his windows? Did I listen when I told myself that, though I had sworn to have no scene with Barbara, the armed neutrality could not last?

Did I really believe that the conditions created by the Versailles conference could only be changed by another war?

2

I am writing so near to the times which I am trying to describe that I must occasionally invoke the judgement of posterity. I may be told that my facts are wrong, that I have distorted them by unintended omissions, above all that I worked in a false perspective. My only answer must be that I have written the truth as I saw it, that I have no thesis to maintain and that my conclusions have been reached without bias. At the armistice I believed that we had done with war; when peace was signed, I believed that another war was being made inevitable; and, when the peace-coalition fell, I believe that the sense and conscience of the country rose in revolt against a system that threatened it with another war. From this standpoint, the general election of 1922 closed the chapter that began in 1918 and the book that opened in 1914. If it did not answer my question whether the old governing classes could make peace, it gave an unmistakable answer to those who demonstrated that they could not. So far as the people of England are concerned, I feel that the diplomatic moves and counter-moves of this period, the division and regrouping of political parties, the influence of the party and press managers and the historical significance of the Irish settlement or the unemployment problem were all leading to the upheaval of 1922. If history admit of beginnings and ends, a system ended with the end of the 1918 parliament. In using the word "revolt", which Louis XVI favoured, I wonder whether I should not use the word "revolution", which de Liancourt substituted.

According to my uncle, the first responsible attack on the peace-treaty was delivered by President Harding; a counter-attack was opened by the French, when they stultified the Washington Conference; and an attack, in

reply to the counter-attack, was launched by the Balfour Note on inter-allied indebtedness.

On the day after it was published, Clifford van Oss called in Fetter Lane to enquire whether the note was an overture to repudiation.

"I should rather call it our reply to the French *non possumus* at Washington," said Bertrand. "If we pay our debts to you, the French must pay their debts to us instead of building submarines against us."

"From what I know of the French," said Clifford, with the detachment that some of us found irritating in a country which had so disconcertingly washed its hands of European problems, "they won't take it lying down."

The assertion was so intrinsically probable that I did not contest it; but, if I spent little time wondering what the French reply would be, that was chiefly because I was watching the fulfilment of another prophecy. The controversy that raged for six months over O'Rane's articles in the *Democratic Review* is now public, if not ancient, history; and my chief memory is of his victory by silence. If one of his million critics had troubled to study his argument, he would have seen that the flamboyant gifts of embarrassed millionaires were attacked for their demoralizing effect on the recipients. Those who wrote to the papers or passed unanimous resolutions of protest laid emphasis on the crying needs of hospitals and the like; they assumed an almost impertinent right to tell other people how they should spend their money; but they did not meet O'Rane's contention that every university could be endowed, every laboratory subsidized and every great work of art purchased for the nation from the money that was spent on luxuries.

I paid less attention to those who lectured O'Rane from expensive addresses than to those who heard, on the authority of a millionaire, that a great many people had a great deal too much money.

"Any windows broken?," I asked him on one of the rare occasions when we met in these months.

"Not yet," he laughed.

I did not dare to enquire whether any wives had been running away lately. Sonia's threatened repudiation had not yet been published; but this, Barbara told me, was only because he had not yet stated in public that he would renounce his inheritance. The controversy imparted a transient heat to the chilly summer of 1922; and no doubt I should still be printing letters of protest if O'Rane's theories of property had not been drowned in the thunder

of a more urgent conflict. In August I took Barbara to stay with the Knightriders; and I had only reached Northumberland when my uncle recalled me to London with a telegram that revived for many days the agonizing fears and uncertainties of 1914.

I returned alone to find Bertrand breakfasting in bed.

"You've asked me more than once what we've done to prevent another war," he began. "Here's your answer: nothing."

In the last week I had seen but a few provincial papers; I had almost forgotten the diplomatic moves that led to this check. With all the suddenness of those August days eight years before, however, I stepped out of the train at King's Cross to learn that Great Britain was being left to fight, single-handed, for the freedom of the Straits, against a restored and rejuvenated Turkey.

"This is the French reply to the Balfour note," I said; "their revenge for our refusing to accompany them into the Ruhr."

"If you'll be good enough to tell me what it's all about . . ." Bertrand thundered; then he lay back, spent and very old, until I suggested calling in Fetter Lane to see the latest telegrams.

There was nothing to be learned there; almost nothing to be learned when I invited myself to dine with the Crawleighs, though I remember this night with pleasure as the only one on which my father-in-law and I looked on any political problem with the same eyes. Halfway through dinner, Neave entered in service-uniform. His battalion had received its orders for Chanak; he did not know why he was going; we could not tell him.

"Harington's a cool-headed fellow," said Crawleigh to keep his own courage up. "If he *can* avoid a conflict . . ."

I remembered the days eight years before when Jim Loring and I kept our courage up by telling each other that Sir Edward Grey would prevent war if war could be prevented.

"I *still* don't understand," muttered Lady Crawleigh, as though we were conspiring to keep some discreditable secret for her.

"No one does, ma," Neave snapped and then left his father to reach the same conclusion in less few words.

War was again at our gates; and we had not willed it, we did not want it. Stalking across Europe from that country which had been most completely vanquished, it hammered at our gates within four years of the war that was

to have ended war. Whenever in the last three years I had urged that the incorrigible and blighting Turk should be forced into the hinterland of Asia Minor, Crawleigh had annotated my articles with the red-ink comment that we should pay for a peaceful Europe with a hostile India. Now, though he knew better than most men that Mohammedan India was not bound to us by ties of love, we awoke to find that, while the victorious allies were quarrelling at a distance, Turkey had set herself quietly to recover all that she had lost in the war. When British troops went unsupported to uphold the Treaty of Sèvres, they were to find their old enemies equipped with the arms which we had shipped to Russia and restored to fighting form by officers of the French army.

"But . . . but *why* . . .?," Lady Crawleigh kept repeating with pathetic helplessness.

Parliament, as represented by Crawleigh, the services, as represented by his son, the press, as represented by me, were not allowed to know all that was involved in this apparently aimless squabble about distant waterways.

"Nobody knows and nobody cares," Neave cried in ungovernable exasperation.

And this was all that I could report in answer to Bertrand's request for news.

"The first shot fires the magazine," he predicted; "and we know from the Balkan wars that people can fight when they've no food and no money. Russia and Hungary will come in search of pickings. One will bring in another." . . .

For once, however, my uncle was at fault. The political instinct of a somnolent people was again expressed by my butler in his favourite formula that another European war would be beyond a joke.

"If they can't do better than that," he decided, of the coalition ministers, "they'd better let some one else have a try."

I handed on this opinion to Bertrand next day, with the rider that he looked like winning an old bet on the life of the coalition. Before I went north again to bring Barbara back to London, the Lloyd-George government was under sentence; and, had Bertrand been at hand in October to claim his wager, I should have had to entertain him at dinner.

Mindful of Lord Saltash's invitation, I called without delay at the Turf and Stage to hear the latest movements of political parties. Now, as before, there was no one to turn the prime minister out if he could hold his cabinet together; now, as before, the insurgents were thrown into confusion by their cross-divisions. While Rupert Foreditch ran up and down in search of a conservative leader, the centre party counted its big guns.

"*It is hard*," the Lingfield press stated, "*to imagine a conservative administration without Lord Birkenhead, Sir Robert Horne and Mr. Chamberlain, all of whom, it is well known, have promised their allegiance to Mr. Lloyd-George*.". . .

"*Recent events in the near east*," retorted the Wister papers, "*have signed the death-warrant of the coalition*.". . .

The organs of both parties combined to ignore the existence of liberal ministers; and I judged that the political wire-pullers on all sides were estimating whether the old but awkward conservative organization or the new but efficient coalition would be the harder to split.

As I failed to see Saltash, I deduced that the tocsin was either not to ring yet or else had rung already in some other place; and my nearest approach to a party-manager was the trim and ill-informed Frank Jellaby, who demanded without preamble what line my paper would take in the election.

"What line are the independent liberals taking?," I asked in my turn. "And how many seats can you be sure of winning? I'd support the devil himself if he promised a homogeneous majority."

"*Our* line . . ." he began eagerly; and, as I turned from the things he had forgotten to the things he had never learned, I classed him unhesitatingly with those who—in O'Rane's phrase—would not admit that a war had taken place.

"I suppose a political whip can't live without an abnormal endowment of optimism," I said, more to myself than to him.

Jellaby forged ahead with growing enthusiasm. The local associations were solidly in support of the Asquith wing, solidly opposed to the Lloyd-George renegades. Much capital could be made out of the Safeguarding of Industries Bill ("which is pure protection; you'd have thought the tories had had enough protection in 1906"); more from the Black-and-Tan reprisals in Ireland; most of all from the unpopularity of the coalition.

"But have you considered why it's unpopular?," I broke in at last. "Not because its policy is faintly protectionist—the electors to-day don't care

tuppence about free trade—; not because it tried to put down murder with more murder. What people care about is taxation and the cost of living and unemployment and, above all else, my dear Frank, security. We're in sight of another and a bloodier war."

"With a man like Lloyd-George . . .," he began with a kindling eye.

I did not wait, however, for the end of the tirade. No one beyond Jellaby's immediate circle of colleagues cared about the internecine feuds of exasperated factionaries; and I look back on this night as the time when so temperamental, congenital and impenitent a liberal as myself had to realize that there was at present no hope for liberalism in the liberal party. So far as the roar of his indignant rhetoric allowed me, I tried to formulate the demands of all who shared my own feeling of insecurity. The country was demoralized by the war and by the paralysis of government that followed it; instinctively the country wanted to be put into training, to have its muscles hardened and—still more—its nerves steadied. Though the heat of civil war had died down in Ireland, it had been replaced by the fitful blaze of individual assassination; the chief of the imperial general staff was done to death this summer on the steps of his house in London; the commander-in-chief of the Free State army was ambushed in Ireland. It was idle to bandy figures of murders and reprisals, when the country demanded a cure for its own demoralization.

"People feel it's time to pull up, take stock, overhaul," I said. "It's the spirit of 1914, when the war did for us what we could not do for ourselves."

"And that security is just what the liberal party offers," said Jellaby. "Standing midway between a tory reaction and socialism . . ."

"If you're going to be the safe, middle party," I interrupted, "go all-out for that. In 1918 you had no policy; you have no living policy now. The only thing you've learnt since 1914 is that you have a score to settle with the coalition-liberals. While you're settling that, the country will look for a government that will tackle unemployment before the unemployed get out of hand, a government that doesn't bring us as near war as we are to-night."

We argued inconclusively until the theatres emptied. As there was still no sign of Saltash, I judged that—in his favourite phrase—he must be troubling the waters to some purpose; and I was preparing to leave when Sam Dainton hurried up to demand why I had not yet patronized his cocktail-bar. He was followed—at an interval of time and space calculated to disarm the king's proctor—by Ivy Gaymer, who told me that she expected her decree to be made absolute the following week.

“These six months have been hell,” she cried viciously, as she danced away with Sam.

Marking her difference of outlook and appearance since she first sought from me an introduction to journalism, I felt that we were threatened by a worse spirit than that of 1914 and that we stood in need of harder moral training. Ivy’s reputation was hanging by a thread; her fingers and Sam Dainton’s were itching equally to snap it.

“A mad world,” I said, as I parted from Jellaby. “A mad world,” I repeated, two days later, when I went north to bring Barbara home. “A mad world face to face with its madness,” I thought to myself, on reading an announcement, sandwiched between news of now greater moment, that Mr. David O’Rane was withdrawing the funds of the Lancing Trust from England.

On reaching Seymour Street I found a telephone-message from Sonia, begging me to see her at once. I replied that I would come; but, as I walked to Westminster that afternoon, I felt—as in the similar atmosphere of eight years before—that the individual had shrunk in importance. Barbara, shaken out of her usual aloofness, now only cared to know what chance of life I would give her brother; and, though I felt for Sonia as I should feel for a popular actress who married a country curate, I was mildly aggrieved that she should absorb my time when I wanted to explore the last frantic hopes of peace.

The case which I prepared for O’Rane was, I fancy, not unpersuasive; but I had no chance of putting it forward. If the inheritance three years before had been a nine-days’-wonder, the news of the renunciation seemed likely to cause, in some quarters at least, a nine weeks’ consternation. I blundered into the wake of a deputation and entered the library in time to hear the venerable Bishop of Poplar pleading for men and women whom O’Rane had kept alive for more than two years. Thousands, the bishop asserted, were on the verge of starvation; before the winter, they would be reckoned by tens of thousands. While Mr. O’Rane’s arguments might be unassailable in normal times, the aftermath of an unprecedented war demanded abnormal remedies.

“From half-a-dozen abnormally long purses?,” O’Rane enquired wearily. “I want *every one* to give and *every one* to feel it. If your few rich men go on strike, what will happen?”

The bishop was too old a controversialist to be trapped:

"You would like me to say that some one will come forward in their place. I wish I could believe it. When the pinch becomes unbearable, the government will provide relief out of the taxpayer's pocket. But, before that relief comes, many people will be dead; there will be rioting . . ."

"It's a nice question already how long we can keep 'em sweet," interposed an anxious voice on behalf of the National Unemployment Committee.

"It's a nice question whether you'll get anything done till they turn nasty," retorted a small man with a Cardiff accent.

The bishop smiled and explained that, to make his deputation representative, he had included his friend Mr. Griffiths, with whose well-known bolshevist views we were no doubt already acquainted.

"What would you think, Mr. O'Rane," he continued, "if I threw the bread of London into the Thames on the plea that it would be better for the people to eat cake? You are pronouncing sentence of death on the weakest section of the community."

In the silence that followed I turned from O'Rane's tortured eyes to the apostle of "bolshevism". This was certainly my first, though not my last, meeting with the organizer and leader of "Griffiths' Heroes". I had expected a figure cast in the heroic mould, for there was a touch of the genius in the originality of his ideas and a hint of the commander in the obedience which he secured in carrying them out. Most strongly marked, however, was the fanatic; and his blended passion and cruelty made him something less than human. In thinking of him after all these months I am always reminded of an angry ferret. He was very small, very hirsute, very quick; though his eyes were brown, they seemed to shine red; and, as he looked scornfully round O'Rane's warm library, I felt that his little teeth were seeking a hand to bite.

"There'd be less talk of bolshevism, if people knew what they were talking about," he announced with a bluntness that was in painful contrast to the bishop's courtly patience. "The government says it doesn't know what to do; let's see if any one else does. When folk are starving, they know what to do."

There was a threat in his tone; but he did not explain it, as Sonia came in at this moment and motioned me into the corner by the tea-table. Griffiths, to the credit of his consistency, refused tea: the men whom he represented had been out of work for eleven months; he lived as they lived and, if need be, would starve as they starved.

“We’re first on the list for looting, when the revolution comes,” she whispered cheerfully, while he examined her clothes as though he would have liked to strip her. Then, for a moment, she forgot to think of herself. “Oh, George! Babs has just telephoned for you. I’m so sorry, I’m afraid there’s bad news. Your uncle . . .” I stood up; but she pulled me back, as the deputation filed out. “She’s sending the car here; she thinks you ought to go to him at once. If there’s anything we can do . . .”

I shook my head. At Bertrand’s age, there was little that any one could do.

“Have you told Raney?,” I asked.

“I hadn’t a chance. This deputation . . . Oh, David, what did you tell them?”

O’Rane dropped into a chair and pressed his fists against his temples:

“I said . . . I’d think the thing over. It was really out of politeness to the poor old bishop. Nothing can make any difference.”. . .

“Even when everybody tells you you’re wrong? People simply won’t believe it. I had four reporters within half-an-hour.”

“I don’t know what they want to worry us for,” he broke out. “What did you tell them?”

Sonia weighed each word of her answer before launching it:

“I said you hadn’t made up your mind. If you want to shew that you care for me . . .”

O’Rane walked to her with his hands outstretched in an attitude of entreaty:

“If this accursed money had never come to me, you couldn’t have said that.”

The attitude of entreaty won no hint of yielding.

“Of course, if you *won’t* be warned . . .” Sonia muttered, as she walked with me to the door.

4

As I got into the car, I was first frightened and then touched to find Barbara sitting half-hidden in her corner.

"I'm afraid he's very bad," she whispered. "It's not a stroke this time; but something's broken inside him and he's had terrible hæmorrhages. If he has another . . . I'm so sorry, George."

"It was good of you to come."

In the darkness I heard a sigh; and Barbara laid her hand on mine:

"We've always been good friends, even if we *have* made rather a mess of our lives." . . .

I could not hear what she said after that, for I had been caught unprepared by Sonia and was realizing now for the first time that it was a toss-up whether I saw Bertrand alive. My uncle was a man of almost fifty when I was born. For ten years I was frightened out of my wits by his huge stature and bellowing voice; for another ten I was humiliated by his brutal jests and blasting disparagement; then, as a young man, I rose in exasperation and trounced him till he roared with delight at my beating. From that unlikely beginning sprang a friendship in which Bertrand played the part of father, elder brother, political mentor and fellow-conspirator in my most impressionable years.

"I . . simply can't imagine life without Bertrand," I told Barbara.

"If you want me . . .", she whispered.

Did even she know how the sentence would have ended? I was stunned by the thought of losing Bertrand; I clutched at any one who would take his place, clutching literally with both my hands about Barbara's wrists. And she, for the first time in my acquaintance, was frightened.

"Does this mean . . .?," I began.

"I won't come into his room, of course," she continued, in a superb recovery. "If you want me to fetch some one for a second opinion . . ."

"Does this mean that we're going to make a new start?," I persisted.

"I'll do all I *can* . . ."

Though it was Bertrand's imminent death that broke my self-control, I forgot him and forgot that we were driving to his death-bed:

"The only good you can do is to tell me this ghastly farce is played out! Two years!"

"We all make mistakes," she answered with composure, though she had winced at that word "farce". "I can't help you *much*. In these two years I've

grown used to doing without love. I've lost everything, thrown everything away." The silence that followed seemed to daunt her; and I felt my hand being pressed. "You know as well as I do all you've done for me. I'll be your wife, I'll bear you children if I can; but I can't give you a love I don't feel."

As though I had stepped aside, I saw myself lurching forward to demand satisfaction for the unuttered reproaches and contemptuous suspicions that had masqueraded so long as patience.

"Did you ever feel it?," I heard myself asking. "Have you *ever* loved *any one*? You've been curious about many people; but it's always been in your head and not in your heart."

"I don't let *myself* off!," she moaned.

"I wonder! You have tragic scenes; but, when other people are broken, you survive. If your heart had been brought into the play . . ."

I broke off in stark horror. Never before had we held such language; and we were almost within earshot of Bertrand. Barbara was dumbfoundered at first; then she rallied and threw herself into the duel as though I were at last giving her an opportunity of which she had been unfairly deprived ever since our marriage.

"I never pretended to be in love with you," she taunted me.

"You've never been in love with any one. If you'd ever known the meaning of the word, you wouldn't have married me on those terms."

Barbara turned away and covered her face with her hands.

"That's the way Eric said good-bye to me!," she gasped. "George, I asked you to divorce me two years ago."

"And I wanted to make sure, for your sake. Well, let's face reality for once! Imagine me to be dead." . . .

With another unexpected turn, Barbara clung to me convulsively and laid her hand over my mouth:

"Don't talk of death!," she whispered. "I'm so frightened of it! And it's very near at hand now. I've been ill so often, I've had to fight it so often. My dear, my dear, if I ever heard you were ill, it would bring back all my love: I'd nurse you; I'd shew you I *could* sacrifice myself. Never say that again!," she cried hysterically.

My fit of bitterness passed as quickly as it had come; and I tried to apologize. Then it returned; and I asked myself whether this talk of "sacrifice" meant more than that Barbara was living, as ever, in a world of emotional romance. Then the car stopped; and I stumbled up the steps of my uncle's house.

In the hall Violet Loring told me there had been no further hæmorrhages. Only a few more hours of life could be expected, however; and this Bertrand realized.

"I didn't bother you before," he began in his normal voice, "because I didn't know whether I was going to live or die. I'm going to die, it seems; and I can tell you, George, it's the most interesting experience I've ever had."

His grim chuckles rumbled till the vast Victorian brass-bed creaked. Involuntarily Violet shivered; but I felt that the last and least service I could do was to make my mood chime with my uncle's.

"I'm glad I'm in time to thank you, Bertrand," I said. "You've been my best friend ever since we first set up house here together, nearly twenty years ago."

Though I knew the room of old, I was struck for the first time by the uncouth masculinity of a vanished era.

"Odd business," he grunted. "I always dropped a generation. I'm your *great*-uncle; but I always put you in your father's place. You've kept me young. . . . And now this is the end, the moment we wait for all our lives. The heart's weak, thank goodness, so I shan't make a fight; but I swear to you I expect to wake up again to-morrow morning! I'm not afraid of going out, but I can't believe it. That's why people persist in fabricating a future life. I'll tell you one thing, George, that'll comfort you: death's only a terrible thing if it comes before you're ready, and you're only ready when you're worn out. That was the terrible part of the war." The leonine head turned with an effort that left him breathless. "Violet my dear, I bow humbly at the thought of boys like Jim who were killed before they had time to find the grasshopper a burden. I can't believe I shan't wake up to-morrow, but I don't want to . . . here or anywhere. A silly old woman of a parson came here yesterday. . . . It cost me a hæmorrhage to get rid of him. Good God, I've outgrown *that* phase! Life eternal. . . . I'm much more interested in the brief life that is our portion here. I've had nigh on a century of it; and I know less about it than I did when I was born."

He paused as the nurse came in to say that O'Rane was waiting downstairs.

"Good of the boy," he murmured. "Ask him to come up." Then his eyes shone with their last gleam of mischief:

" '*Never seen death yet, Dickie? . . . Well, now is your time to learn!*' "

5

The fit of coughing that followed caused my uncle to examine himself for injuries. The nurse made signs to Violet, who slipped noiselessly from the room; O'Rane came in, and I guided him to the bedside. Bertrand shook hands with difficulty; and his heavy eyes lightened.

"You're another of them," he panted. "Always think of your father when I see you. I wonder what he'd have made of it all if he'd lived. . . . George there?"

"I'm here," I answered, as I pulled a chair to the bedside.

"I've been thinking over what you said the other day about our prototypes in history. Triskett's great-grandfather firing on the Versailles mob just to see what would happen. . . . I've known a good few historic figures: O'Connell; Mazzini; Lassalle. The great unspeakables. I believe I went to them for fear of being told by boys like you that I and my spiritual forefathers had been on the wrong side. Dam' conceit! I hope I've outgrown that phase now; but, when that ass Crawleigh spluttered about rounding up conscientious objectors in the war, I felt that his ancestors had burnt heretics. Your friend Maitland sentenced a man to the cat the other day: he said it was the only remedy for crimes of violence. I asked him why he didn't break the fellow on a wheel, as his forebears had done. Damn it, I gave up shooting for fear of finding myself in the same dock as the old cock-fighters. Conceit, if you like. I've been a radical because I couldn't let posterity charge me with the savagery and intolerance which we throw up against our conservative predecessors. Time was on my side. I recorded my protest. What *good* it's done . . .? That's why you'd better keep the paper on, George. It'll shew the next generation how superior you were to this."

The advice was rounded with a cynical, deep chuckle; and he lay long without speaking.

"The world's a gentler place than when you were a boy, sir," O'Rane put in.

Bertrand looked at him in silence for a moment and then shook his head slowly:

"You say that, with your experience of the late war? *Does* human nature change? . . . We shan't have that dinner, George, but I wasn't far out in my date. The present government is falling to pieces."

"And what's going to take its place?," I asked.

Bertrand ruminated in silence for some time; then his face lighted for the last time in a reflective smile:

"A restoration government! We've given a million men and heaven knows how many thousand million pounds to keep things . . . *just as they were*. Nurse says we're shipping troops again to the Straits: to defend the graves we've already filled there, I suppose. In ten years the great powers will be balanced as they were ten years ago; there'll be the same competition in armaments, the same scares, ultimately the same universal war . . . on a vastly different scale. At home we've fallen back into our old social and financial grooves." Bertrand's eyes turned fixedly to the ceiling in a strained effort of concentration. He was speaking very slowly now and studying his articulation. "We're . . . going on . . . from 1914 . . . without break of thought . . . or mend of heart."

As he paused, O'Rane stood up and walked cautiously to the bed.

"I'll leave you now, sir, unless you want me," he said. "I expect you'd like to talk to George. I . . . want to thank you." . . .

"You've nothing to thank me for. Don't go unless I'm depressing you."

"It's not encouraging," O'Rane laughed. "You remember Anatole France's story of the woman who tried to save her lover in the Terror? She gave herself to one of the judges and was told afterwards that she had . . . rather misunderstood his assurances. *On fera le nécessaire*, yes; but what then? '*Je t'ai dit, citoyenne, qu'on ferait le nécessaire, c'est-à-dire qu'on appliquerait la loi, rien de plus, rien de moins*.' Most unfortunate misunderstanding! '*Elle sentit aussitôt*'," he quoted slowly, " '*qu'elle avait fait . . . un sacrifice inutile*'."

As Bertrand looked from O'Rane's scarred hands to his sightless eyes, I saw that he had no answer ready. I do not know what answer either of us could have given such a man at such a moment.

Until the nurse came in with the doctor, my uncle lay silent and, I think, half-asleep. Towards midnight he roused with a start and seemed at a loss to

explain why we were there. Then he remembered that he was dying; and, with the slow effort of failing strength, one hand was dragged painfully from under the bed-clothes. I led O'Rane to him and then shook hands myself.

"That place of yours . . ." he muttered.

"Yes?"

"Lake House. I heard you were selling it. Don't . . . unless you must. I was brought up there. Your grandfather and I . . . You're too young to remember the orangery . . . When I was twenty, our nearest neighbour was a girl called Cathleen Nolan . . ." He paused for breath, and I tried to find out if he wanted to send her a message. "She's been dead for more than sixty years," said Bertrand with a twisted smile.

If that was his romance, he could tell me no more of it; and the smile gave place to a quick contortion of pain. I sent O'Rane for the nurse; but, before he reached the door, my uncle gave one long sigh and the slight movement of his breathing ended.

O'Rane carried the news to Barbara and with it a note to say that I should stay at Princes Gardens until the funeral. On the heels of the first letter I sent a second to beg her forgiveness for my mad words in the car. She replied that she had forgotten everything.

PART THREE

CHAPTER ONE

TO-MORROW AND TO-MORROW . . .

. . . In the dark there careers—
As if Death astride came
To numb all with his knock—
A horse at mad rate
Over rut and stone.

No figure appears,
No call of my name,
No sound but "Tic-toc"
Without check. Past the gate
It clatters—is gone. . . .

Maybe that "More Tears!—
More Famine and Flame—
More Severance and Shock!"
Is the order from Fate
That the Rider speeds on
To pale Europe; and tiredly the pines intone.

THOMAS HARDY: *A New Year's Eve in War Time.*

1

The days that followed my uncle's death stand out in my memory as a vivid and wholly disconnected dream between two normal periods of waking-life. At one moment I was living in the midst of vast, conflicting noises; there followed complete calm, during which I was indeed as busy as ever—as busy as one seems to be in a dream—; then the tumult broke out afresh. Though nothing had in fact been suspended, though nothing had greatly progressed in my short spell of unconsciousness, I felt at the time that I had two personalities, one on either bank of the dividing stream.

2

I believe Bertrand's death saved my life or at least my reason. I remember feeling almost bitterly that I could not support his illness in addition to my work for our paper, the hourly exasperation of my life at home and the storm of calamities that were bursting on us from the four corners of heaven at the same moment. The shock of losing him gave me the break I needed. When I awoke in an unfamiliar bed, I recalled that we were overshadowed by a new war, that a general election was imminent and that unemployment was a problem which we could not solve "by pulling long faces". Then I recollected the venomous, red-eyed author of that phrase; and the scene in O'Rane's library was flashed on my brain like a scene in a film. I remembered Sonia's jejune sympathy. I remembered finding Barbara in the car. I wondered dully how we stood after that bitter, mad outpouring; and, despite her note, I was thankful that we should not meet for a few days. Then I realized that for a few days I should have a respite enforced: from the paper, from war and unemployment, from everything that seemed at the moment more than I could bear.

My first duty was to arrange for the memorial service at St. Margaret's; and, as I watched the congregation arriving, I felt that the respite was extending, for an hour, to all of us. The obituary notices, the memoir which I was writing for one of the quarterly reviews, most of all this solemn tribute to a man, perhaps great, of an undeniably great past turned our thoughts backward to a time when France lived under a citizen-king and disunited Germany declaimed ineffectually at Frankfurt. Of the two former prime ministers who attended the service, both were hardly more than boys when my uncle first entered the House; the oldest head of a foreign mission had found "old Bertrand Oakleigh" an established institution when he was first accredited to the Court of St. James; and the journalists, the lawyers, the men of business, the bees and butterflies of society who moved sombrely to their places could not remember a time when the truculent Johnsonian figure had not been one of the familiar sights of London.

"A great landmark gone," whispered Dainton, as I waited for Barbara to arrive with the Crawleighs. "I didn't always agree with him. Indeed, if you took a poll of the people here he *hadn't* quarrelled with . . ."

I turned to watch the cars emptying and the new arrivals dodging or seeking out the reporters. My mother had come over from Cannes; my sister and her husband, Violet Loring and Laurence represented the family; and, if we had all tingled from the old man's lash, that was long ago and inextricably in the part he chose to play. The older generation in the House of Commons and the younger generation in Fleet Street—men who won his

respect by standing squarely up to him—came unurged to prove their regard for his fighting qualities and his generosity.

"I deplore his politics," said Crawleigh, "but he was a great public servant."

At such a time I refrained from suggesting that Crawleigh's father had deplored the politics of Bright and Cobden. It is one curse of the party-system that an opponent must be dead before we admit that he may possibly not be damned. I was brought up to regard Lord Salisbury as a monster wherewith to frighten naughty children; my father, if he had been required to expose the Antichrist, would have pointed his finger unhesitatingly at Lord Beacons field.

I thought over Crawleigh's belated tribute as I took Barbara to our places. This imminent election might purge the House of those to whom the war—as Saltash told me frankly—had come as a god-send; but, if the adventurers into public life were not sent back to their counting-houses and newspaper-offices and bucket-shops, I feared that, with Bertrand, there would die an unparalleled tradition of integrity and devotion. My uncle had prepared himself for politics by half a lifetime of study, as Gladstone and Salisbury, Morley and Rosebery prepared themselves; of the men under thirty who entered the House with me in 1906, hardly one had not tried to equip himself by travel, by settlement-work, by experience in business or by the management of an estate. There seemed to be fewer servants of the public in 1918.

"If he had scoffed less," said Lady Dainton, "he would have done more."

I agreed privately, though I think his cynicism covered a disappointment of soul: he had come to England, as a brilliant, ambitious and sanguine boy, to reform the world; and the sluggish-witted, slow-speaking English had worn him down. To begin as an O'Connell and to end as "a great public servant" would have roused him to savage merriment.

"How he would have despised all this!," I whispered to Barbara, as the people whom he would not admit to his house hurried importantly into the more prominent seats.

Ministers of the present and past, divines and pressmen, authors and diplomats poured in till every place seemed to be taken. A crowd began to collect at the doors; there was rather more noise than I thought seemly; and I was glad when the organ began to play.

Sixty years of public life. I was trying to remember whether Bertrand had known Westminster before the new Houses of Parliament were built, when Spence-Atkins, who was acting as an usher, touched my arm and asked if we had room in our pew for two more. I made way for Sonia, who crushed past me with scarlet cheeks, and for O'Rane, who allowed himself to be guided by a verger. His face, I thought, was white and set, with a suppressed anger which I had seen more often at school than in later years. I asked if anything was amiss; but he would only reply "Afterwards." Then I relapsed into the past and forgot my surroundings until the last notes of the Dead March throbbed into silence.

Outside I was surrounded by sympathetic friends; but, in the complete detachment of my anæsthesia, I was thinking only that I had time to see my solicitors before luncheon, when I found Sonia the centre of an agitated little group which O'Rane was trying alternately to soothe and to disperse.

"No, I insist on telling George," she proclaimed. "Did you hear what happened when we arrived? I don't like being called a murderer!"

The word—and, still more, the tone in which it was uttered—disturbed my dream of past days.

"Who . . .?" I began.

Then O'Rane, with mounting irritation as some queer sense warned him that a crowd was collecting, felt for my arm and led me away.

"We don't want a scene," he whispered. "I'm sorry, George: I wouldn't have come if I'd thought for a moment. . . . Our excellent friendship the Bishop of Poplar is unintentionally at the bottom of this. You remember his saying something about my condemning innocent people to death if I stopped the money I've been giving him the last few years? Well, that's been taken up by Griffiths' gang. We've had sandwichmen patrolling The Sanctuary all this week: O'RANE'S SENTENCE OF DEATH or something of the kind. I didn't care; I wasn't going to be blackmailed. Then, to-day, one of the reporters at the door asked my name; and somebody in the crowd overheard it. A few idiots thought it would be amusing to shout 'murderer'. . . . Where's Sonia? It's time we got back."

As I led him to his wife, I observed that her cheeks were no longer flushed; she looked, indeed, unpleasantly scared, and her eyes were fixed on the avenue of loiterers between whom she must pass on her way home.

"We'll drop you," Barbara suggested, with a quick movement towards the car.

Sonia hurried gratefully to her side.

"Thanks, Babs, I'll walk," said O'Rane obstinately.

"Then I'll walk with you," I said. "This business is frightening your wife," I added when we were alone. "Why don't you tell the police to clear these sandwichmen away?"

"I really haven't had time. This is going to be the worst winter of all, George; we must raise every penny we can." His lip curled contemptuously at the booing which greeted us in Palace Yard. "I'm free to beg now; if people want to know what I'm doing myself, I can say I'm giving every last shilling I can spare and they must do the same. We're *all* responsible for relieving this distress; it's part of the war, and we must volunteer as freely as we volunteered in '14. And, if that doesn't bring the money, we must try other means. The smug, secure people were glad enough to have conscription of men. Their money's less than a man's life; we must have conscription of wealth if they won't volunteer. If it amuses the people I'm working for to call me murderer . . . Will you come in?" he asked, as we reached The Sanctuary.

"I'm already overdue at my solicitors'," I answered, though I made time to call at the Admiralty on my way to the City.

I thought that Philip Hornbeck, who amassed "intelligence" of all kinds, should have a first-hand account of this ugly little scene; and I wanted to hear his opinion of Griffiths. Though he promised to keep on eye open for the O'Ranes, he clearly considered the temper of the country less dangerous than in the big strikes after the war. The unemployed were numerous enough, but they were kept scattered; Griffiths had the ability and the will to make mischief, but he was disowned by the official labour-leaders.

"The people of this country have no experience in revolutions," said Hornbeck. "When you have a riot, it's always the rioters who need police-protection."

3

The tumult, which had seemed to be so mysteriously suspended, broke out anew on the day when I sent my memoir of Bertrand to the printers and walked out of Princes Gardens into the traffic of Knightsbridge. Clamorous contents-bills at the street-corners reminded me that I was come back to a world where new wars were imminent; the Guards had sailed for Chanak; a general election could no longer be averted.

My ultimate duty to Bertrand was fulfilled when I persuaded my staff to carry out his last wishes for *Peace*. Though he mocked the empty conceits of recording protests and demonstrating moral superiority, he was not scheming to stand well with enlightened posterity when he lay murmuring: "*Un sacrifice inutile? Un sacrifice inutile?*" O'Rane's question was an affront to him; he was wishing himself fifty years younger, to make an answer that would satisfy him; and we must take up the burden which his hands could no longer hold.

As soon as I had their promise of support, I left my colleagues and set out for Berkeley Square to learn the secret history of the long-threatened conservative revolt.

This menace of war had done what the grotesque treaty of Versailles, the organized anarchy in Ireland, the paralysis of government in every limb had so far failed to do. Others, besides my butler, were saying that the long record of misrule was beyond a joke; and the party-managers, in concert with the independent wire-pullers who were now an established part of our public life, had decided to wreck the coalition. 'Blob' Wister had already spoken; and Saltash told me that Woburn and the Press Combine would speak next day.

I found my father-in-law engaged on a letter to *The Times*, protesting against the exclusion of peers from the Carlton Club meeting; and for a long spell he reiterated like a sulky child that he could tell me nothing because he was allowed to know nothing. Then he relaxed and informed me that the fight was taking place over foreign policy in general and, in particular, over the prime minister's dictatorial habit of conducting his foreign relationships through his own secretariat over the head of the Foreign Office.

"If I'd been Curzon, I'd have thrown the whole thing up years ago," said Crawleigh with that eagerness for resignation so often exhibited by men who have not been invited to hold cabinet office.

"He may feel he's more useful as a brake on the prime minister," I suggested.

"If the prime minister goes, the foreign secretary must follow . . . unless he precedes him, when he sees how the cat's jumping," said Crawleigh with ill-concealed malice. "Well, it's quite simple; Chamberlain has pledged himself to support the coalition; Birkenhead and Horne are with him; and the rump is meeting to see if it can overthrow Chamberlain."

"Who's to be put in Chamberlain's place?," I asked.

"No one knows yet. No one has the least idea how the meeting will turn out. If I were in the confidence of my party . . . Nowadays the unhappy accident of being a peer . . ."

Feeling that I should hear no more, I drifted to the Turf and Stage, where Frank Jellaby thickened the mist in which Crawleigh had enveloped the Carlton Club. After a denunciation of the coalition-liberals which reminded me of Cato's punctual fulminations against Carthage, he explained that the new crisis had been engineered by 'Blob' Wister and that its outcome depended on Wister's success in finding a leader:

"He had no difficulty in persuading people like Dean and Lingfield to come out for an all-tory government when his papers were marching ahead to cover their advance. If he can get Bonar Law to stampede the meeting . . ."

"I hear Lingfield and the rest of George's tory ministers are swearing allegiance to him with one hand," I said, "and writing him letters of resignation with the other."

"*They* don't know anything . . . except that some of them will be badly left."

"But no one," I encouraged him, "will be left quite so completely as your coalition-liberal friends."

Jellaby's face darkened:

"They sold the pass in '16, they've had their reward; if there were another pass to sell, they'd sell it; and they mustn't complain if they can't find one."

"You won't join forces," I asked, "to keep the tories out?"

"After 1916 I could never trust a coaly-lib again," he answered. "Now, if your paper would help us into a position where we could hold the balance . . ."

"That," I said, "is simply overturning one coalition to make way for another. And you've no more programme to-day than you had in 1918, when you let Ll-G.'s mad promises pass without a protest. We're paying for your silence to-day, at Chanak and wherever the French can hit us."

Before Jellaby had time to answer, we were hurried one stage farther along the ever unfinished road of contemporary politics. Lord Saltash, whom I had observed moving from table to table with the manner of a conspirator rather far gone in wine, raised his eyebrows suddenly as 'Blob'

Wister hacked his way across the dancing-floor. There was a quick nod; and Saltash lurched towards the telephone-boxes, only pausing to whisper thickly in my ear:

"He's going! Bonar, I mean. Meeting to-morrow."

"Are you betting on the result?" I asked.

"He's not coming back politics sake being losing side," Saltash answered telegraphically, laying a squat index-finger against one side of his nose. "Last kick dying lion. Wash-out George. Number up."

Jellaby was silent for a few minutes; then he smiled as one who had waited patiently by the mills of the gods.

"Had Zimri peace, who slew his master?," he demanded at large.

"This is the end of the liberal party for a generation," I said; which was not the answer expected of me.

And then I stood up to say good-by. There is little difference of age between Jellaby and myself; but he has been nurtured more strictly on the official hatreds of a whips' office. I was born and bred a liberal, whereas Jellaby embraced that faith as he embraced agnosticism, the poetry of Arthur Hugh Clough, the painting of Manet, the æsthetics of Pater and, for a time, total abstinence. They were all fashionable among the members of one coterie at Balliol in his day.

"For some years . . ." he conceded with regretful solemnity.

"And," I pursued, "what happens to liberalism, which is more important to me than the liberal party?"

Jellaby had no answer ready; and, if he had not been my host, I should have asked him whether a liberal whips' office cared for these things.

Next day the conservative wing of the coalition seceded, after a brief debate, on the strength of a single, brief speech. The prime minister resigned; and the king invited Mr. Bonar Law to form a government. As soon as the conservative party had accepted its new leader, the date of the election was announced. Those of my friends who were nursing constituencies became, of a sudden, very important and excited; I received invitations to speak from people who must have forgotten, if they ever knew, how bad a speaker I am; wagers were offered freely; and all parties predicted confidently that they would return with increased numbers.

I spent much time at the Eclectic Club in these days, wondering what line my paper should follow in the election. No new policy was being put forward; and, if the old policy stood condemned, I did not understand why ministers who were responsible for it were kept in office. Nor, at a season when everybody speculated how long the patience of the unemployed would endure, did I understand why the order of the county was entrusted to a man who had preached the sacred right of rebellion so few years before in Ulster. I wondered, too, what would happen to the floating wreckage of the coalition; and, more bitterly than ever before, I missed old Bertrand's caustic humour in the hours when he sat with me here in a window of the smoking-room, defaming the passers-by and pretending that we were studying trends of opinion and "the great movement of men".

He it was who said that politics were desocialized when Mr. Asquith left Downing Street. For six years the political stage had been occupied by statesmen, demagogues, shy scholars, blatant adventurers, advertising-agents, unemployed millionaires, newspaper-proprietors, dukes, international Jews and merchant-princes. Cabinet control had been replaced by the personal domination of one man who miraculously held this heterogeneous company together; considered policy had yielded to a succession of brilliant and incongruous improvisations. On no day could an outsider foretell who next would pull a wire; and, as I looked round the crowded rooms of the Eclectic, I wondered what all these long-faced, out-of-work pressmen and financiers, these confidential secretaries and hangers-on would now do for a living or a career.

Then, as the ministry was completed and the first election-addresses appeared, I recalled Bertrand's last verdict.

"*Without break of thought or mend of heart . . .*"

Were we going on from 1914? Had the war, in which most of my generation perished, really achieved nothing?

4

As we slid noiselessly into the least passionate general election of my experience, I wondered whether we were going on from anything so good even as 1914. If the German peril was at an end, no man could say what new trouble might come out of the east, when demoralized Russia and Austria joined hands with resentful Turkey and Prussia. The mark had collapsed; and, unless it could be rehabilitated, the trade of central Europe must come to a standstill.

After that, it was a toss-up whether famine or revolution came first. Against this tidal wave of hunger, disease and the reckless savagery of hopeless millions, the only powers with strength and means to build a rampart were France, America and Great Britain.

If Lucien de Grammont and Clifford van Oss fairly represented the first two, the simple faith of the French—embodied in M. Clemenceau—was being betrayed by every one else at the very moment when M. Clemenceau was betraying the simple faith of President Wilson. Recalling that the world was to have been made safe for democracy, I wondered if another war must be fought before democracy was made safe for the world. According to one or other of us, it was the greed and bad faith of Great Britain, America and France which was wholly and solely responsible for our present perils.

In these days of misgiving the most persistent optimist of my acquaintance was my father-in-law. To him—in common with most of my conservative friends—public life had been a bad dream from the moment when Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman and his *sansculottes* usurped power. Crawleigh was genuinely convinced that all electors, at all times and in all places, were conservative born and bred; and, to him, a liberal victory could only come by low cunning. Now that the spell had been broken, he looked forward to "going on from 1906"; and, in listening to him, I understood, as Saltash had never made me understand, the all-conservative movement in the late coalition, the Carlton Club meeting and the loathing of the party for those who still tried to keep it in bondage to its old associates. So a Bourbon might have felt towards a legitimist who took office under Napoleon.

Sir Roger Dainton, when I dined with him on the night after the polling, was even more outspoken. Some one had taught him the word "impeachment"; and he was for impeaching the fallen members of the old cabinet as light-heartedly as his wife, in other days, had consigned "agitators" to the nearest firing-party.

"You think there are further depths they can still reach?," I asked. The brush of a professional moralist would be needed to paint the difference between this election and the last, between the power of a prime minister in being and that of the member for Carnarvon Boroughs. "Come and see the results."

By its rules the Eclectic Club is constituted a "place of social intercourse for officers and gentlemen, irrespective of politics". Any demonstration, other than occasional groans when a labour victory was announced, would have been ill-received; but I was struck chiefly by the absence of all desire

to demonstrate except when objects of personal venom appeared at the bottom of the poll. Dainton thumped my back with furtive violence when two rich and rather questionable private secretaries, from his own party, were at last "put out of harm's way", as he expressed it; and Jellaby became almost hysterical as one coalition-liberal after another was edged into the cold; but it was left to my father-in-law to express the rapture of his associates in a series of satisfied grunts. Without looking at the board, I could recognize a conservative gain by Crawleigh's long "A-a-ah!"

"The entry of the first French troops into their recovered provinces," I murmured to Jellaby.

"And yet . . . they don't seem as much pleased about it as I should have expected."

"Perhaps these fellows feel that it's the same board, the same problem, and that it becomes no easier by a shuffle of the pieces. Perhaps they're wondering what more they can do than the coalition to prevent a world-revolution or a new world-war."

Jellaby looked contemptuously at the lengthening tale of ministerial successes:

"Perhaps they realize that these results don't represent the true strength of parties."

"You mean it's a moral victory for you?," I asked. "I said the same thing to you when I was beaten at Cranborne in 1910. With respect I think the feeling of the country is admirably represented in this club to-night: nobody cares."

With that I left him. Seven men, I think, said good-night to me as I crossed the hall; six of them added: "Well, thank God *that's* over."

There was a further spasm of excitement as the new parliament met; and for me, though I was preoccupied with Barbara's return, a stab of regret when the liberal party had to surrender its historic claim to lead the opposition. Then one of the shortest sessions on record opened and closed; the foreign secretary set out for Lausanne to find an escape from the threatened war in the near east; and the country gave its undivided attention to the most popular murder-trial of the year.

Save for a moment after Bertrand's memorial service, I had not been alone with Barbara since our scene in the car. I fancied that she was hardly less embarrassed than I was, though she talked easily enough of her plans for being painted by Edmund Wace and of my work on Bertrand's papers.

We both felt that nothing could be quite the same after that explosion; but I at least had no idea what she wanted.

"There was a touch of brutality about your uncle," she said after dinner the first night, in criticism of my sketch. "I'm not sure that you bring it out. Any one who disagreed with him was treated with such obvious contempt."

"Unless he happened to like the person," I said. "I can't imagine a single point on which he agreed with you or Violet or Amy, but he was devoted to you all. On the other hand, I've heard him trouncing poor Sonia for holding exactly the same views, simply because he thought her second-rate."

"He thought all women second-rate. So do you, George," she rejoined without malice.

So sweeping a misstatement I could not allow to pass unchallenged.

"I'll leave you out for fear of embarrassing you . . .," I began.

Barbara laughed sadly and turned, with a shrug, to the fire:

"No, my dear, you're leaving me out because you despise me. Not *cruelly*, but just in the Oakleigh way: as a tolerant Turk would despise me. In your eyes, we've never grown up; and sometimes you shew us the tenderness you'd shew to a child. You think we're creatures who've failed to be men; you don't imagine that we've never tried to be men. . . . You smile benignly on our little foibles and follies and frailties just as I smile at a kitten chasing its own tail. 'Kittens will be kittens,' I say; 'women will be women,' you murmur to yourself."

"The trouble is that you speak the same language . . ."

"But we don't think the same thoughts. D'you remember my telling you I'd forgotten certain things you'd said?"

As her eyes turned slowly to meet mine, I thought I could see a gentle new light of friendship.

"I wished at the time you'd said you had forgiven them," I answered.

"There was nothing to forgive. You were right, from your point of view. May I speak of it?"

"If it will help us."

Barbara turned once more to the fire and sat with her cheek resting against her hand:

"It's just two years since Eric died. You think I'm not in love with him and never was. Well, I'm not now, but I was once; and the *whole* of my heart went into it, George. Do men ever realize that women can be in love with them and yet know all the time that it's a mistake? When he left me, Eric thought I'd been taking all his love for my own selfish, greedy enjoyment. I hadn't. I took it because I couldn't help myself; but I always knew it would be a mistake for us to marry. We were too much alike, too highly-strung. If you can imagine two great musicians marrying . . . If only I'd been strong enough to refuse his love! I couldn't help myself . . . It was wrong of me, by any standard, to do what I did at Croxton. If I'd told you at the time . . ."

"I should have thought nothing of it, I hope."

Barbara laughed mirthlessly and crossed to my chair, where she seated herself on the arm.

"That's what I feared," she whispered. "I knew I was wrong, I knew it would have been hell for us all if Eric had agreed, I'd had the worst rebuff that can come to a woman, I was still in love with him. All that, you'd have said, was nothing. A perfect Oakleighism! . . . Yet I wish now I *had* told you. Eric's letter must have been a cruel shock."

Her hand stole timidly to mine; and I raised it to my lips:

"That's all over now; but, Babs, I did *not* spend twelve days wondering whether you would run away with any one else. What hurt was that you'd pretended to love me when you didn't."

"And that's what you've been urging me to do for the last two years."

Silence fell between us. Then I said:

"I've been hoping that you could love me without pretending. I forgot those twelve days the moment I set eyes on you."

"Yes. You were as much in love with me as I was with Eric. But love didn't give you much understanding, dear. For two years you've been waiting for me to confess that I did something very wrong: you'd then be able to commit another Oakleighism by forgiving me. You've been waiting for me to say I've outgrown my love for Eric, so that you could tell me—Oakleigh-fashion—that you'd always known time would cure all things. Well, I *was* wrong; and I *have* outgrown my love. Does it help you to know that? The difficulty is, George, that I don't want to be forgiven. I'm not a child, I'm not an unsuccessful attempt to be a man; I'm a woman."

"And being a woman . . ."

Barbara laid her hand over my lips:

"Shall I say it for you? 'Being a woman, you don't know what you *do* want.' It's quite true, even though all the Oakleighs in history have said it. I know you so much better than you know me."

"And better than you know yourself?"

"I know myself better than I can explain myself. Women feel so much more and express so much less than men. Words are clumsy. When a man frames a sentence, he imagines he is shewing a thought to the world; a woman feels that the thought is being imprisoned, perhaps mutilated." . . .

"Do you know why you married me?," I asked.

Before she could answer, Barbara stared long at the fire.

"Yes. But I've never put it in words. I couldn't now. I wasn't in love with you, but you gave me something that I needed. . . . Women marry sometimes because they're frightened of themselves. Sonia did. And I remember how my beloved aunts gloated over Jack Waring, as the one man who could keep me in order. Strange to say, I didn't want to be kept in order; and I wasn't frightened of myself. I'm only frightened of death and of waste: a wasted life, with all the love and the beauty left out of it. You gave me the feeling that you had something I needed to keep my life from being wasted."

"And do you feel that no longer?"

"Have I needed you these last two years? I've ceased to look for happiness."

"And you're not yet thirty!," I groaned.

Barbara glanced at her watch and stood up:

"It's time for me to go to bed. I'm afraid I've talked a great deal about myself. It was thinking about Bertrand that started it. The world is divided into men, women and Oakleighs."

"I believe you'll find, as you go on, that every husband begins as a man and ends as an Oakleigh. That is one of the major tragedies of life."

For the first time in eighteen months, Barbara bent to kiss my cheek.

"To marry an Oakleigh and find him a man would be the greatest romance life could offer," she laughed.

"Then I'm afraid you must look elsewhere for your romance," I sighed. "You can only give out what's in you. I'm sorry our marriage has been a

failure. I've honestly done my best." . . .

Turning at the door, Barbara came slowly back and kissed me again:

"I know you have. And I'll do mine. I told you the day poor old Bertrand died that I'd be your wife, I'd bear you children if I could . . ."

In spite of her kisses, in spite of the strange new light in her eyes, I had to be told in words that our two years' tragedy was over:

"My dear one, you said we should be dishonoured if we put anything in the place of love . . ."

I waited to hear that terrible verdict reversed. Barbara looked at me in amazement and then gave a single tearless sob. She regained her composure immediately and walked again to the door.

"You have a good memory, George," she threw back. "Have you saved that up for two years? Do you want me to say that I've suddenly found you irresistible? The Oakleighs are very true to their own type."

5

As the door closed, I saw my last chance being shut from me. The house was in darkness when I went into the hall; there was no answer when I called to Barbara, though I could see a light in her room. I came downstairs again to brood of men, women and Oakleighs.

I tried next day to explain, but Barbara refused with cold courtesy to understand what I was trying to explain. I had been patient, too patient; in her turn she was trying to meet me. She was ready to give anything I asked, if she had it to give; and the false sweetness of her complaisance was a deadlier bar than any refusal.

"I feel I was ungracious," I said.

"Ungracious? You?," she mocked. "I must go now, or I shall be late for Mr. Wace."

"Shall I see you after the opening of parliament?"

"But of course! For another eternity! Good-bye."

The rest of that morning I spent in Fetter Lane, reviewing the achievements of the peace-administration. The only visible traces of the war, when I walked down to Westminster, were the cenotaph in Whitehall and the long army of unemployed that was trying to get past it to the precincts of

parliament. While I waited for the crowd to disperse, I heard a familiar voice asking my neighbour what was happening.

"Raney! Here, you'd better let me see you home," I said. "There's an appalling mob everywhere."

"Thanks, I've had to acquire a sixth sense," he answered. "What are you doing here?"

"Looking on and thinking of that week-end in August when the Anti-Intervention people pursued me down to Loring Castle. I've been wondering if we shouldn't have done better to keep out of the war at all costs."

"We should have been dishonoured if we'd let Belgium down," he answered.

"If we'd told the Germans we would stop the moment Belgium was evacuated, the war would have been over in '14. And we shouldn't have an unemployed army marching through London to-day," I added savagely.

We squeezed our way forward till a sudden thinning of the crowd enabled us to escape into the park.

"I think we're individually the better for the sacrifices we all of us made," he answered slowly. "For one moment there was a real spirit of fraternity; and, when the reaction has run its course, I hope to see that again. I'm recruiting people now, with quite fair success: reminding them what they did once and asking them to give up everything for one month or six or a year for the service of their country. I'm only asking them to do what I've done myself. I tell them, as I tell you, *that's* the new idea that we must capture from the war. Fraternity . . ."

"Your new idea is at least as old as Christ and Buddha," I objected. "Will you succeed where they failed?"

"Had they ever such a chance as we have? We've seen the quality of modern war. We know that, if there's another, it will bury civilization under a sea of lava. Men, women, sheep, cattle, the very blades of grass. Another war is synonymous with the end of the world."

"But how does one set about being fraternal?," I asked.

O'Rane walked for some distance without answering; and I thought he had not heard my question. Then he laughed and gave my arm a squeeze:

"By realizing the alternative, as every one's had every chance of doing in this war. By seeing that, if we trample on people weaker than ourselves,

there'll be people stronger than ourselves to trample on us. When I first saw 'fraternity' shining in front of me like Constantine's Cross, I was a very small, very young, very miserable boy. I went through hell till I learnt how to defend myself. And then . . . many years afterwards . . . I began to think . . . about the poor devils who couldn't defend *themselves*. I saw that we must make a world in which man wasn't always measuring his strength. Yes, I admit Christ had made the discovery before me," he ended with another laugh.

I forebore to ask whether the second discovery was likely to change the hearts of men more than the first. The rule of force, I pointed out, had to be repudiated by every one at the same time:

"If we'd been fraternal when the Germans were marching on Calais . . ."

"If we'd been fraternal rather earlier, perhaps they'd never have marched there. Some one has to make a beginning. That's one reason I had to give up this money. Fraternity can't exist side by side with vast differences of wealth, among nations or individuals. It's our sense of possession, George, that stands between us and our souls."

"Unfortunately, ever since man appeared on this planet, it's been the instinct that keeps soul and body together. Will you be the first to strip for the plunge?"

"*I'm* ready."

"If you take that dive, Raney, your wife and children won't follow. They also are a part of humanity, which I think you sometimes forget."

" 'Who is my mother?'," he murmured. . . .

CHAPTER TWO

THE TEST

King Henry:

The sum of all our answer is but this:
We would not seek a battle, as we are;
Nor, as we are, we say we will not shun it . . .

SHAKESPEARE: *King Henry V.*

1

Since the first tragedy cast its shadow on the first man, philosophers have taught, in the jargon of their choice, that the past is unalterable, that it is no use crying over spilt milk and that it is a waste of time to job backwards. Unphilosophic man has then returned to the twilit dreamland of might-have-beens.

Daily, since the tragedy that darkened my life in the last weeks of 1922, I have asked myself whether I could have done anything to prevent it. I am sane enough to realize that I contributed nothing by what I did; the philosopher blandly assures me that questioning comes too late; and, in spite of all, I continue to wonder what would have happened if I had made a firm stand here or a graceful surrender there. If only, as I walked with O'Rane to The Sanctuary after the opening of parliament, I had thrown my weight into one scale or the other . . . If only, at any time subsequently, I had shewn myself to be what nature failed to make me, a man of action, strong and silent, rapping out decisions like Napoleon disposing an army . . .

2

I had not intended to come into The Sanctuary, but O'Rane insisted that Sonia would be disappointed if I turned back at the door. We found her in the nursery, playing with her elder boy, while the baby was packed protesting to bed in the next room. I had not often been privileged to catch Sonia in a domestic attitude and was ill-prepared for her efficiency. This

child in her lap was a beautiful creature, in radiant health and exuberant spirits, with his mother's brown hair and eyes. There was a lusty crow of delight when O'Rane came into the room; and, as I shook hands with Sonia, the child demanded shrilly that the interrupted tale of the day before should be resumed.

"Will you say good-night to David junior?," she asked me, as Daniel surrendered to the spell of O'Rane's story.

"If he's not asleep," I said; and she conducted me into the presence of a wide-awake and fierce Japanese doll, who gripped two of my fingers and demanded truculently what I was doing in his nursery.

At three years old, the child had his father's flashing black eyes and imperious manner. Sonia added that he had also more than his father's indomitable obstinacy.

"Is he equally fearless?," I asked.

For answer she pointed from a green bruise on the child's forehead to a padlocked grille over the window:

"David had a fire-escape fitted the other day. He went down it himself just to learn the way; and this infant must needs follow. He'd never been on a ladder in his life, but he climbed cheerfully out of the window . . ."

"Trusting to the special providence that looks after all O'Ranes," I put in.

"By the mercy of heaven a policeman caught him; but if he behaves like that now . . ."

"He looks like keeping you fully occupied."

"I can do what I like with him at present," she answered, "because he realizes I'm only a woman, and I can get on the soft side of him. When he's old enough to see that women can be more easily bullied than men, more easily hurt . . . I don't envy his wife. I don't envy any wife."

"Yet if all marriages were dissolved by act of parliament . . .," I began, as she led me downstairs.

"Should I take David on again? I wonder! He's the only man I've ever loved. . . . What fools we women are! And what fools men are! They don't want a woman to have a will of her own; and, when she echoes their will, they find her insipid. And what a fool I've always been! Once I thought it would be wonderful to run away . . . as I did. But that was only a wonderful

fit of bad temper," she added with the candour that she always employed in discussing herself.

"And one that you'll never repeat."

"No. In those days I was so hungry for children that I thought myself quite immodest: if I'd had my first one earlier, we should never have had our great tragedy. Now that I've got two, you need never be afraid I shall run away again even if David ties me to the bed and beats me. I honestly, honestly don't think of myself any longer except through them. I want them to have the best chance in life: all that you and Jim and my brothers had. They must go to the best schools, the best universities; they must never be driven down the wrong road like so many boys because they haven't the money to go by the right one. They must be *secure*." . . . Her face darkened; and she turned to the fire. "David won't promise me that. My father can't afford it." . . .

I believe that, if her husband could have seen Sonia at that moment as I saw her, he would have compromised with his insurgent conscience. Once before, when he came back from France, I had seen her, as now, on her knees; pleading, as now, for the privilege of serving him and, as now, wholly forgetful of her too insistent self.

"He's not easy to move when he's made up his mind," I said, with memories of our conversation earlier in the afternoon.

Sonia shook her head ruefully:

"Don't I know that? You remember when that unemployment deputation came to see him? We've had about three a day ever since. Does that influence him? The press camps on our doorstep. He's besieged in his office. This afternoon that man Griffiths came here again."

"What did you do with him?"

Her patience suddenly deserted her:

"I sent him to Hampstead. This *is* a private house, when all's said and done. I don't suppose he got any satisfaction there, but I thought the walk would be good for him. Odious little creature!"

It was now that I feel I might have done some good by speaking strongly. Neither Griffiths nor any other grown man deserved to be sent on a fool's errand; in cooler moments Sonia would have been ashamed to play such a trick. Her answer, I suppose, would have been that Griffiths and her husband were too much for any one's coolness; and I feared—no doubt,

weakly—that I should lose my slight influence over her if I sided with her husband. When he came down from the nursery, she was still indignant enough to retail Griffiths' visit and to ask O'Rane whether the deputation had reached Hampstead in time to find him.

"I had to say I could do nothing for them," he answered a little wearily. "I've given all I can spare of my own money; and I've collected as much as I can from other people. If they come again, you might tell them that."

"You must tell them yourself," Sonia replied stiffly. "*I'm* not going to make myself responsible."

"I only wanted you to save them a useless journey. When you sent them to me, you gave them some sort of hope; and that makes it so much harder when I have to turn them down."

"Perhaps in time you'll find it so hard . . ." she muttered.

"I can't go back on what I've said. It's only unkind to give them a long walk for nothing. Promise me you won't do it again, Sonia."

"Let's hope they won't come again. If they do, I shall *again* send them to you." Then, without disguise, her temper broke. "I'm not consulted about what you do with this money, so I wash my hands of it. This is not your office; and you can't blame me if you refuse to give them anything for their trouble."

"I can only repeat that you make my task more difficult," O'Rane answered patiently.

"Before I've done, I hope to make it impossible," Sonia retorted defiantly, as she hurried out of the library and up the stairs.

I had a second opportunity of speaking strongly, this time to O'Rane; and I failed to press it. The papers that night gave long accounts of the opening of parliament and longer, less hackneyed descriptions of the demonstration by the unemployed. I detected for the first time a note of uneasiness as, for the first time, unemployment passed out of the realm of abstract statistics and incarnated itself in ragged armies of hungry men. I remembered Philip Hornbeck's blithe assurance that Griffiths could do little harm so long as the armies were scattered; well, their banners shewed that they were scattered no longer. One nervous leader-writer compared this march with the advance of the Marseillais on Paris and asked angrily how the police had allowed it; another, more valiant, rehearsed the history of the Fascismo movement in Italy and warned the proletariat at large—without considering whether the proletariat was likely to read such a paper—that

England would never yield to mob-violence. A third, mentioning O'Rane by name, exhumed the controversy of the summer and enquired whether those who had voluntarily undertaken a national responsibility could abandon it at such a time in satisfaction of a "doctrinaire whim". In less blunt terms than the sandwichman had displayed, O'Rane's 'sentence of death' was brought up against him; and it was with some muddled, premonitory feeling of an isolated conflict between Griffiths and the O'Ranes that I uttered my warning.

"Suspend your sentence," I said, "until the new government has declared its unemployment policy."

O'Rane replied with the entirely logical and utterly irrelevant thesis that unemployment was a consequence of the war, that the community had called the tune and must pay the piper, that one government had imposed conscription of men's lives and that another could impose conscription of their wealth. The state had turned prosperous civilians into soldiers; the state must turn these soldiers back into prosperous civilians.

His cold reasoning and neat phrasing reminded me of a speech at some undergraduate debating-society.

"I can only hope," I said, "that you won't have to say 'no' again."

Hungry men had no time for debating-society arguments. I hoped, too, that Sonia would not be forced to say 'no' again. Hungry men had no taste for being ordered to walk from Westminster to Hampstead as a move in the game with her husband. I said no more. And, amid my self-reproaches, I find a barren comfort in the knowledge that neither Sonia nor her husband would have listened, though one rose from the dead to warn them.

3

Thereafter, like every one else, I waited to see the policy of the government proclaimed. The debate on the address gave rise to some acrimonious passages between the two front benches; a programme of rather remote public-relief work was fluttered in the face of the labour party; and the prime minister ostentatiously reestablished departmental responsibility and dissociated himself from the improvisations of his predecessor by refusing to receive a deputation of the unemployed.

Then the interest of the public sought a new stimulus.

I am inclined to think that modern journalism, with its craving for daily excitement and its acquiescence in the superficial, has incapacitated us for

patient study. Few subjects unconnected with sex or bloodshed can hold the attention of a newspaper-reader for more than three days; and, when the men with schemes for employment had been photographed as they walked to Downing Street and when a popular novelist had protested passionately that the unemployed were not really bolshevists, the eyes of the nation were allured by pictures of Lord Curzon entering his train for the Lausanne conference, and controversialists with uncertain memories enquired rhetorically the name of the last woman to be hanged in England for complicity in murder. Like the peace negotiations, like the war, like the domestic and international unrest before the war, like the Irish problem, this unemployment business became a bore: the public was accustomed to the variety of a "continuous performance" in its cinematograph theatres, it expected a "new programme weekly" for its political stage.

I myself was compelled for professional reasons to study problems of public policy even after they had ceased to be fashionable. The only excuse for continuing our paper was to be found in my uncle's warning that, after four years of peace, we were in at least no better position than at the outbreak of war; at his death, we had cut our last party-ties and were standing behind the government as friendly critic. If the new administration shewed no improvement on the old, we should have to consider—as I told my colleagues—whether we were to throw in our lot with labour, whether we should lay our paper in its overdue grave or whether we must extend to our own country the verdict of revolutionary Russia that the old machine of national and international government had broken down.

That verdict was pronounced in my private hearing by Griffiths himself, with a warning that he would repeat it publicly if the government failed to give him instant satisfaction. Our second interview was no more of my seeking than the first. When the House rose without curing unemployment then and there, he made it known—first of all at a mass-meeting in Trafalgar Square and then in handbills which were distributed about the streets—that he would instruct ministers in the meaning of unemployment by confronting them with the unemployed. This, in the vague phrase which he favoured, would "put things to the test". The demonstrations at the opening of parliament had been hardly more than a parade. "Hunger marches" were now to be organized in every part of the country, converging on London at the same moment. After that . . .? I noticed that Griffiths carefully refrained from saying what would happen when fifty, or a hundred, thousand disappointed men found themselves empty-handed, empty-bellied, foot-sore and resentful at the closed door of an impotent office. And I pointed out this sinister omission in the next number of *Peace*.

There was nothing, Hornbeck told me at this time, in the speech or the manifesto to justify police interference; but any one who remembered Griffiths' share in organizing the land-grabbing campaign could imagine how this new demonstration would be conducted and how it was likely to end. I went farther than most of my *confrères* and denounced the manifesto as deliberately provocative. Griffiths called to inform me that, if I chose to print lies, he could not stop me, but that, if I was interested in the truth, I might perhaps be not too proud to hear it from him.

I professed a prompt eagerness for truth in any form, though I was more interested to know what amusement or instruction he derived from so painfully academic a journal as *Peace*. I wondered how he came to associate me with its direction and why he visited me in Seymour Street rather than in Fetter Lane. My curiosity on this last point was satisfied when he ran a practised eye over the dimensions of the house and asked me how many the establishment comprised.

"You? And your wife? And six servants?," he recapitulated. "No kids? A car and a man to drive it? Four meals a day? You don't call *that* provocative?"

"If we had fewer servants, you'd have more unemployed," I pointed out.

"It takes three men and four women to keep the two of you alive. The house is half empty. You waste more food in a day than my people eat in a week. You drive about in your jewels and fine clothes among people who've been cold and hungry for months. And then you tell me not to be . . . 'provocative'!"

I reminded him that we were supposed to be discussing unemployment.

"I shan't remedy that by going about in rags," I said, "or by shutting up half the house."

"If you were in Germany, you wouldn't be allowed to have empty rooms. And, if you were in Russia, you wouldn't be allowed twenty coats when the next man has nothing but a shirt between him and the rain."

I reminded him that we were in England and that he had called to demonstrate how little provocation his manifesto contained.

"If the government orders me to find accommodation for people without homes," I said, "if I have to clothe them and feed them, I'll do it to the best of my ability. I put obedience to the law above all things." The little red eyes glowed in anticipation of an attack. "My criticism of you is the criticism I've brought before now against the people who preach a general strike for

political objects. That's not the way to proceed in a constitutional country. There's no end to it short of revolution. You object to the word 'provocative'. . ."

"Did you *read* what I said?," he interrupted.

"Every word. It was admirably phrased. A single letter more would have had you prosecuted. You're careful not to provoke anybody in words; but I tell you that you're inciting people to violence by your actions. You know their temper far better than I do. You know what you've taught them to regard as the minimum standard of housing, feeding, wages and out-of-work pay. Do you believe you'll get it by bringing a hundred thousand men to London?"

Griffiths hesitated perceptibly. If he said "no", he condemned himself for inflating his followers with false hopes; if he said "yes", he was confessing himself the prophet of intimidation in its crudest form.

"In time," he answered at length.

"Do your men realize that they'll have to wait?" He hesitated again for fear of admitting that he had taught them too well or not well enough. "No government in the world can submit to the dictation of a mass-meeting. You know that. If it surrendered to-morrow, you'd have another mass-meeting the day after. I think you know that too."

"And still they wouldn't have all they're entitled to," he murmured.

"That's another question. My charge is that you're bringing thousands of men to London on false pretences. They're probably not in the sweetest of moods; and small blame to them. They won't get what you're promising them; and they'll turn on you."

The red eyes flashed defiantly:

"I can look after myself."

So far, we had kept fairly free from personal attacks, but something in Griffiths' manner or voice exasperated me. I had not admitted him in order to be lectured about the number of servants who were needed to keep me alive; the angry, ferret's eyes gave me a curious feeling that I must bite before I was bitten; and, seeing him—perhaps quite unjustifiably as a vindictive, treacherous little animal, I fixed a quality of untrustworthiness on the man.

"You will look after yourself," I prophesied, "by putting the blame on the government and rousing your people against law and order instead of

telling them there was never a hope of their getting any of the things you promised."

Though my antagonist betrayed his feelings in an angry flush, he affected to dismiss my prediction as something unworthy of his notice:

"They said that at Woolhampton," he answered, "when we seized the Town Hall. I'm always stirring people up, it seems . . . Provocative . . . because I put the blame where the blame should go! You haven't called me a paid agitator yet."

"I've no intention of doing so. I say to your face, as I said in print, that you're provoking something which may end in a revolution. I take the purity of your motives for granted. You've volunteered to tell me the truth and to shew that you're not organizing constructive revolution." . . .

Despite the dislike which I could not help feeling, there was no doubting the man's passionate sincerity. He felt for the people he championed the same frenzied protectiveness and lust for revenge that I should have felt if my sister had been hacked to pieces before my eyes. Argument was out of the question; warnings were idle. I reconsidered the phrase I had used in likening him to a spiteful ferret, for he was touched with the greatness that is inseparable from fanaticism. Self-advancement and self-advertising had no place in his thoughts, though he was arrogantly confident of his authority as a popular leader and of his power to cut knots that had baffled every other hand. In a conversation that extended over two hours I learned nothing of his private history; at the end I realized no better than at the beginning why he had singled me out for his aggressive apologia. The resonant blows of our blunt swords echoed emptily on our impenetrable harness; and, when I saw him to the door, I was saying for the fiftieth time: "You're trying to stir up a revolution"; and for the fiftieth time he was retorting: "If your precious government can't do anything, some one else had better have a try."

As we crossed swords for the last time, Barbara drove up to the door. She had been giving another sitting to Wace; and her appearance, in an ermine coat and a diamond star, was not wasted on Griffiths, who bowed ironically and looked her up and down as though he were assessing her in terms of daily meat-meals.

"Well, I must be off," he said; and I know he was recapitulating again: "*You. And your wife. And six servants . . .*"

"I'm glad to have had this talk," I said, "even though we've not convinced each other. If you think I've misrepresented you, I can only offer

you equal space in our columns to put yourself right with our readers."

"I shan't have time," he answered.

"You can do it in two lines. If you'll answer my charge that you're working, consciously or unconsciously, for a revolution . . ."

"I'm answering it now," he interrupted. "From here I go to King's Cross and from King's Cross to the north. Putting things to the test. I shall be back again in just the time that it takes us to walk here."

As he disappeared from sight, Barbara commented admiringly on his exit:

"For a third curtain, it was unsurpassed. I *do* want to know what's going to happen in the last act."

4

If I did not know then, I had a strength of conviction that amounted almost to knowledge. There was going to be public excitement; there was going to be loose speaking; there was going to be bad blood. And, after that, there might well be rioting.

I have replayed the game a hundred times since that day and asked myself what I could have done to change the issue. Before the war I should have talked to Bertrand; and, if he had shared my apprehensions, he would have spoken a word to the responsible ministers. With this new government of men unknown to me, with this new House no longer even in session, there was no one I could approach. During the war, when we broke down most of the interdepartmental walls, a telephone message from the Admiralty would have stirred sympathetic chords in Scotland Yard or the Home Office. Now I had long severed my connection with the public service; Philip Hornbeck was my one remaining link; and, if I bothered him again, I ran the risk of being told that Griffiths was become a bee in my bonnet.

This notwithstanding, I did ask Barbara to arrange a dinner; and I am only sorry that I did not make the invitation more urgent.

"Is anything the matter?," she asked in some surprise, for Hornbeck had dined with us only two or three nights before.

"Not at the moment; but there may be trouble if some one doesn't spike that fellow Griffiths' guns. In his way, the man's right: as the government *has* no remedy, you can't find an answer to people who say they'll take the

remedy into their own hands. But the common sense of the world won't allow that. Griffiths will be refused a hearing; the mob may break a few windows; and then the police will clear the streets. It's not worth marching an army three hundred miles to learn that old lesson."

"Until they've learnt it, they'll go on believing in men like Griffiths," said Barbara.

"But it will be a more costly lesson than they realize. With the best intentions in the world, he's marching them into a trap. I want Hornbeck to stop the march and break up the units before they can collect in force."

We telephoned to the Admiralty; but Hornbeck had left. When I got in touch with him next day, he was engaged for several nights ahead. Rather shamefacedly, I told him my fears; and he promised to enquire what steps were being taken, though I felt I had wholly failed to communicate my dread of the wasted little fanatic Griffiths. In the middle of the following week I read that the great "hunger-march" had begun; and, when Hornbeck dined with us, he explained that Griffiths was being given enough rope to hang himself, but no more. One army had reached Nottingham, a second was on the outskirts of Coventry and a third was halting on the east side of Newbury; but they would not be allowed to reach London. Since my interview with him, the leader and spokesman had abandoned his former caution; and Hornbeck told me that the police were waiting to prosecute him for inciting to crime.

"It's a pity to wait," I said.

"What else can one do?," asked Hornbeck.

Perhaps my memory is biased by the events of the following week, perhaps my instinct was right in warning me that Griffiths was one of the most dangerous firebrands that I had ever met. He haunted me, as the shadow of Marat must have haunted the well-to-do citizens of Paris; and I felt an equal, unreasoning impatience with the departments that ignored him and with the papers that advertised him. For two or three days the great march was reported mile by mile, with a list of the victories won by "Griffiths' armies" over the powerless custodians of such county halls, municipal libraries and public baths as they occupied on their way. For the same period the government maintained a calm and dignified silence. Then new interests demanded attention and space.

By the time that the various units joined forces in the open country beyond Neasden, hunger-marching commanded no price in the ever-

changing tariff of news-items. London was shopping for Christmas; the Lausanne conference was becoming every day more firm and ineffectual; Signor Mussolini was in England; Germany had defaulted again; and the prime ministers of the late allies were discussing with their financial experts new and final methods of settling the problem of reparations.

I only learned that the army was at hand when I read that the government policy for combating unemployment had been fully explained and that, in the opinion of one private secretary, "*no useful purpose would be served by a meeting between the Minister and the leaders of the unemployed now collected in Wembley Park*."

"This is the moment I've been dreading," I told Barbara. "Griffiths has made fools of these people; and he can only recover his authority by fighting the government."

I read next day that the leaders of the unemployed insisted upon sending a deputation to the minister of labour. A public demonstration was announced later; and from an evening paper I learned that, while the police would not interfere with an orderly march through the streets, it must not be conducted in the neighbourhood of Westminster. As I walked home that night, I was given a handbill in which I read, over the signature of Griffiths, that the hunger-march would be resumed next morning and would be directed first to Buckingham Palace, then—as a concession to constitutionalism—to the Home Office and finally—for a reason I could not guess, since parliament was no longer sitting—to the House of Commons. It was not for Scotland Yard to say who might or might not have access to the king or his responsible ministers; and the problem that chiefly vexed the spirit of Griffiths was to discover who in fact was responsible.

"Now," I told my colleagues when I reached Fetter Lane through a double line of police, "there's going to be trouble. The only thing that can stop it will be a downpour of rain."

"And there is in fact a hard frost," yawned Triskett.

"This fog may do as well," said Jefferson Wright.

"It's pretty serious," we all agreed.

Did any of us believe in the warnings and predictions which we uttered? I cannot say. Everything that happened in these days is coloured by the memory of what happened afterwards. I may conceivably take credit for explaining before other people that these demonstrations were on a different plane from the coal strikes and railway strikes that aroused our uneasiness

after the war; on the other hand, I may only have been suffering from disordered nerves. It was the end of the year; I wanted a holiday; and the self-control which I had to exercise at home sometimes deserted me when I was at my office. Accordingly I claim no praise and feel no shame in saying that I was nervous. The long lines of police-pickets had not been stationed about the streets without some purpose; and the news that trickled in throughout the morning was not of a kind to allay anxiety.

Philip Hornbeck did indeed repeat by telephone his customary assurance that Griffiths could be discounted. When the marchers entered Regent's Park, they were warned that they would not be allowed to approach Downing Street; and, as Hornbeck walked to the Admiralty, he passed half-a-dozen columns of dejected, leaderless men who were standing easy or trudging slowly under banners of ineffectual protest. Even the bands, he said, were dispirited. After one glance, the passers-by paid no heed to a sight that was now wearisomely familiar; and, in Hornbeck's eyes, the gaunt, ragged army found its best friends among the constables who tramped in a protective and restraining cordon.

"Did these fellows seem disappointed?," I asked.

"I think they were too tired, poor devils, to feel anything. If it hadn't been for the bobbies, you might have thought it was another retreat from Moscow. I believe there *was* some plain speaking when they found their Napoleon had left them, but I hear he's only gone to see about billets. The police are helping him all they can. That's the way we stop revolutions in England," he chuckled.

I was reminded again of the day now long distant when O'Rane and I had stood in a crowd of many thousands to watch the body of Terence McSwiney drawing through the respectfully silent streets of London. The English, I felt, behaved sometimes like characters in a comic opera: consistent only in their inconsistency, they could not rise to a revolution. With a longer leap into the past, my memory fastened on a moment in O'Rane's first year at Melton, when he watched a half-hearted attempt at a May Day demonstration and, in disgust at the apathy of the demonstrators, instructed them in the Marseillaise. I wondered if he recalled that day, which was also nearly his last as a scholar of Melton. I wondered if he and Hornbeck were right in discounting this threat of revolution.

Then I thought of the weary crowds that were pouring into London.

"If you'd put a spoke in his wheel at the beginning . . .," I began.

"You can't stop peaceful pedestrians from walking along the king's highway," Hornbeck rejoined, "and Griffiths arranged that the armies should only *become* armies when they were too big to turn back."

5

I had intended to lunch at the Eclectic in the hopes of hearing what steps the government was taking to house and feed the hunger-marchers, but, when I was halfway to St. James' Street, I turned north and walked home with a vague feeling that I must see how Barbara was getting on.

When Spence-Atkins asked me point-blank if I thought there would be any outbreak, I had replied with conviction that I did not. That, however, was in the office; and, as I walked west, I was disquieted by the sight of these silent columns, marching aimlessly, halting and dissolving into little knots of stragglers too weary to march longer. In Waterloo Place and Regent Street, the police imposed an order which the men themselves had been unable to maintain; but from Hanover Square to Park Lane the army split into its elements. Through the settling fog I saw men sitting on the kerbs and clustering on the island-refuges; they dropped in a shapeless heap on the first convenient doorstep; and the good-humoured constables who said "Now then, you must move along" found themselves addressing ears that were already deaf with sleep.

"Half of them are no more than boys, sir," one policeman pointed out to me. "Tired out, that's what they are. They don't mean no harm."

By a damnable irony, the men had chosen for their collapse a moment when Brook Street offered a tantalizing blend of warm, savoury smells. I, who had never known the meaning of hunger, found my appetite quickening.

"They're tired out and *hungry*," I said. So far as I am a judge of accents, some of these boys had come from the Black Country, others from Lancashire, others again from Northumberland. "I live near here. Is it any good trying to raise some soup . . .?"

The constable shrugged his shoulders and waited while an old man, who had fainted, was lifted on to an ambulance.

"If once you begin, sir, you'll have the whole lot of them at your door. It's more than one man can tackle."

I walked on to Seymour Street with a growing sense of despair. All this had been prophesied to Griffiths in forcible language ten days before; but

my meagre powers of imagination and description never came within miles of actuality. I had not realized the dishonour to humanity which a man commits when he no longer hides a broken spirit; I had forgotten the disfigurements of starvation and the sickly stench of neglect. The policeman was entirely right: half these fellows were only boys; and I felt the blood mounting to my head when I thought of the way they were victimized and their ignorance exploited. During the war I had seen them and their elder brothers trotting obediently to the slaughter-house and bemusedly offering their lives for a cause that was never explained and for objects that they never understood. Now, no less obediently, they trotted in answer to a voice that promised them a quick millennium.

I should have caught some hope, for all my denunciation of violence, if they had torn Griffiths limb from limb; but the patient credulity that collected them under his leadership accepted uncomplainingly the fate to which he led them. Griffiths, as he had boasted to me, could look after himself; providence, the police or the devil might look after his followers, who sprawled about the misty streets like slumbering cattle.

If I had expected to find Barbara sharing my own anxiety, I might have known better than to expect any sign of it. She greeted me with faint surprise because I had not warned her that I should be lunching at home; then the surprise turned to relief as she recollected that she was a man short.

"It's a family party," she explained. "Father and mother and Charles. I asked the O'Ranes; but David can't get away, so you must take his place. . . . You're not ill or anything are you, George?"

"Oh, no, thanks. *Depressed*, if you like. London's a horrible sight with all these hunger-marchers dropping down on every side from sheer exhaustion. I don't know what's to be done about them. I only hope there won't be a scrap."

Barbara looked out of window; but the fog was now so thick that she could not see across the street.

"Was that why you came back?," she asked with her head averted.

"I wanted to see that you were all right."

"Thank you." . . . As though afraid that I might take advantage of her curt gratitude, she broke into a laugh. "Some one—I think it was Jim—once said that, when the revolution came, there'd be keen competition between Sonia and me for a place in the first tumbril. If it begins to-day, we shall be able to drive down together. I suppose we *are* two of the most useless human

beings in creation. . . . I hope the mob doesn't break in while father's here: I know he'd struggle with the executioner, and I think it's unfair to hinder a man who's simply trying to do his duty."

"I feel Robson would probably save us," I answered. "He'd tell the mob, very patiently, that it was out of the question for them to have a revolution in Seymour Street." . . .

"You don't really expect any trouble, do you?"

As I believed Barbara to be entirely fearless, I did not mind speaking frankly:

"It all turns on what's likely to happen in the next few hours. The men are too tired at present even to feel hungry. When they wake up, they'll be like ravening wolves."

On Crawleigh's arrival, I was distantly comforted to find that he shared my own view and had indeed spent an hour trying to get it accepted in Downing Street. During his viceroyalty he had been ultimately responsible for the relief-works in two famines; and, for once, I found him pregnant with constructive proposals. Three or four of the biggest catering-firms, he urged, should set up kitchens in the London parks; every public hall should be turned into a dormitory; and, if supplies ran short in the shops, there must be a house-to-house visitation to collect bread and blankets.

"I'd punish the ring-leaders without mercy," he added, "but we must do one thing at a time. This is December, these men are starving; and for the next forty-eight hours we must simply suspend our ordinary laws. Why the government ever *allowed* such madness . . ."

We were still discussing emergency measures when Sonia came in very late and apologetic. Every approach to Westminster, she reported, was barred with lines of mounted police; St. James' Park was closed, Whitehall and Victoria Street were barricaded. She herself had crossed the river at Lambeth and come by tube from Waterloo.

"Are things still quiet?," Lady Crawleigh enquired nervously.

"I should think so; but the fog's so thick that you can't tell. . . . Did David find you?," Sonia asked me. "He wanted to talk to you about soup-kitchens or something."

"He hadn't come when I left the office," I answered.

As we went in to luncheon, Charles Neave, who had come up from the country the day before, contributed some first-hand observations on the

march from Cumberland. It had been peaceful and orderly from the moment when the marchers convinced their potential antagonists that they meant to have what they wanted. Private property was scrupulously respected; but, on the principle that churches and public buildings belonged to the community, Griffiths' 'armies' took possession of them as lodgings for a night. I was given to understand that there had been one or two sharp conflicts; but Crawleigh was expressing more than his own opinion when he reminded us that this was December and that the men were starving. Barns and warehouses were offered voluntarily as soon as their owners were satisfied that they would not be damaged.

"How did they manage for food?," I asked.

"The workhouse people did what they could. I think the rest was voted by the different town-councils. There wasn't enough to go round anywhere, but a whole lot was given privately."

"Were there any speeches or demonstrations?," asked Crawleigh.

"I didn't hear any. Everybody seemed to be on the side of the marchers. They felt it was jolly hard lines and something ought to be done. Any ass who calls it bolshevism doesn't know what he's talking about."

"If we can only get them back as quietly as they've come . . ." Crawleigh began and left his sentence unfinished.

I wondered whether he too was reflecting that the most dangerous revolution is the one in which popular sympathy goes out to the revolutionaries. In the last years of the eighteenth century the history of the world would have been changed if Louis had not forbidden the Swiss Guard to fire from the windows of the Tuileries; it was in fact changed—and revolution died in giving birth to Bonapartism—when Napoleon cleared the streets of Paris with a whiff of grapeshot. I would more readily have turned a machine-gun on my own dining-room than have harassed the spent men whom I saw collapsing on the doorsteps of Brook Street; but I wondered how far the sympathy of the onlookers and the kindliness of the police would paralyse vigorous action if the spent men rose and had to be coerced.

"Is anybody in *fact* taking any steps?," I asked Crawleigh. "We've food in the house, we can buy more." . . .

"They're collecting food and money as it is," added Sonia. "Just before I came here, that little red-eyed Welshman called to see David . . ."

"D'you mean Griffiths?," I asked in surprise.

“Yes. That’s another reason why I was so late. He wouldn’t go. I told him I’d nothing to give him.”

“Did he come alone?”

“Oh, no! There was a queue stretching farther than I could see. He told me he was sure Mr. O’Rane wouldn’t refuse to help when he realized what these men had been through to bring their grievances before the government.” Sonia’s expression grew suddenly hard. “I told him we weren’t the government; and I should be very glad if he’d take his army to Hampstead and let me get to my taxi.”

Before I had time to warn her against such trifling, I was called to the telephone and informed that O’Rane himself was in Fetter Lane and wished to see me at once.

“Hullo? This is a private wire, isn’t it?,” he began. “Good! I came to see you on quite other business. Then one of your people came in with the latest news, and I felt I should have to borrow your eyes for the afternoon. I’m afraid Griffiths’ people are getting out of hand. There’s a certain amount of damage being done . . .”

“Whereabouts?,” I interrupted.

“In Hampstead. I’ve warned the police; and, of course, Hampstead is a big place; but I couldn’t help wondering if they’d taken it into their heads to loot my office. I’m afraid they won’t find more than about five pounds in the till; but there are a lot of young clerks there, and I don’t want them to have a scare. If you could pick me up here and come to inspect the field of battle . . .”

“I’ll be with you as soon as I can get across London,” I answered.

6

As I hung up the receiver, I saw Barbara standing in the doorway. One hand gripped the moulding of the frame; the other was pressed to her side. I jumped up in sudden alarm and helped her to a chair, for her lips were moving without giving forth any sound.

“Babs! Darling heart, what’s the matter?,” I asked.

“That’s what I came to find out,” she answered with an effort that almost choked her. “George, you’re not going!”

“Not till you’re all right,” I promised. “Are you feeling faint? I shall have to go out for a bit: a man who’s waiting to see me at the office . . .”

"But you're not going!," she repeated frantically.

"It'll only be for an hour or so . . ."

"It'll be for all eternity! George, if you go, you won't come back! Can't you *feel* it? I know when death's at hand! Have I ever been wrong? Uncle Bertrand. Eric . . . Oh, before the war! Jack Summertown and the other boys in Jim's last party! I know, I *know*! You think I'm mad . . ."

"But, my dear, who's going to kill me?," I asked. "I've been in too many London fogs to fear them much; and, if you're thinking of the hunger-marchers, I'm afraid the poor devils couldn't do any mischief even if they wanted to. I made an appointment with a man . . ."

"With David. You put him before me?"

I was at a loss to think of anything that would calm her.

"He is my best and oldest friend," I said.

"You always *have* put him before me," she cried.

"My dear, you speak as if you were jealous! It's absurd . . ."

"I heard what you said to him."

"Then you couldn't have heard more than about six words. I said I'd be with him . . ."

"And wasn't that enough? Wasn't it enough when I knew he wanted you? I'm not jealous; I'm terrified! Don't I know what he said to you? He's in trouble and he wants to drag you into it. But he shan't, he shan't!"

I sat down by Barbara's side and told her, so far as I could remember, word for word all that O'Rane had said to me.

"You know what Fleet Street rumours are," I ended, though I felt it was unfortunate that this rumour of rioting in Hampstead had followed so disquieting soon on Sonia's jaunty account of her meeting with Griffiths.

"If there weren't danger, you wouldn't think it necessary to go. It's no good lying to me, George. I've lived with you too long not to know something about you. I ask you to stay."

"If Raney could see for himself . . .," I began.

"Let some one *else* go!"

Though I could not tell Barbara, I remembered vividly the night when I had sat alone in that room, begging O'Rane to come and keep me company.

I remembered, too, his characteristic promise that he would see me through to the grave and beyond.

"He's never asked me to do anything for him before. I've promised; and I'm afraid I can't go back on it."

Barbara stood up as though she were going to rejoin her guests. Physically she was in control of herself and could walk without difficulty or apparent pain; mentally she seemed to be on the verge of a collapse.

"Four and a half," she muttered at the door.

"Four and a half what?," I asked.

"Four and a half years since *you* made certain promises to *me*. Four and a half years since we were married. David has only to raise his little finger . . ."

"This is hardly the time to hold a *post mortem* on our marriage," I said.

"And I'm hardly the person?," she taunted.

"I didn't say that."

"You wouldn't! You made up your mind to be patient with me at all costs. You just *wouldn't* lose your temper! Dear God, why didn't you, George? I deserved it. We could have been friends if you'd dropped your hateful superiority for a moment, if you'd ever become human! You *can* be! You were marvellously sympathetic when all was going well; but, after the crash, you behaved like a stone god. I was wrong. I *told* you I was wrong. You didn't blame me. You know I'm jealous through and through, but you wouldn't punish me by falling in love with some one else. You didn't even complain of this ghastly two years' imprisonment. Won't you ever meet me half way? I told you my love for Eric was dead; you know I never loved any one else. What more do you want? Must I apologize? I will! I'm sorry. I love you, I need you! I wouldn't say it the other night, because I was trying to hold together the rags of my pride. Isn't that enough? If you'll stay, I'll make up for all my wickedness and cruelty. You're all I have in the world. I didn't know it before; but now I can feel death hovering over you like some great black bird. If you go . . . If you go . . ."

Suddenly turning, she clung to me, laughing and crying. I stood without speaking because her intensity of feeling overwhelmed me. I remember stroking her hands. I believe I told her that I should be back before she had time to miss me.

"But you're not going *now*?," she cried.

“Darling, I must. I shan’t be in any more danger than I am now; but, if it were a question of bombs and machine-guns, you wouldn’t ask me to let Raney down. He wouldn’t have asked me if he didn’t need me.”

Barbara’s hands disengaged themselves from mine and rose to draw me into her embrace. As our lips met, I felt that she belonged to me, at last, heart and soul; but, when I looked into her eyes, I read her frantic certainty that we should never kiss again.

“I’m coming back, sweetheart,” I promised her.

“Good-bye,” she whispered. Then, still gripping my shoulders, she looked wildly about the room as though to face and drive away this black presence of death that was haunting her. “It’s . . . come too late. Good-bye . . . and forgive me.”

“I’m coming back,” I told her again; but Barbara was now kneeling with eyes closed and folded hands.

If she heard me, she made no sign; I fancy she heard nothing but her own passionate prayers. As I stumbled into the choking fog, the door slammed behind me; and for the first time in these bewildering five minutes I realized that I was awake.

CHAPTER THREE

TWO IN THE FIELD

"The one shall be taken, and the other left."

S. Matthew: XXIV, 40.

1

In Seymour Street I could not distinguish the houses on the far side of the road; at the Marble Arch I was unable to see from the one side of the pavement to the other; and I made my cautious way to the tube station chiefly by sense of touch.

A London fog can be the completest insulator in the world. Paralysing sight and muffling sound, it separates the individual from his fellows in the densest part of a crowded street. As I walked up Great Cumberland Place, there was no sound but my own faint footsteps; the whole city belonged to me.

" '*Dear God, the very houses seem asleep*';" I murmured involuntarily:

" '*And all that mighty heart is lying still.*' "

Then, I am not ashamed to confess, I felt suddenly frightened, for I knew that the mighty heart was beating, the houses which seemed asleep were full of people peering into the darkness of the street as I peered through the darkness at their windows. The street was full; at any moment I might trample on the unseen; and the unseen that watched and listened for my faint footsteps might spring out on me. I walked on tiptoe . . . and could have sworn that some one or something laughed at my futile caution.

At an unattainable distance, a haze of dirty-lemon light smeared the darkness. I hurried forward six paces and bruised my knees against a lamp-post. Pausing to pick up my hat, I saw a knot of motionless bodies tangled on the doorstep at my feet. There was no word, no more laughter; perhaps I had imagined that earlier laugh. The fog insulated me again as though I had been thrust under an airless bell-glass with a pile of dead. I dared not move for fear of treading on one of them. The lemon light grew dim, as a thicker

wave of fog floated silently from the unplumbed reservoir in the park. I felt my fingers tightening round my stick. Then one of the crumpled bodies moved in its sleep and broke the spell. I walked on—slowly, because I was out of breath—and steadied my nerves by speaking to the policeman on duty at the corner.

He too, I found, was insulated by the fog. Some one should have relieved him hours ago; but every man in the force was required to regulate the traffic and to shepherd the hunger-marchers. What had happened to them he could not tell me. Whenever the fog lifted, he saw groups of them drifting aimlessly about or camping wearily in the first resting-place that they could find. As armies, they had either ceased to exist or had transferred themselves to another part of London. I asked whether he had heard of any trouble.

"Haven't heard nothing, sir," he answered. "Wish I had. No, there won't be no trouble. These chaps are too tired; and they're all of them strange to London."

2

When I reached the light and warmth of the tube, I could analyse calmly my curious surrender to panic on my way up Great Cumberland Place. A London fog, as I had told Barbara, was no new phenomenon to me; apart from its dirt, I rather enjoyed one for its mystery and romance. If the order of interrogation had been reversed, I should have assured the policeman that I anticipated no trouble and that the hunger-marchers were too tired, too ill-acquainted with London to provoke a riot. I believed every word that I had said to my wife; I am not more nervous than most short-sighted and unadventurous men of forty; and yet for a moment I had entirely lost my head. Was this due to Barbara's sudden collapse? Were my own nerves cracking?

In the familiar long car, staring up at the well-known advertisements, I was myself again. I could dismiss all thoughts of imminent death, hanging over the house like a bird of doom, as lightly as they would have been dismissed by my stolid neighbours in the train. Barbara, for some reason, was overexcited. In my uncle's last illness she had felt—or said she felt—the presence of death; she added then, with something of the same terror, that, if she ever heard my life was in danger, she would be dragged out of her indifference. We had been talking, throughout luncheon, of possible riots; I had arrived unexpectedly because I was anxious for her safety; a cell in her unconscious mind might well have retained our conversation as I drove to my uncle's death-bed. Was it necessary to probe deeper than that?

What mattered, what I could not yet begin to realize was that Barbara and I were at last one flesh and spirit. When I returned to her . . .

I wondered whether I had done wisely in leaving her. When I remembered the last poignant attitude in which I had seen her, kneeling upright with closed eyes and praying distractedly, I felt unforgivably callous.

"For a casual promise to a friend," I told myself indignantly; "when I've assured her he's in no danger . . ."

As the train ran in to Oxford Circus, I rose from my seat. Then I sat down again; rose again; sat down again . . . till the conductor called sharply:

"Now, make up your mind, sir."

I made up my mind and went on to Chancery Lane. I must keep my word to O'Rane. Had I wished to break it, I could not; and, with this sense of impotence, something of my old anxiety returned. Raney would not have summoned me for a trifle; if he needed me, there was danger; yet I had told Barbara that I should be as safe with him as if I stayed in Seymour Street. . . .

From Chancery Lane I stumbled to my office at a pace that left no time for morbid fancies. O'Rane was in my room, sitting by the fire and slapping a stick lazily against his boot. I have never seen any one less like a figure of destiny, urging me to an unknown doom. At the vaguest hint, he would have insisted on my going back to Barbara.

"Is there any more news?," I asked. "I came as soon as I could."

"It's very good of you. No, I've heard nothing since that first rumour," he answered. "If I had, I wouldn't have bothered you; but I've been trying for two hours to get through to my secretary, and the girl at the exchange tells me every time that there's no answer. I expect the hunger-march has disorganized everything; and I can smell a pretty thick fog even if I can't see it. . . . Shall we start, or is there anything you want to do here first?"

As we set out, I realized that in the darkness of night or the greater darkness of a fog the blind man has an advantage over those who are guided by their eyes. With a murmured "Chancery Lane Tube; and then change at Tottenham Court Road", O'Rane piloted me more surely and far more quickly than I could have found my way unaided. The contents-bills outside the station proclaimed—rather superfluously—"*Fog-Pall over London*"; but, beyond one or two collisions and an accident with a runaway horse on the Embankment, I could find no news. "*Griffiths' Armies*" were given a headline of no more than medium size; and their progress had been followed

less far than Philip Hornbeck had carried it that morning. The peaceful encounter with the police in Regent's Park was briefly described; but of the barricades which Sonia had seen at Westminster there was no mention.

"By the way, you know Griffiths has turned up again?," I said. "Your wife was lunching with us; and I gathered that he'd called on you at The Sanctuary. That was just before lunch."

"What's happened to him?," O'Rane asked.

"Sonia told him you weren't at home."

"Did she send him to the office?"

"I believe she did."

O'Rane's face grew grave; but he only muttered a hope that he would be in time to meet the deputation.

"This is a moment for desperate remedies," he explained. "That's why I came to see you in the first place. Most of these fellows will starve, and a fair number will go berserk if we don't do something for them. I've had leave to turn Millbank Gardens into a canteen; so we can look after any one who comes to The Sanctuary. Only a few, though, will penetrate into the heart of London; the main armies are still in the suburbs; and if we can set up relief-camps at Wimbledon, Hounslow, Hampstead, Epping . . . I wanted you to help me with the plans . . . Are we nearly there yet?," he enquired with sudden impatience.

"It's the next station," I answered.

On the high ground of Hampstead, the fog lay whiter, with a tantalizing promise that it would clear at any moment. As we came out of the lift, I could read without difficulty the shop-signs on the opposite side of the street, though the higher ground of the Heath alternated patches of afternoon light with pockets of mist as impenetrable as anything I had seen at the Marble Arch. Of hunger-marchers I could find no trace; but here, as everywhere in London, the police seemed to have been multiplied a hundredfold.

"Take my arm," O'Rane ordered. "I can shew you a short cut."

Leaving the main road, I followed him through devious alleys until a sense of open spaces hinted that we must be near the Heath. After the noise of the train, the silence of these empty lanes was unearthly; after the thronged street by the station, we seemed to be alone in the world.

“This reminds me of a raid-night in the war,” I said, as we plunged into a belt of fog. “Pitch-dark. Deserted. And all the time you feel there are thousands of people within touching-distance of you.”

Before he could answer, we had come again into a broad street and were within touching-distance of a crowd that seemed to number thousands, though I could only see the first three or four ranks.

“Is this one of the armies?,” O’Rane asked, as he turned, almost without checking, down a footway between two villas.

“Spectators, I think. It was more like a football crowd than a demonstration.”

“What the devil’s a crowd doing here?,” he asked with the first note of anxiety that I had heard in his voice. “There’s nothing to see, except my office. . . . Hold on a minute while I find the key. I’m going to take you in the back way.”

As we halted, I observed that the footway had brought us to a high brick wall with a wooden door in the middle. O’Rane was fitting the key into the lock when the door opened from the inside and a constable flashed his bull’s-eye into our faces.

“Now then, what are you up to?,” he demanded truculently.

“This is my office,” O’Rane answered.

“Sorry, sir. My orders are not to let any one in.”

“But you can’t keep me out of my own house. Where’s the inspector?”

The constable levelled the beam of his lamp on us again, this time with marked indecision. O’Rane’s voice had a ring of authority; and the key which he held was superficial evidence of good faith.

“Are you Mr. O’Rane, sir?,” asked the constable. “The inspector’s been trying to get hold of you. Maybe . . . you haven’t heard, sir?”

“Haven’t heard what?”

“The place has been smashed about, sir. Them hunger-marchers . . .”

“Any one hurt?”

“None of your people, sir; but we had to take our truncheons to the others. If you’ll see the inspector, sir . . .”

O'Rane bent his head and passed through the doorway, dragging me behind him by the wrist. Our path lay through an overgrown clump of evergreens; and, when we came into the open, on a strip of blighted lawn, it was my turn to catch O'Rane's wrist while I surveyed the damage. So far as I could see in the uncertain light, there was not one whole pane of glass in the place; a door, torn from its hinges, lay athwart one of the trampled flower-beds; and under the boarding of the penthouse that did duty for a waiting-room there trickled a thin stream of black water. The lawn was carpeted with files and ledgers; the doorways were blocked with broken chairs; and the air was heavy with the smell of wet ashes.

"The place is wrecked?," O'Rane broke in on my description. "That's enough for the present. Find me the man in charge."

In a corner of the main office we came upon a group of three constables, one inspector and two unexplained men in plain-clothes. They were talking in undertones round a table on which O'Rane's secretary lay in a dead faint. Another clerk, white-faced and tremulous, sat in another corner with a telephone; a third wandered distractedly about the room, tidying books into place and sobbing gently to herself.

"This is Mr. O'Rane," I told the inspector. "We understand no one's been killed. That's all we know."

"It's not the fault of those others that some one *wasn't* killed. Excuse me, sir, she's coming to," he added in an undertone. "Don't hurry her! Stand back there and give her room."

3

Five minutes later we began to build up a composite explanation from the inspector's report and the evidence of the three eye-witnesses. Shortly after one o'clock a man had called to see Mr. O'Rane; he gave no name, but said that he had been sent to the office from Westminster. On hearing that Mr. O'Rane was not yet arrived, he explained that he was spokesman of a deputation and would like to wait for an interview. The one clerk who was on duty during the luncheon-hour then tried to make an appointment for the next morning on the ground that Mr. O'Rane had said he would not be at the office until late, if indeed he came at all that day. The spokesman of the deputation replied that he had heard that story before and enquired sarcastically if he should lead his men back to Westminster.

"He said he'd come all the way from the north," interposed O'Rane's secretary. "I guessed then he was one of the hunger-marchers; and I . . .

didn't like the way he spoke. So, when he turned to call the others, I gave him a push and slammed the door behind him. Then . . . then . . . then . . ."

O'Rane patted the girl's hand while the inspector resumed his narrative. Barred from one entrance, the rioters attacked the other and succeeded in wrenching the door down. Inside, their conduct at first was orderly: some stretched themselves on the floor, others collected round the fires; when the police arrived, however, one or two got out of hand: tables were overturned, drawers ransacked and the safe bombarded, ineffectually enough, with sticks and stones. Then two arrests were made; and the crowd settled down to fight in earnest. Those who were outside shattered the windows with every missile that came to hand; those within overturned the furniture, flung the books from their shelves and kicked burning coals into the midst of the wreckage. When the truncheons came into place, the attack collapsed; but, with half-a-dozen exceptions, the invaders had made good their escape.

"Which way did they go?," asked O'Rane.

"Every way, sir, as far as we could see. They were lost in the fog before they were out of the garden."

"I understand. Well, they're not likely to come back, but I suppose you'll leave some one to look after the place. I shall be here first thing to-morrow morning, but I've rather a lot to do now. Can you arrange for some one to take these ladies home? I don't like them to wander about unprotected. George, I want you."

As I followed him into the ruins of his private office, he asked me if Sonia had mentioned where she was going that afternoon.

"I imagine, to The Sanctuary," I answered. "She had tickets for a private view, but I heard her say it was too dark to do anything except go to bed."

"And the best place too. Will you get hold of the other telephone and tell her to bar the door and put the shutters up in the library? All the ground-floor rooms without shutters must be locked on the outside. She's not to go to the door on any pretext; and there must be no lights in any window. If I want to get in, I'll use the fire-escape; so she must leave the nursery-window open. Tell her—without frightening her, if possible—that I'm asking the police to draft some additional men into the neighbourhood . . ."

"You think this gang has gone back?," I interrupted.

This was the first time that I had engaged in any adventure with O'Rane; and I began to appreciate some of his qualities of leadership. Always knowing what he wanted, he made his followers want it with equal intensity;

fearless himself, he subdued fear in others. I felt that he would stand back to back with me against an army corps; and it was only natural that I should wish to stand back to back with him.

"It's more than likely. They're out for blood now . . . thanks to Sonia's damned folly in sending them here when I told her I shouldn't be near the place. I should want somebody's blood myself if I'd had a trick like that played on me."

I sent O'Rane's message in his own words, not caring greatly whether I frightened Sonia so long as she obeyed to the letter. Then I telephoned to Seymour Street to give a similar warning. I would not speak to Barbara for fear she should try to argue; but I instructed Robson to put the house in preparation for a siege. Griffiths had honoured me with one call; in his mind I was intimately associated with O'Rane; I did not want him to call a second time until I had prepared a suitable reception for him.

"Tell her ladyship that there's a certain amount of rioting," I said, "and it is my urgent wish that she shall not go out of doors. Mr. O'Rane's office has been damaged, though—fortunately—no one has been injured. I'm going with him to his house in Westminster, just to see that everything's all right there. Then I shall come straight home."

As I finished speaking, O'Rane came into the room and asked if I had sent his message.

"Then I needn't keep you, old man," he added. "It was good of you to see me through. One's sometimes extraordinarily helpless without one's eyes."

"I'm coming back with you," I said.

"Why?"

"Because . . . one is sometimes extraordinarily helpless without one's eyes."

"But this isn't your show. Sonia set the match to the fire; and I must put it out."

"I may be able to lend a hand."

O'Rane stood silent for a moment. Then he shook his head and turned to the door:

"I'm not going to let you in for this. You have . . . other responsibilities."

"It's as bad as that?"

“It may be. You’ve never seen a mob out of temper.” . . .

“If you’re right, I may see one to-day. I’m not going to let you go alone, Raney.”

“It’s . . . good of you; but I think you’re a fool.”

“Well, that’s as may be,” I answered. “Come on.”

4

As we hurried to the station, I told O’Rane that the approaches to Westminster had been barricaded earlier in the day and suggested that we should make for The Sanctuary by way of Waterloo and Lambeth. He nodded without speaking; and, after that, I left him undisturbed. I am not, I never have been, anything that could be called “a man of action”; I did not know whether we were hastening into the vortex of a revolution; and, if I had known, I should have had no idea what to do.

“I’m simply waiting for your orders,” I reminded him, as we struggled out of the lift.

“And I’m waiting for you to tell me what’s happening. How’s the fog?”

“I really believe it’s thicker than ever.”

“Good. Take my arm and come for all you’re worth. There’s no difference to me between night and day or fog and sunshine; but there’s all the difference in the world to these other fellows. I figure out that Griffiths’ gang ought to be arriving just about now, if they’ve come on foot. And if they’ve come at all. The police ought to be there before them, with luck. We’ve no idea of numbers on either side; but one policeman, attacking or defending, is a match for quite a few people who haven’t made up their minds how far they want to go. And it’s a trained against an untrained force. On the other hand, the police can’t go to extremes until they’re driven.”

“And in pitch darkness,” I added, “numbers and training and the majesty of the law don’t count for much.”

“I’m banking on that. This may be a one-man show. Me. The fog’s still holding everywhere? Good again. We’re all blind for this evening, but I’ve had more than seven years’ start of the others. I haven’t bumped you once so far? I can *feel* when people are near. And I’m coming to know London like my own bedroom. There’s a crossing here, with rather a high kerb. Left incline to the refuge! There’s a lorry feeling his way along . . . and getting tied up with a south-bound tram. We can go on now. People aren’t

frightened of a fog nearly as much as I should have expected. When I remember the agony of fear I went through when I was blinded . . . The helplessness . . . Here's Westminster Bridge, but I don't think it's the least use trying that."

We hurried along the south bank of the river and only crossed when we were safely in the rear of all possible pickets.

"What happens if we get separated?," I asked.

"Look after yourself as best you can, but don't call me by name. D'you know *Lilliburlero*? Well, pretend you're Uncle Toby and whistle that when you get a chance, just to shew me where you are. If you want help, whistle *John Peel*. I'll get to you if I can . . . Of course, we *may* find everything as peaceful as the grave. If we do, I think I shall still take the precaution of moving Sonia and the boys to some other part of London."

"Bring them to Seymour Street," I suggested.

"I will, thankfully. If we find there's a scrap in progress, we must arrange a retreat. There'll be nobody on the west side of the house, because there are no windows for any one to break on the ground floor; and there's a fairly high wall round the stable-yard. If you'll keep *cavé*, I'll slip in there and go up the fire-escape. I'll give you the first line of *The Campbells Are Coming* to know if the coast's clear; if you'll reply with *Over the Hills and Far Away*, I shall know I can unlock the door. From there, the way is by Smith Square, Great College Street and Dean's Yard. The gates will be shut against us; but the police will open them. . . . Are you feeling at all nervous?"

"A bit keyed-up. This damned fog . . ."

"You may live to bless it. If for any reason we don't both get through, we'll say good-bye now. Slow down a bit; we can't be more than fifty yards from the corner."

Though I fancied we were still half a mile away, I discovered—by the abrupt change from stucco to brick—that we had indeed reached the south side of the house. So far as I could see or hear, the neighbourhood was deserted; but a single distant thud, followed by a sharp tinkle, told me that some one on the other side of the house had broken a window and that the missile had been stopped by a shutter. I heard hurried footsteps and pulled up within an inch of colliding with a young policeman. His truncheon was drawn; and he had lost his helmet.

"You gentlemen had best keep out of this," he warned us.

“What’s happening?,” I asked. “Are these the hunger-marchers?”

“I reckon so. And they’re out for mischief. If you could see them, it wouldn’t be so bad . . .”

He broke off as a fusillade of stones rattled against the house. A hollow ‘plump’, like the sound of a weight dropped into water, indicated another broken window; and in the moment’s silence that followed we heard another tinkle of glass.

“The house will stand a good deal of that,” O’Rane murmured. “They’ve had no luck with the door?”

“Two or three got in by the area window,” stated the constable. “Now they can’t get out again. There are two men waiting for them.”

O’Rane broke into an unexpected laugh:

“I’m afraid they’ll have a long wait. That’s the cellar; and the door’s sure to be locked. I hope they’ll find the wine to their taste.”

“Is this your house, sir?,” asked the policeman. “You’d best not let them see you, then. They’re after you.”

“So it seems,” O’Rane answered, as a new volley of stones rattled on to the pavement and a series of short scuffles gave place to the sound of running feet.

The battle, we were told, had been raging for half-an-hour. At first the assailants had concentrated on the front door; when that refused to yield, they began to break every window within reach until the police scattered them. Then the attack was transferred to a distance. On the Embankment twenty yards away, where the road was under repair, lay miscellaneous heaps of stones and granite blocks. By these the hunger-marchers collected and bombarded both the house and the newly formed cordon. It was a difficult attack to meet at any time, but the fog made it impossible. When the police charged, the assailants slipped between and round them, to reassemble in flank and to continue their bombardment of the house at close-quarters; when the police charged back, the hunger-marchers returned to their ammunition-dump and reopened a long-range fire. The present lull in the fighting was due to a change of tactics: half the police were stationed in open order round the house, while the other half encircled the granite piles to cut off supplies. Their numbers, however, were insufficient to hold either position effectively; and, though further reinforcements were reported to be on their way, there were enough stones lying loose about the house for a long spell of irregular practice.

"Is that fellow Griffiths in charge?," asked O'Rane.

"I've heard so," answered the constable.

"I want to get hold of him. This must be stopped, but it's no good breaking heads and putting people under arrest. We must stop it before the reinforcements come up and the whole thing starts again. There's a lot to be said for these fellows: they're hungry, to begin with, and they've been fooled by everybody, Griffiths most of all. The first thing they need is a meal; and I'm going to promise them that, if they'll stop this stone-throwing business. And after that we must find 'em a place for the night; but I must promise them there'll be no arrests. Where's the inspector?"

"He's guarding the area window, sir."

"I hope to God I can make my voice heard," O'Rane muttered, as he vanished from my side to be swallowed up in the fog.

I waited with the constable because I had been given no orders. He had been on duty for little more than half-an-hour and could tell me nothing of the battle's beginning. On the other hand, he told me much about the rest of London: my premonition of a duel between Griffiths and the O'Ranes had come true; in every other part, the hunger-marchers were being peacefully conducted to makeshift kitchens and dormitories; Hampstead was quiet again; and this brawl, between unknown numbers on either side, was the nearest approach—as Philip Hornbeck might have said—to barricade-fighting.

Only a brawl, but an unpleasant brawl. I do not remember feeling unusually frightened, though I was more than usually helpless. From time to time a stone hurtled over my head or skated along the pavement at my feet; of all futile precautions, I pulled my hat over my eyes and turned up my coat-collar; also, I heard a sustained cursing of this Egyptian darkness and was surprised to recognize my own voice behind it. I could not see my watch; I have no idea how long it was before the next fusillade was followed by the now inevitable scuffling rush. Then came the sound of O'Rane's voice from the front of the house. He called several times for Griffiths; and, when no answer came, he began to talk to the crowd and at their leader in the same breath.

Only once before had I heard O'Rane address a mass-meeting: that was in the early days of the war, when he came to gather recruits and wagered light-heartedly that he would stampede the meeting in five minutes. He won his bet; but then he had been able to see his audience, and his audience

yielded to the double hypnotism of his voice and eyes. Now he was talking to a blind tent of darkness. I could not watch the effect; I could not tell how many heard him nor how many were present to hear. It was something that they listened in silence; but, until the speech was over, neither he nor I could tell for certain whether any one was in earshot.

There was little more in what he said now than in what he had rehearsed to me. After telling the crowd his name—which was received in silence—, he explained that, when the deputation called earlier in the day and at the moment when it was marching on his office in Hampstead, he had been taking steps to procure food for men whose only fault at that time was that they had listened to promises which could not be kept. If they did not know that, Griffiths did; the government had stated a dozen times that it would not receive their leaders; and the sympathy which the hunger-marchers had aroused on their way to London would vanish in a moment if they destroyed houses and helped themselves to private property. Though it was too late to undo the harm already done, it could be overlooked. If the rioting stopped instantly, no steps would be taken against the rioters, with the exception of Griffiths himself, against whom the police already held a warrant for inciting to crime. Further, immediate steps would be taken to provide shelter and food; but the stone-throwing must stop. Those who came forward empty-handed would be marshalled and led to Millbank Gardens, where supplies had already been collected.

The speech was over in three minutes; but twice that time passed before any answer came. I moved round to the front of the house, but the place from which O'Rane's voice had issued was occupied by a single policeman. There was no more stone-throwing, but I could see nothing of the besieging army. Once I whistled a few bars of *Lilliburlero*, but they passed unacknowledged. Then I walked in a wider compass towards the battlefield on the Embankment. Everything was silent, every one was still; and each man suspected his neighbour. I could see neither policemen nor rioters until I was within a yard of them; then a face would leap at me out of the grey fog. Usually it was frightened, sometimes it was angry; always it seemed thin, hopeless and bewildered. The stench was oppressive; the sense of silent numbers suffocating.

As I turned back towards the house, I felt a slight tremor among the men who surrounded me. Perhaps my own aimless movement had given them the lead they were awaiting. Those ahead of us were pushed forward; those behind hurried to catch up. Suspicion seemed to die down; and I heard a hoarse murmur of conversation. Finding myself alone, I tried *Lilliburlero*

again; and with an answering whistle O'Rane slipped like a snake through the intervening ranks and stationed himself at my side.

"You all right?," he whispered.

"Yes, thanks. It's over, Raney. What d'you want me to do now?"

"Let's be sure first that it *is* over. . . . I don't like the sound of *that*."

Taking my arm, he led me in the direction of a voice that seemed to be answering his own speech. I could not hear the words; and, if I suspected the voice to be Griffiths', that was only because a curious snarl, passed from lip to lip, was taken up as a cry.

"They're saying it's a trap," I told O'Rane.

"Trap . . . Trap . . . Trap . . ." came the snarl; and those who were nearest the house turned headlong till we were almost swept off our feet.

"Trap be damned," shouted a voice; and in place of the mutters and snarls came the roar of two opposing armies.

5

It was very much as I had foreseen; very much as I had predicted to Griffiths himself. His men were turning against him.

When hunger first became unbearable, they soothed their anger with a dose of wholesale destruction. If Griffiths had not urged them to it, I have never heard any one suggest that he tried to restrain them; I should be sceptical if any one told me that he had marched them from Hampstead to Westminster with another thought than to offer them a further dose of the same sedative. By this time, however, the men were realizing that broken windows brought satisfaction to no one but the fortunate two or three who had dug themselves into the wine-cellar. I hoped they would remain there. In a lull between two bursts of shouting I heard a subterranean bellowing; one or two bottles were flung up and promptly smashed by the inspector of police. I did not want our complications to be increased by the madness that comes to starving men who have inflamed their aching stomachs with strong liquor. O'Rane, if he aimed at dividing the enemy, could not have chosen a happier moment for exposing Griffiths to his followers. Their resentment of that day's leadership became lost in a greater resentment of the leadership that had dragged them to London. Fear sharpened the antagonism of those who had heard a moment before that they were being incited by Griffiths to crime; the police were still very near; and O'Rane had promised an amnesty to all who threw down their missiles and came forward peacefully.

Amnesty and immediate food. The collective cry of hunger was less than human; but, as I had predicted, the disappointed mob had vengeance to wreak on the author of its misfortunes before it could eat in comfort of mind. As though a barrier had fallen, there was a rush towards the corner of the street where an excited voice could still be heard haranguing of 'traps'.

"That fellow will be lynched if we don't get him away!," O'Rane cried.

"You'll be lynched yourself," I answered, "if you get mixed up with his gang."

Even as I spoke, the tide hung and turned. As I might have foreseen, as Griffiths himself had told me, he could look after himself. Again I could not hear his words; for part of the time I fancy he was speaking in Welsh; and he held his audience. The opposing clamour dwindled and died away. The hoarse cheers of his supporters spread until they were taken up all round us. There was a pause of perfect stillness, like the moment when a gigantic wave gathers before breaking; then the mob turned as one man upon the house.

Griffiths had won that round.

"I imagine this must be something like the storming of the Bastille," O'Rane murmured coolly.

"They're absolutely out of hand. The police are using their truncheons, too," I added, as the sickening smack of hard wood on human flesh and bone was followed by yelps of rage and whimpering moans.

"I haven't heard anything of our precious reinforcement . . . There's a most awful reek of whisky."

"They're looting the cellar. Once *that* begins . . ."

"If they'll get drunk quietly, it will be the best thing in the world for everybody. . . . D'you smell burning?"

I sniffed; but my duller senses told me nothing till I saw a distant orange glow fainter than the reflection of a winter sunset.

"They've started a fire. I can't see where."

"Is it making any difference to the fog?"

"No, but I believe the fog's lifting. I can see . . . oh, ten yards. Come out of the way: I think the police are going to charge again."

Though I dragged at his arm, O'Rane stayed motionless.

"If the fog's lifting . . .," he murmured slowly. Then, for the second time that evening, he gripped my hand. "We must go while the going's good. The stable-door. And afterwards by Smith Square and Great College Street."

I found myself suddenly alone. The fog was certainly lifting, for I could see the concerted rush of the police, though I was not in time to get out of their way. It was a truncheon, I think, and not a stray stone that brought me down. I remember excruciating pain at the side of my head; I remember my knees giving slowly beneath me; and then, for a time, I remember nothing more.

6

When I came to, the fire was invisible; but the battle was still raging. My glasses were gone; my head ached savagely; and an ungentle foot had trodden my left hand to a bleeding pulp. I felt overpoweringly sick; and I wanted to crawl away from all this din till I had recovered my nerve. I did not know why I was there at all.

Then I remembered O'Rane and the stable-door.

During the war, I was told by many of my friends that, in the first moments after being slightly wounded, they became wholly demoralized: they might have been facing intensive fire for several hours on end without undue discomfort, but, when once they had been hit, they dodged and cowered their way back to the clearing-station as though the heavens were raining shrapnel upon them. My own demoralization, as I slunk away and made for the stable-door by the other side of the house, was more complete than I care to remember: I ducked, I sidestepped, I ran, I hid, everywhere pursued by the reek and roar of struggling humanity, convinced against all reason that I alone was visible in the darkness and that every missile was deliberately aimed at me.

The stable-door was locked; I could see no one near it; and I sank to the ground till I should faint again or be trampled to death. There was some challenge, some pass-word for me to remember; but, when I heard a whistle, I forgot my orders and called out: "Here I am! All clear."

There was a precautionary pause before the door was opened. Then O'Rane pushed a small, muffled figure towards me and stepped into the road with a second figure, slightly larger and equally muffled, in his arms.

"Shut the door quietly and follow me," he whispered. "It locks itself."

"Where's Sonia?," I asked.

"I must go back for her. She's rather rattled."

I cannot say whether my recovery was the natural result of time or whether I was infected by O'Rane's unruffled calm. His companionship meant much; his air of authority more; and, if I was still frightened, I hope at least that I did not shew it. A very few steps, moreover, brought us into comparative quiet; and I could forget the red-hot pain in my head.

"The fog *is* lifting," I told O'Rane.

"The deuce it is!" He stopped suddenly and lowered his burden to the ground. "You must take Daniel as well, while I go back. Sonia wouldn't face the fire-escape; and I must carry her down. There's no time to lose, because these fellows have been filling up on neat spirit; and I came across a dud incendiary-bomb . . . which doesn't look like clean fighting. You're in Smith Square now. Feel your way round the church railings, then straight ahead, then to the left as far as you can go. Knock up any of the Abbey people and say these children must be taken in. Give them *your* address and beat it for home. We shall join you as soon as we can. Go carefully," he added in a whisper. "There's some one coming. Oh, it's only a woman. *She* won't hurt you."

As he turned back to The Sanctuary, I gave Daniel my undamaged hand while I hoisted little David half on to my shoulder. I had heard no footsteps, but somewhere in this bewildering darkness I heard a woman's light cough. Then a voice said:

"Don't look round! I'll take the baby as soon as we're safe, but I want to keep my hands free just in case . . ."

Then we came into a narrow circle of lamp-light and I saw Barbara in tweed jacket and trousers. She had tidied her hair away under one of my hats; and the fingers of her right hand gripped a service revolver.

"When you didn't come . . ." she began.

"You've no right to be here," I exclaimed in horror.

"Just as much right as you, darling. I drove the car here in case any one was . . . hurt. It's in that street by the Church House."

"Then will you shew me the way and take these infants to Seymour Street? Raney will follow as soon as he can bring Sonia down."

"And you?"

"I'm going back to give him a hand."

"Must you?"

"There may be other people in the house. Servants."

Barbara lifted the child off my shoulders into her arms and hurried down a side street. The fog was lifting rapidly, too rapidly; I could see across the street and I wondered how much could be seen on the battlefield outside The Sanctuary.

"If you *must* . . ." Barbara murmured. "George, I told Robson I was coming to see if I could help you; but . . . I brought the car to take back your dead body."

"I've no intention of being killed," I said, "but we can't leave people to be burnt alive."

"Well, . . . take the revolver," said Barbara helplessly.

When we had put the children inside the car, I went back at a run down Great College Street to Smith Square. The fog lay in pockets so that I could see thirty yards at one moment and less than three at another. I fancied, as I neared The Sanctuary, that the noise had diminished; I could see neither fire nor smoke; and, though my own road was deserted, I thought I could hear the patter of running feet. It was more than time for the reinforcements to have arrived; it was more than a likelihood that, with the increasing light, experience and discipline were favouring the police. I was halfway through Smith Square when I heard a sound of crying and saw a woman's figure cowering against the railings. As I went forward, I was greeted with a scream of terror; the figure turned to run, and I recognized Sonia.

Calling her by name, I started in pursuit and brought her back from the scene of riot for which she was blindly heading. Her nerve was gone; and I had dragged and carried her halfway to the car before she could speak coherently. Then I learned that the battle was over, the fire out and Griffiths' army in full flight; but all this was nothing to the unforgettable agony of the bombardment, and she sobbed hysterically as she tried to describe her own sufferings from the moment when she received my message from Hampstead to the moment when her husband climbed through the nursery-window.

"Where *is* Raney?," I asked.

"He's following. He said it was dangerous for us to go together; and I should get along quicker without him. Oh, George, it was so awful! I believe I'm going to faint." . . .

Though I tried to comfort her, I should have had an easier task if she had composed herself wholly or wholly collapsed. Though I had not shared her ordeal, I felt that Sonia was making rather a pitiful exhibition of herself. She was frightened, but so was I; so—under his Gasconnade—was O'Rane; so—without disguise—had Barbara been. When, however, an emergency wrested the direction of her daily life from her own hands, Barbara behaved as tradition and inherited instinct taught her. Though her body might play her false, the dauntless strength of breeding came out in her spirit; she might break down in private; but, once on the public scaffold, she shewed an Elizabethan daring and feared death less than the ague which might make her enemies think she feared death. Alone of us four, Sonia was more concerned for her personal alarms than for the dignity of the order in which we had been brought up.

"It's only a few yards to the car," I told her. "Barbara will look after you. And you'll find the children quite safe. . . . D'you know which way David was coming?"

"No. . . . I just ran for my life. He said he'd follow." . . .

I handed her over to my wife's keeping with no more comment than that she was badly shaken in nerve. There might have been a noticeable contraction of sympathy if Barbara, who had superfluously ventured into this maelstrom through loyalty to me, heard that Sonia had run for her life and left her blind husband to extricate herself from the danger in which she had involved him.

"I'm just going to meet Raney," I said. "He's expecting us either in Dean's Yard or Seymour Street."

"If we've gone before you come back, it'll mean that he's found us first," said Barbara. "Then you'll come home independently. Take care of yourself."

"It's all over now. Even the fog's almost gone."

7

As I returned to The Sanctuary for the last time, I could see—even without my glasses—from one lamp-post to the next. The narrow streets north of Smith Square were almost empty; and I could hardly blame a routed enemy for shying from such sinister avenues of escape. There were more and more people as I drew nearer to the Embankment, all of them rather dazed and many wounded. I saw no dead, though stretchers were being hurried up as I came in sight of The Sanctuary; and of the battle there was

no other sound than a rapid scurry of feet towards Westminster Bridge and Vauxhall.

At the corner of Sanctuary Road I was challenged and stopped by a policeman.

"I'm looking for the gentleman whose house has been attacked," I explained. "I've got his family in a car near by; but he's unfortunately blind, and I don't want him to miss them."

I was allowed through; and, a moment later, I stood in the midst of one of the strangest scenes that I have witnessed. To see, to smell and to touch, it was a blend of shambles and distillery under the combined influence of earthquake and fire. The ground was in places waist-deep with stones; for twenty feet round the house I heard the glass crackling as I walked. More than once I slipped in an ominous pool of blood; and the air was sickly with the smell of whisky and singed clothing.

I whistled and called O'Rane's name, but there was no answer. Every approach was now guarded by police; and on either side of the cordon I heard scuffling as the last unyielding attackers were put under arrest. In the middle of the open square, the wounded were laid out to await the ambulances. I borrowed a lantern and flashed it down the lines, but there was no one remotely resembling Raney.

"I'm going to try the house now," I told the policeman nearest the stables. "If you'll give me a leg up, I can get over the wall and up the fire escape."

There was no one in the yard, no one in the house. As a last hope, I interrogated two or three of the constables; but, if any of them had found time to notice anything my description did not help to identify one half-seen figure in a surging crowd of many thousands.

"Well, if he turns up," I said to the inspector, "will you tell him that all's well and that his family has gone to Mr. Oakleigh's house?"

Then, handing him a card, I bent my steps in the direction of the Church House.

The fog had lifted; and only a faint haze remained. For the first time in many hours I looked at my watch to explain what seemed to be stars. It was nine o'clock; and I became suddenly conscious of great hunger, great fatigue and almost unbearable pain in my head and hand. At the same moment I began to see the events of the afternoon in their perspective.

Nothing quite of this kind had happened for a hundred years. Barbara had confirmed what the policeman told me: this outbreak was isolated and unique. Within the next day or two I was to meet men who had driven unsuspectingly across the battlefield from luncheon-parties an hour before the battle; I was to meet others who drove across the same ground an hour after the surrender and only imagined that the road was under repair. It was local, it was brief; but it was new. Had I seen the beginning or the end? Sardou, I remember, makes one of his characters say: "*An* émeute *is when the mob is conquered; then they are all* canaille; *a revolution is when they are victorious; then they are all heroes*." The *émeute* of to-day, however, becomes not infrequently the revolution of to-morrow. I felt that, in history, this outbreak might mark a turning-point: it would be the first active step towards a social revolution, or it would be the last demonstration of turbulence before a great and orderly people, with a genius for self-government, adjusted itself slowly, pragmatically and irrationally to the new conditions.

I know now, I knew next day, that the collision which loomed so large to me would escape the notice of the most vigilant historian. The average headline in the average paper said no more than: DISORDERLY SCENES IN WESTMINSTER. FEARED LOSS OF LIFE. Then and now I felt and feel that what I witnessed was more than a "disorderly scene". Little more than eight years had passed since the threat of a European war shook us to the foundations of our being. The ardent among us had vowed that, if we won, we would have an order of civilization for which any man would be proud to die. After eight years, the danger of a new war lowered more menacingly than in the summer months of 1914. And the civilization which we had set up to commemorate the war was to be judged on that afternoon's encounter. Had the association of one human being with another, in his national and international grouping, grown so complex that no one could control it? Had the world become like the Roman Empire in its last days, when—for no reason that a statesman of the day or an historian of later days could enunciate—the mighty machine ceased to revolve? If the aim of government was to secure the life and liberty of the governed and to lead them towards prosperity and happiness, government had palpably failed in victorious England and France, in defeated Germany, in revolutionary Russia. My uncle warned me on his death-bed that we were back in 1914; had he been with me now, I must have told him that we were sunk to something incredibly lower than 1914. After the events of this afternoon I did not believe that even O'Rane would dispute that.

Of all the ironies that had chequered his life, I knew of none greater than that his should be the house to be attacked by the most downtrodden and hopeless section of the community. If their salvation could have been helped by his death, he would have given his life for them as lightly as another man might toss a coin to a beggar. Now, if any one had indeed been killed, he would be held indirectly responsible.

I had come to a halt till the pain which every step sent shooting through my head should abate. Looking again at my watch, I saw that I must hasten. By Great College Street, O'Rane had told me, and then into Dean's Yard. As I turned the corner, I had to step aside to avoid an obstacle. Glancing back, I saw that it was a man. He lay stretched on his back, with his arms flung out, midway between two lamp-posts; and I could not be sure whether he was wounded or drunk. I called out to find if he wanted help; but there was no answer. Then I struck a match.

As it flared, I saw what—in some way that I shall never understand—I had been expecting to see. It was this that had sent me back to his side again and again; this, maybe, that had brought Barbara with her car; this, for all I know, that appeared to her in the semblance of black wings beating a prophetic message over the house. O'Rane's hands were cold as ice; the back of his head was brutally smashed. His black eyes stared up to heaven in mild perplexity at the insoluble enigma of death and the eternal paradox of life.

He looked a boy of twenty.

I covered his face and mounted guard over my last and best friend. . . .

Waltham St. Lawrence,
Berkshire, 1923.

THE END

TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Mis-spelled words and printer errors have been corrected. Where multiple spellings occur, majority use has been employed.

Punctuation has been maintained except where obvious printer errors occur.

Page numbers have been removed due to a non-page layout.

[The end of *To-morrow and To-morrow* by Stephen McKenna]