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WAR
&
THE FUTURE

H. G.
WELLS



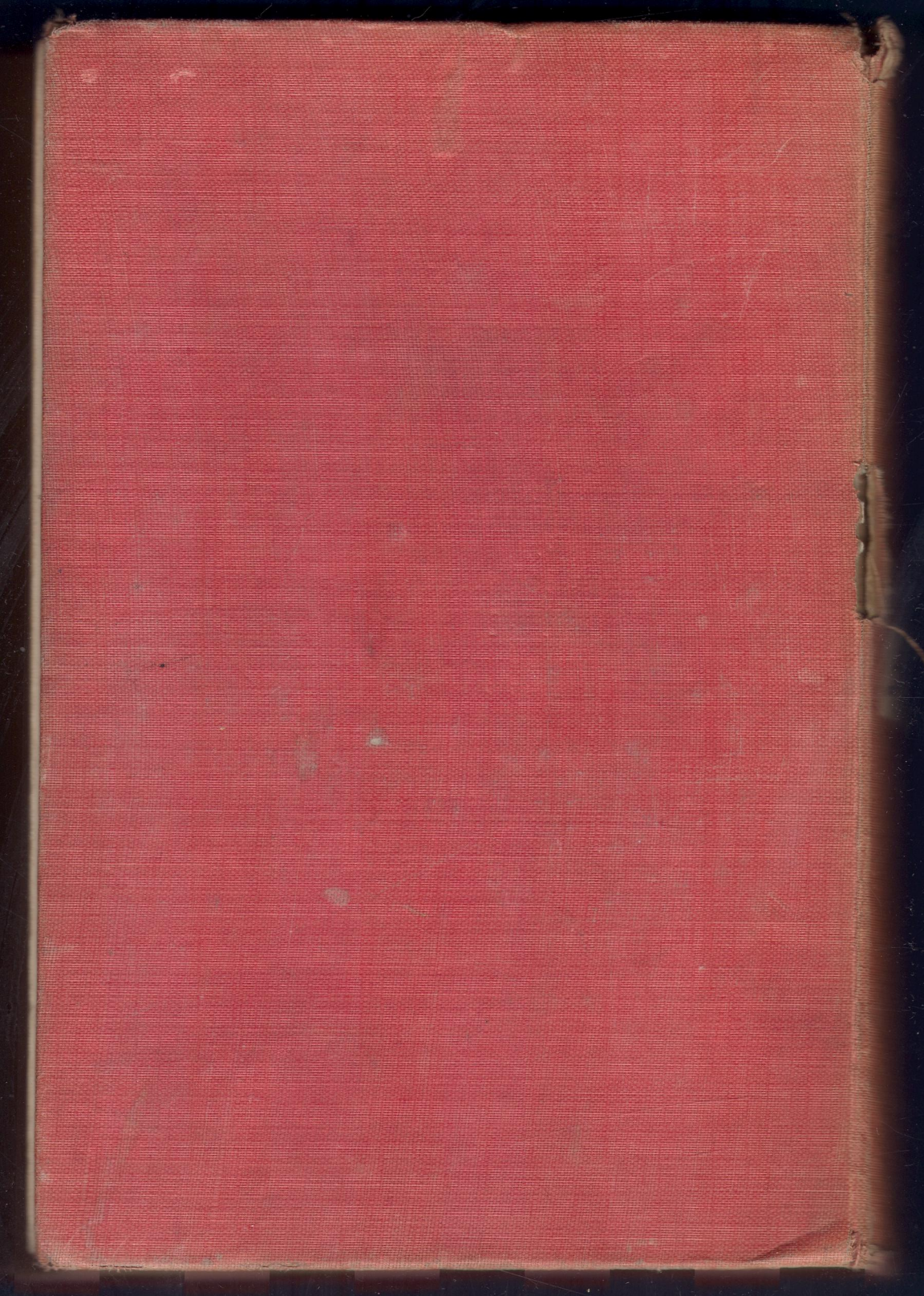
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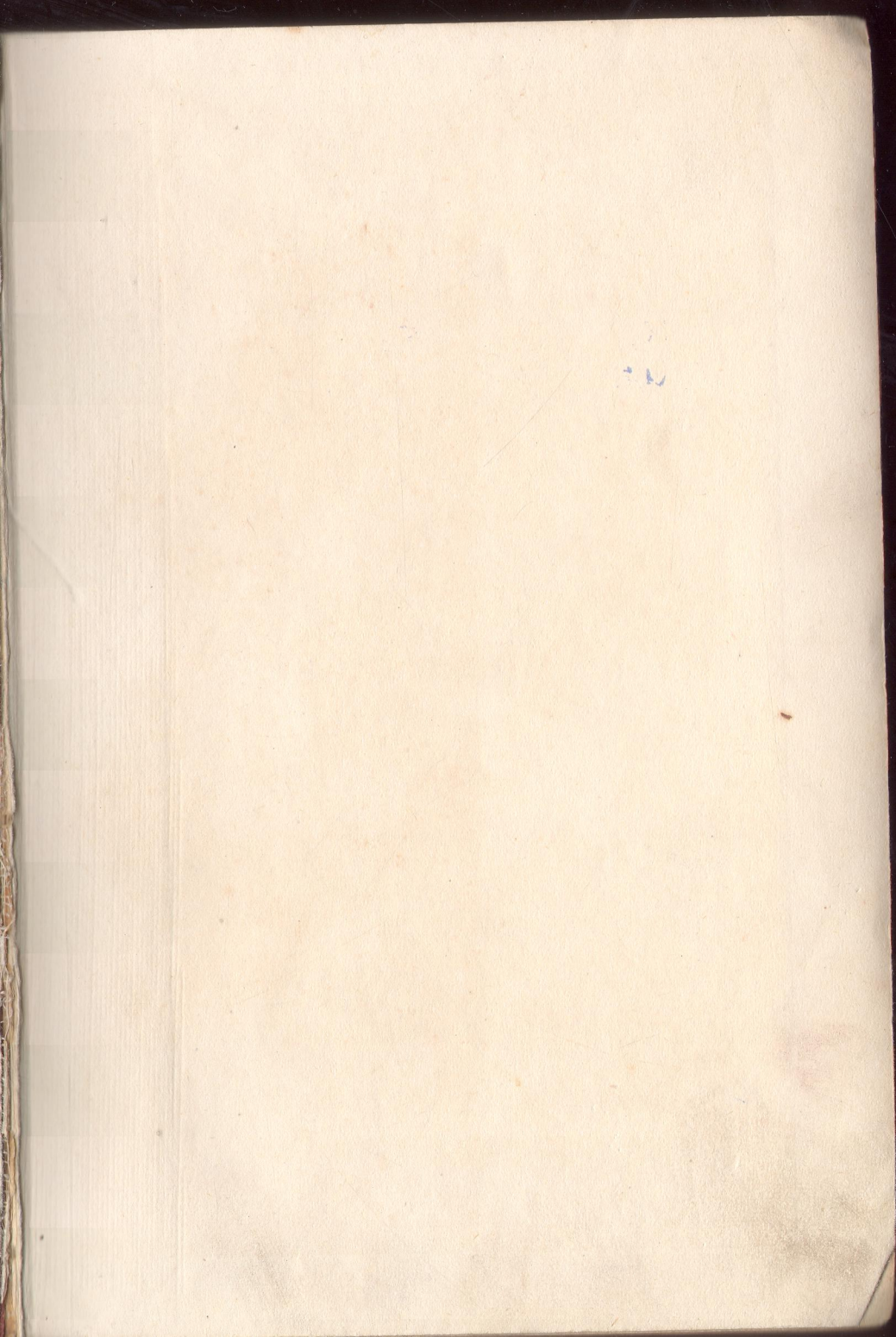
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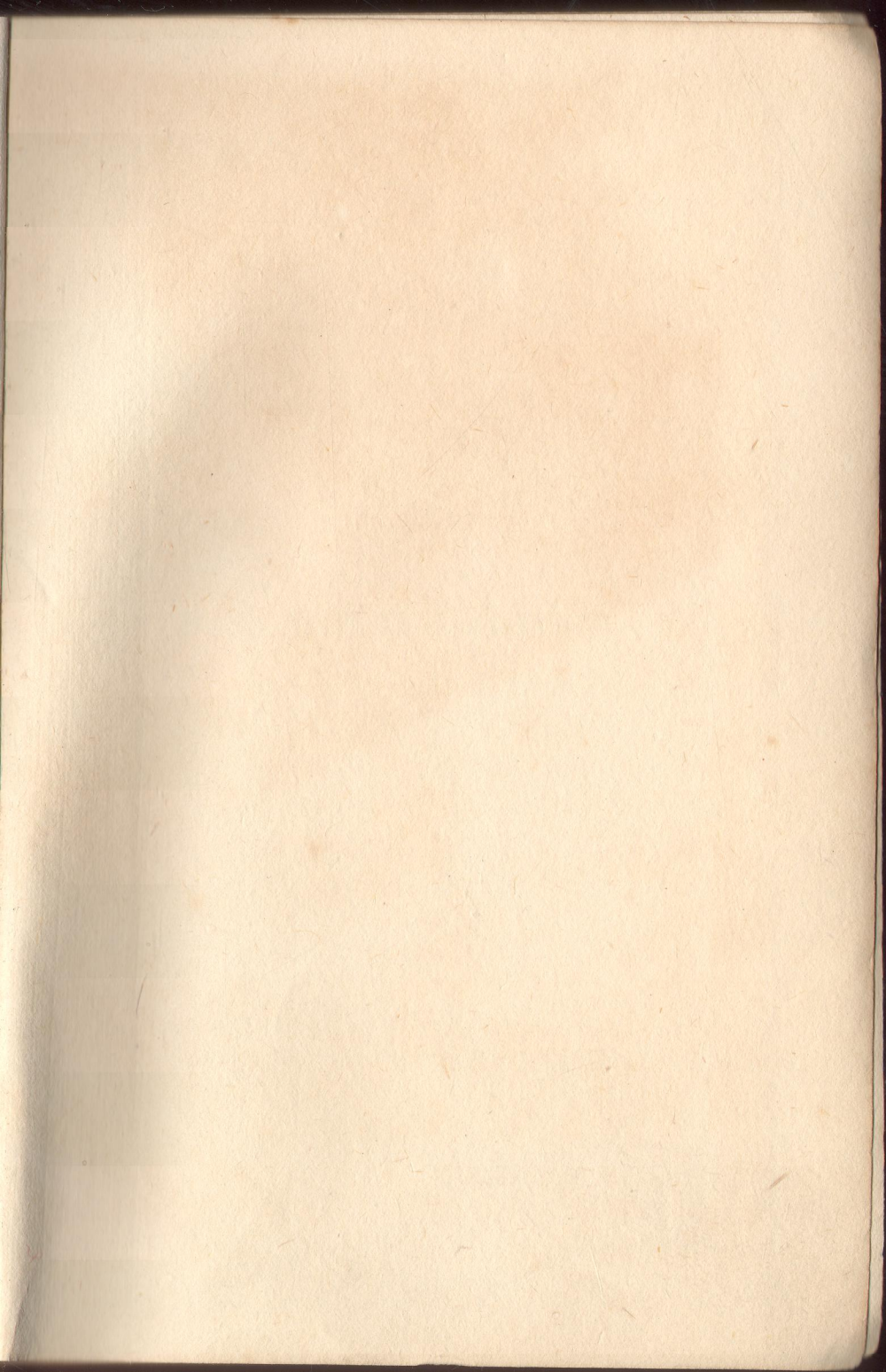


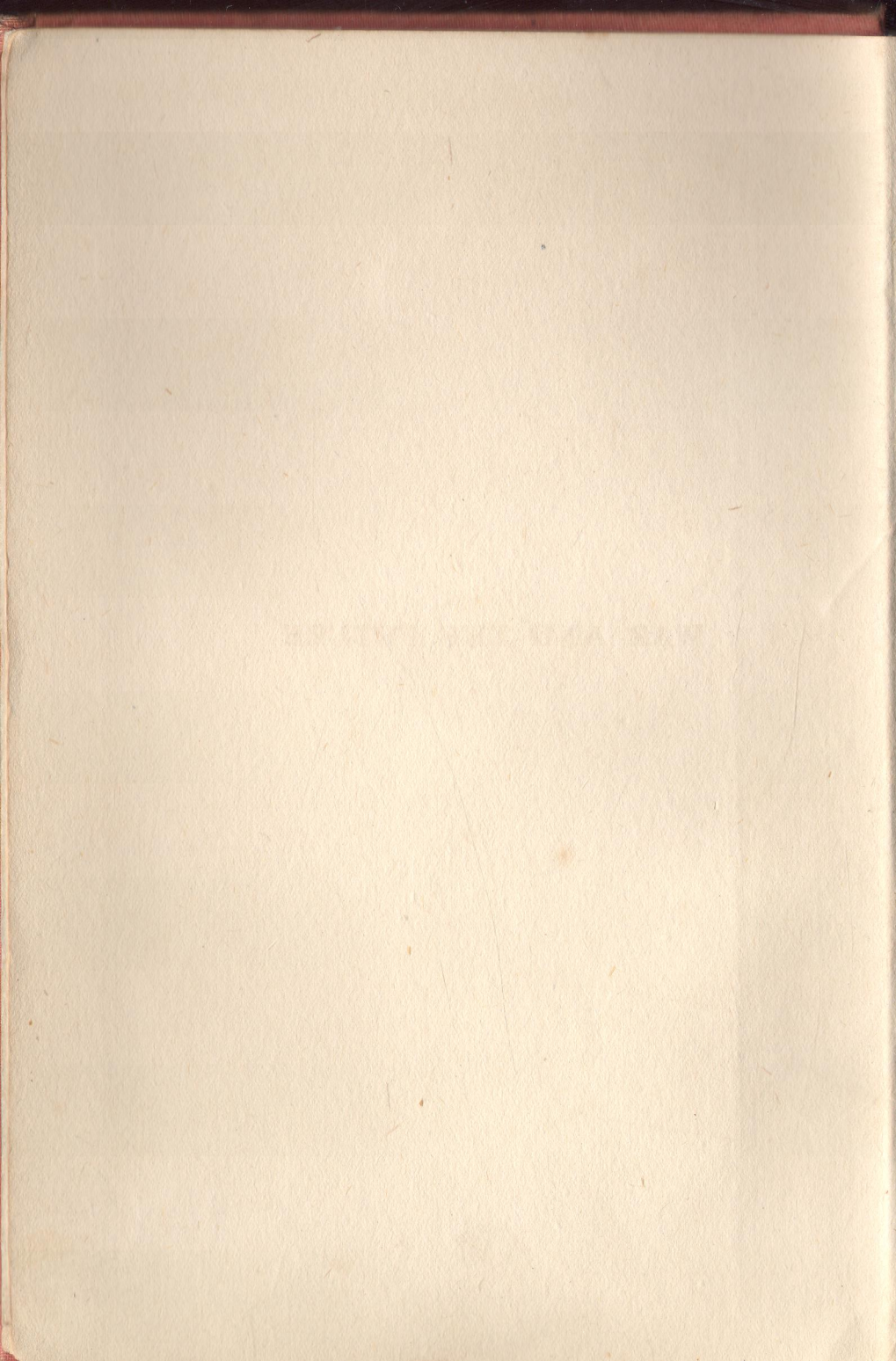
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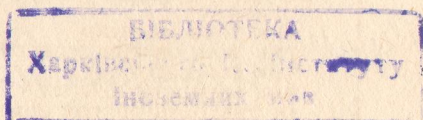
FLOOR GAMES LITTLE WARS

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W-S War and the Future

Italy, France and Britain at War

By

H. G. WELLS



инв. 51334-742

CASELL AND COMPANY, LTD
London, New York, Toronto and Melbourne

1917

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T3(0)532

First published *February*, 1917.
Reprinted March, 1917.

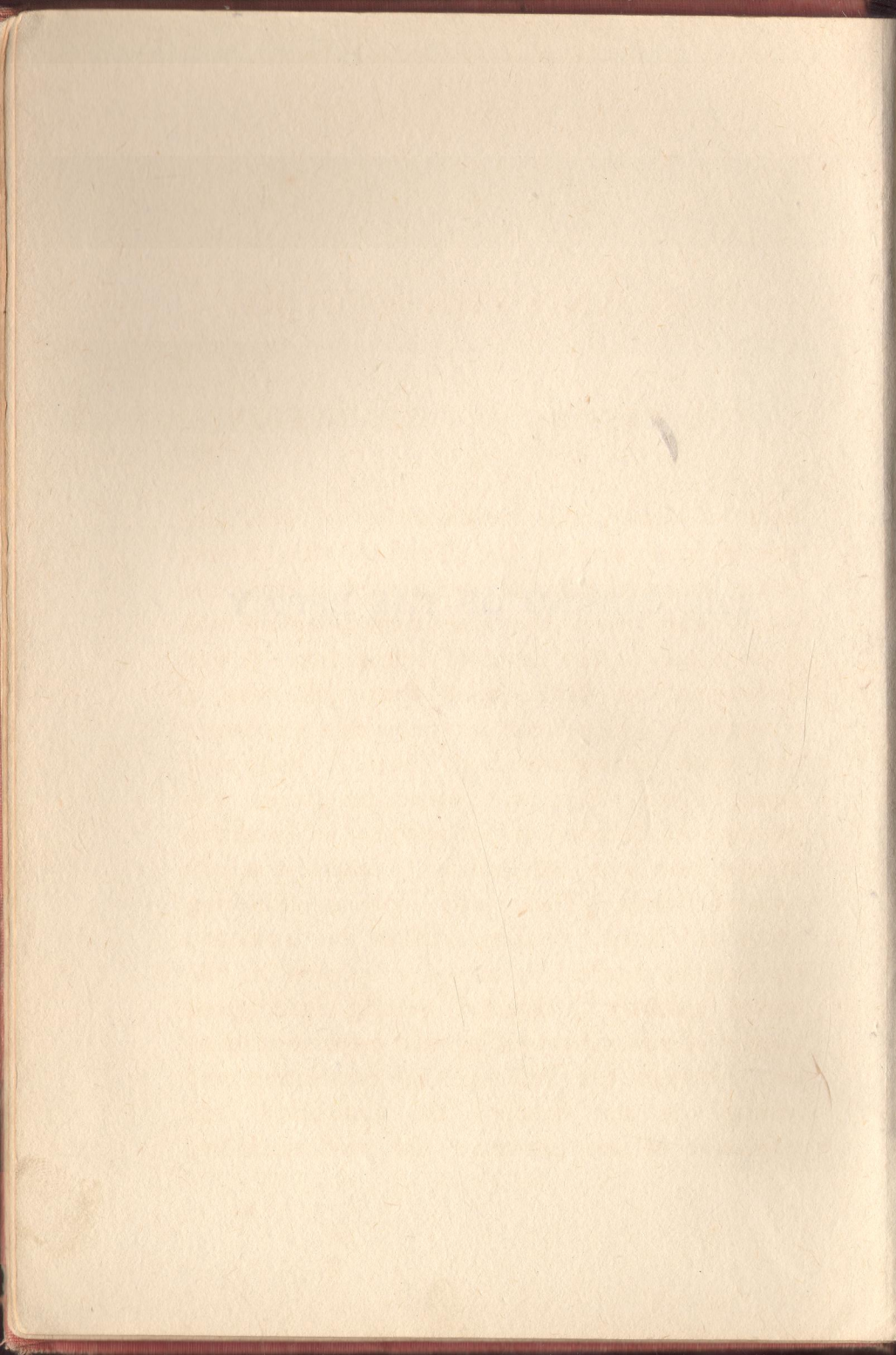


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THE PASSING OF THE EFFIGY



WAR AND THE FUTURE

THE PASSING OF THE EFFIGY

§ 1

ONE of the minor peculiarities of this unprecedented war is the Tour of the Front. After some months of suppressed information—in which even the war correspondent was discouraged to the point of elimination—it was discovered on both sides that this was a struggle in which Opinion was playing a larger and more important part than it had ever done before. This wild spreading weed was perhaps of decisive importance; the Germans at any rate were attempting to make it a cultivated flower. There was Opinion flowering away at home, feeding rankly on rumour; Opinion in neutral countries; Opinion in the enemy country; Opinion getting into great tangles of misunderstanding and incorrect valuation between the Allies. The confidence and courage of the enemy; the amiability and assistance of the neutral; the zeal, sacrifice,

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and serenity of the home population; all were affected. The German cultivation of opinion began long before the war; it is still the most systematic and, because of the psychological ineptitude of Germans, it is probably the clumsiest. The French *Maison de la Presse* is certainly the best organisation in existence for making things clear, counteracting hostile suggestion, and propagating good understanding. The British official organisations are comparatively ineffective; but what is lacking officially is very largely made up for by the good will and generous efforts of the English and American press. An interesting monograph might be written upon these various attempts of the belligerents to get themselves and their proceedings explained.

Because there is perceptible in these developments, quite over and above the desire to influence opinion, a very real effort to get things explained. It is the most interesting and curious—one might almost write touching—feature of these organisations that they do not constitute a positive and defined propaganda such as the Germans maintain. The German propaganda is simple, because its ends are simple; assertions of the moral elevation and loveliness of Germany; of the insuperable excellences of German Kultur, the Kaiser,

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the Crown Prince, and so forth; abuse of the "treacherous" English who allied themselves with the "degenerate" French and the "barbaric" Russians; nonsense about "the freedom of the seas"—the emptiest phrase in history—childish attempts to sow suspicion between the Allies, and still more childish attempts to induce neutrals and simple-minded pacifists of allied nationality to save the face of Germany by initiating peace negotiations. But apart from their steady record and reminder of German brutalities and German aggression, the press organisations of the Allies have none of this definiteness in their task. The aim of the national intelligence in each of the allied countries is not to exalt one's own nation and confuse and divide the enemy, but to get to a real understanding with the peoples and spirits of a number of different nations, an understanding that will increase and become a fruitful and permanent understanding between the allied peoples. Neither the English, the Russians, the Italians nor the French, to name only the bigger European allies, are concerned in setting up a legend, as the Germans are concerned in setting up a legend of themselves to impose upon mankind. They are reality dealers in this war, and the Germans are effigy mongers. Practically the Allies are saying each

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to one another, "Pray come to me and see for yourself that I am very much the human stuff that you are. Come and see that I am doing my best—and I think it is not so very bad a best. . . ." And with that is something else still more subtle, something rather in the form of, "And please tell me what you think of me—and all this."

So we have this curious byplay of the war, and one day I find Mr. Nabokoff, the editor of the *Retch*, and Count Alexy Tolstoy, that writer of delicate short stories, and Mr. Chukovsky, the subtle critic, calling in upon me after braving the wintry seas to see the British fleet; M. Joseph Reinach follows them presently upon the same errand; and then appear photographs of Mr. Arnold Bennett wading in the trenches of Flanders, Mr. Noyes becomes discreetly indiscreet about what he has seen among the submarines, and Mr. Hugh Walpole catches things from Mr. Stephen Graham in the Dark Forest of Russia. All this is quite over and above such writing of facts at first hand as Mr. Patrick McGill and a dozen other real experiencing soldiers,—not to mention the soldiers' letters Mr. James Milne has collected, or the unforgettable and immortal *Prisoner of War* of Mr. Arthur Green—or such admirable war correspondents' work as Mr.

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Philip Gibbs or Mr. Washburne has done. Some of us writers—I can answer for one—have made our Tour of the Fronts with a very understandable diffidence. For my own part I did not want to go. I evaded a suggestion that I should go in 1915. I travel badly, I speak French and Italian with incredible atrocity, and am an extreme Pacifist. I hate soldiering. And also I did not want to write anything “under instruction.” It is largely owing to a certain stiffness in the composition of General Delmé-Radcliffe, the British Military Attaché at the Italian Comando Supremo, that I was at last dislodged upon this journey. General Delmé-Radcliffe is resolved that Italy shall not feel neglected by the refusal of the invitation of the Comando Supremo by anyone who from the perspective of Italy may seem to be a representative of British opinion. If Herbert Spencer had been alive General Radcliffe would have certainly made him come, travelling-hammock, ear clips and all—and I am not above confessing that I wish that Herbert Spencer was alive—for this purpose. I found Udine warm and gay with memories of Mr. Belloc, Lord Northcliffe, Mr. Sidney Low, Colonel Repington and Dr. Conan Doyle, and anticipating the arrival of Mr. Harold Cox. So we pass, mostly in automobiles that bump

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tremendously over war roads, a cloud of witnesses each testifying after his manner. Whatever else has happened, we have all been photographed with invincible patience and resolution under the direction of Colonel Barberich in a sunny little court in Udine.

My own manner of testifying must be to tell what I have seen and what I have thought during this extraordinary experience. It has been my natural disposition to see this war as something purposeful and epic, as something fundamentally as splendid as it is great, as an epoch, as "the War that will end War"—but of that last, more anon. I do not think I am alone in this inclination to a dramatic and logical interpretation. The caricatures in the French shops show civilisation (and particularly Marianne) in conflict with a huge and hugely wicked Hindenburg Ogre. Well, I come back from this tour with something not quite so simple as that. If I were to be tied down to one word for my impression of this war, I should say that this war is *Queer*. It is not like anything in a really waking world, but like something in a dream. It hasn't exactly that clearness of light against darkness or of good against ill. But it has the quality of wholesome instinct struggling under a nightmare. The world is not really awake. This

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vague appeal for explanations to all sorts of people, this desire to exhibit the business, to get something in the way of elucidation at present missing, is extraordinarily suggestive of the efforts of the mind to wake up that will sometimes occur at a dream crisis. My memory of this tour I have just made is full of puzzled-looking men. I have seen thousands of *poilus* sitting about in cafés, by the roadside, in tents, in trenches, thoughtful. I have seen Alpini sitting restfully and staring with speculative eyes across the mountain gulfs towards unseen and unaccountable enemies. I have seen trainloads of wounded staring out of the ambulance train windows as we passed. I have seen these dim intimations of questioning reflection in the strangest juxtapositions; in Malagasy soldiers resting for a spell among the big shells they were hoisting into trucks for the front, in a couple of khaki-clad Maoris sitting upon the step of a horse-van in Amiens station. It is always the same expression one catches, rather weary, rather sullen, intimated. The shoulders droop. The very outline is a note of interrogation. They look up as the privileged tourist of the front, in the big automobile or the reserved compartment, with his officer or so in charge, passes—importantly. One meets a pair of eyes

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that seems to say: "Perhaps *you* understand. . . .

"In which case—— . . . ?"

It is a part, I think, of this disposition to investigate that makes everyone collect "specimens" of the war. Everywhere the souvenir forces itself upon the attention. The homecoming permissionaire brings with him invariably a considerable weight of broken objects, bits of shell, cartridge clips, helmets; it is a peripatetic museum. It is as if he hoped for a clue. It is almost impossible, I have found, to escape these pieces in evidence. I am the least collecting of men, but I have brought home Italian cartridges, Austrian cartridges, the fuse of an Austrian shell, a broken Italian bayonet, and a note that is worth half a franc within the confines of Amiens. But a large heavy piece of exploded shell that had been thrust very urgently upon my attention upon the Carso I contrived to lose during the temporary confusion of our party by the arrival and explosion of another prospective souvenir in our close proximity. And two really very large and almost complete specimens of some species of *Ammonites* unknown to me, from the hills to the east of the Adige, partially wrapped in a back number of the *Corriere della Sera*, that were pressed upon me by a friendly officer,

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were unfortunately lost on the line between Verona and Milan through the gross negligence of a railway porter. But I doubt if they would have thrown any very conclusive light upon the war.

§ 2

I avow myself an extreme Pacifist. I am against the man who first takes up the weapon. I carry my pacifism far beyond the position of that ambiguous little group of British and foreign sentimentalists who pretend so amusingly to be socialists in the *Labour Leader*, whose conception of foreign policy is to give Germany now a peace that would be no more than a breathing time for a fresh outrage upon civilisation, and who would even make heroes of the crazy young assassins of the Dublin crime. I do not understand those people. I do not merely want to stop this war. I want to nail down war in its coffin. Modern war is an intolerable thing. It is not a thing to trifle with in this Urban District Council way, it is a thing to end for ever. I have always hated it, so far that is as my imagination had enabled me to realise it; and now that I have been seeing it, sometimes quite closely for a full month, I hate it more than ever. I never imagined a quarter

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of its waste, its boredom, its futility, its desolation. It is merely a destructive and dispersive instead of a constructive and accumulative industrialism. It is a gigantic, dusty, muddy, weedy, bloodstained silliness. It is the plain duty of every man to give his life and all that he has if by so doing he may help to end it. I hate Germany, which has thrust this experience upon mankind, as I hate some horrible infectious disease. The new war, the war on the modern level, is her invention and her crime. I perceive that on our side and in its broad outlines, this war is nothing more than a gigantic and heroic effort in sanitary engineering; an effort to remove German militarism from the life and regions it has invaded, and to bank it in and discredit and enfeeble it so that never more will it repeat its present preposterous and horrible efforts. All human affairs and all great affairs have their reservations and their complications, but that is the broad outline of the business as it has impressed itself on my mind and as I find it conceived in the mind of the average man of the reading class among the allied peoples, and as I find it understood in the judgment of honest and intelligent neutral observers.

It is my unshakeable belief that essentially

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the Allies fight for a permanent world peace, that primarily they do not make war but resist war, that has reconciled me to this not very congenial experience of touring as a spectator all agog to see, through the war zones. At any rate there was never any risk of my playing Balaam and blessing the enemy. This war is tragedy and sacrifice for most of the world, for the Germans it is simply the catastrophic outcome of fifty years of elaborate intellectual foolery. Militarism, Welt Politik, and here we are! What else *could* have happened, with Michael and his infernal War Machine in the very centre of Europe, but this tremendous disaster?

It is a disaster. It may be a necessary disaster; it may teach a lesson that could be learnt in no other way; but for all that, I insist, it remains waste, disorder, disaster.

There is a disposition, I know, in myself as well as in others, to wriggle away from this verity, to find so much good in the collapse that has come to the mad direction of Europe for the past half-century as to make it on the whole almost a beneficial thing. But at most I can find in it no greater good than the good of a nightmare that awakens a sleeper in a dangerous place to a realisation of the extreme

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danger of his sleep. Better had he been awake—or never there. In Venetia Captain Pirelli, whose task it was to keep me out of mischief in the war zone, was insistent upon the way in which all Venetia was being opened up by the new military roads; there has been scarcely a new road made in Venetia since Napoleon drove his straight, poplar-bordered highways through the land. M. Joseph Reinach, who was my companion upon the French front, was equally impressed by the stirring up and exchange of ideas in the villages due to the movement of the war. Charles Lamb's story of the discovery of roast pork comes into one's head with an effect of repartee. More than ideas are exchanged in the war zone, and it is doubtful how far the sanitary precautions of the military authorities avails against a considerable propaganda of disease. A more serious argument for the good of war is that it evokes heroic qualities in common people. There is no denying that it has brought out almost incredible quantities of courage, devotion, and individual romance that did not show in the suffocating peace time that preceded the war. The reckless and beautiful zeal of the women in the British and French munition factories, for example, the gaiety and fearlessness of the common soldiers everywhere; these

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things have always been there—like champagne sleeping in bottles in a cellar. But was there any need to throw a bomb into the cellar?

I am reminded of a story, or rather of the idea for a story that I think I must have read in that curious collection of fantasies and observations, Hawthorne's *Note Book*. It was to be the story of a man who found life dull and his circumstances altogether mediocre. He had loved his wife, but now after all she seemed to be a very ordinary human being. He had begun life with high hopes—and life was commonplace. He was to grow fretful and restless. His discontent was to lead to some action, some irrevocable action; but upon the nature of that action I do not think the *Note Book* was very clear. It was to carry him to the burning of his house. It was to carry him in such a manner that he was to forget his wife. Then, when it was too late, he was to see her at an upper window, stripped and firelit, a glorious thing of light and loveliness and tragic intensity. . . .

The elementary tales of the world are very few, and Hawthorne's story and Lamb's story are, after all, only variations upon the same theme. But can we poor human beings never realise our quality without destruction?

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§ 3

One of the larger singularities of the great war is its failure to produce great and imposing personalities, mighty leaders, Napoleons, Cæsars. I would indeed make that the essential thing in my reckoning up of the war. It is a drama without a hero; with countless incidental heroes, no doubt, but no star part. Even the Germans, with a national predisposition for hero-cults and living still in an atmosphere of Victorian humbug, can produce nothing better than that timber image, Hindenburg.

It is not that the war has failed to produce heroes so much as that it has produced heroism in a torrent. The great man of this war is the common man. It becomes ridiculous to pick out particular names. There are too many true stories of splendid acts in the past two years ever to be properly set down. The V.C.'s and the palms do but indicate samples. One would need an encyclopædia, a row of volumes, of the gloriousness of human impulses. The acts of the small men in this war dwarf all the pretensions of the Great Man. Imperatively these multitudinous heroes forbid the setting up of effigies. When I was a young man I imitated Swift and posed for cynicism; I will confess that now at fifty and

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greatly helped by this war, I have fallen in love with mankind.

But if I had to pick out a single figure to stand for the finest quality of the Allies' war, I should I think choose the figure of General Joffre. He is something new in history. He is leadership without vulgar ambition. He is the extreme antithesis to the Imperial boomster of Berlin. He is as it were the ordinary common sense of men, incarnate. He is the antithesis of the effigy.

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By great good luck I was able to see him. I was delayed in Paris on my way to Italy, and my friend Captain Millet arranged for a visit to the French front at Soissons and put me in charge of Lieutenant de Tessin, whom I had met in England studying British social questions long before this war. Afterwards Lieutenant de Tessin took me to the great hotel—it still proclaims "*Restaurant*" in big black letters on the garden wall—which shelters the General Headquarters of France, and here I was able to see and talk to Generals Pellé and Castelnau as well as to General Joffre. They are three very remarkable and very different men. They have at least one thing in common; it is clear that not one of them has spent ten minutes in all his life in thinking of himself as a Personage or Great Man. They all have

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the effect of being active and able men doing an extremely complicated and difficult but extremely interesting job to the very best of their ability. With me they had all one quality in common. They thought I was interested in what they were doing, and they were quite prepared to treat me as an intelligent man of a different sort, and to show me as much as I could understand. . . .

Let me confess that de Tessin had had to persuade me to go to Headquarters. Partly that was because I didn't want to use up even ten minutes of the time of the French commanders, but much more was it because I have a dread of Personages.

There is something about these encounters with personages—as if one was dealing with an effigy, with something tremendous put up to be seen. As one approaches they become remoter; great unsuspected crevasses are discovered. Across these gulfs one makes ineffective gestures. They do not meet you, they pose at you enormously. Sometimes there is something more terrible than dignity; there is condescension. They are affable. I had but recently had an encounter with an imported Colonial statesman, who was being advertised like a soap as the coming saviour of England. I was curious to meet him. I wanted to talk

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to him about all sorts of things that would have been profoundly interesting, as for example his impressions of the Anglican bishops. But I met a hoarding. I met a thing like a mask, something surrounded by touts, that was dully trying—as we say in London—to “come it” over me. He said he had heard of me. He had read *Kipps*. I intimated that though I had written *Kipps* I had continued to exist—but he did not see the point of that. I said certain things to him about the difference in complexity between political life in Great Britain and the colonies, that he was manifestly totally incapable of understanding. But one could as soon have talked with one of the statesmen at Madame Tussaud’s. An antiquated figure.

The effect of these French commanders upon me was quite different from my encounter with that last belated adventurer in the effigy line. I felt indeed that I was a rather idle and flimsy person coming into the presence of a tremendously compact and busy person, but I had none of that unpleasant sensation of a conventional rôle, of being expected to play the minute worshipper in the presence of the Great Image. I was so moved by the common humanity of them all that in each case I broke away from the discreet interpretations of de

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Tessin and talked to them directly in the strange dialect which I have inadvertently made for myself out of French, a disemvowelled speech of epicene substantives and verbs of incalculable moods and temperaments, "*Entente Cordiale*." They talked back as if we had met in a club. General Pellé pulled my leg very gaily with some quotations from an article I had written upon the conclusion of the war. I think he found my accent and my idioms very refreshing. I had committed myself to a statement that Bloch has been justified in his theory that under modern conditions the defensive wins. There were excellent reasons, and General Pellé pointed them out, for doubting the applicability of this to the present war.

Both he and General Castelnau were anxious that I should see a French offensive sector as well as Soissons. Then I should understand. And since then I have returned from Italy and I have seen and I do understand. The Allied offensive was winning; that is to say, it was inflicting far greater losses than it experienced; it was steadily beating the spirit out of the German army and shoving it back towards Germany. Only peace can, I believe, prevent the western war ending in Germany. And it is the Frenchmen mainly who have worked out how to do it.

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But of that I will write later. My present concern is with General Joffre as the antithesis of the Effigy. The effigy,

“Thou Prince of Peace,
Thou God of War,”

as Mr. Sylvester Viereck called him, prances on a great horse, wears a Wagnerian cloak, sits on thrones and talks of shining armour and “*unser Gott*.” All Germany gloats over his Jovian domesticities; when I was last in Berlin the postcard shops were full of photographs of a sort of procession of himself and his sons, all with long straight noses and side-long eyes. It is all dreadfully old-fashioned. General Joffre sits in a pleasant little sitting-room in a very ordinary little villa conveniently close to Headquarters. He sits among furniture that has no quality of pose at all, that is neither magnificent nor ostentatiously simple and hardy. He has dark, rather sleepy eyes under light eyelashes, eyes that glance shyly and a little askance at his interlocutor and then, as he talks, away—as if he did not want to be preoccupied by your attention. He has a broad, rather broadly modelled face, a soft voice, the sort of persuasive reasoning voice that many Scotchmen have. I had a feeling that if he were to talk English he would do so

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with a Scotch accent. Perhaps somewhere I have met a Scotchman of his type. He sat sideways to his table as a man might sit for a gossip in a café.

He is physically a big man, and in my memory he grows bigger and bigger. He sits now in my memory in a room like the rooms that any decent people might occupy, like that vague room that is the background of so many good portraits, a great blue-coated figure with a soft voice and rather tired eyes, explaining very simply and clearly the difficulties that this vulgar imperialism of Germany, seizing upon modern science and modern appliances, has created for France and the spirit of mankind.

He talked chiefly of the strangeness of this confounded war. It was exactly like a sanitary engineer speaking of the unexpected difficulties of some particularly nasty inundation. He made little stiff horizontal gestures with his hands. First one had to build a dam and stop the rush of it, so ; then one had to organise the push that would send it back. He explained the organisation of the push. They had got an organisation now that was working out most satisfactorily. Had I seen a sector ? I had seen the sector of Soissons. Yes, but that was not now an offensive sector. I must see an offensive sector ; see the whole method.

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Lieutenant de Tessin must see that that was arranged. . . .

Neither he nor his two colleagues spoke of the Germans with either hostility or humanity. Germany for them is manifestly merely an objectionable Thing. It is not a nation, not a people, but a nuisance. One has to build up this great counter-thrust bigger and stronger until they go back. The war must end in Germany. The French generals have no such delusions about German science or foresight or capacity as dominates the smart dinner chatter of England. One knows so well that detestable type of English folly, and its voice of despair: "They plan everything. They foresee everything." This paralysing Germanophobia is not common among the French. The war, the French generals said, might take—well, it certainly looked like taking longer than the winter. Next summer perhaps. Probably, if nothing unforeseen occurred, before a full year has passed the job might be done. Were any surprises in store? They didn't seem to think it was probable that the Germans had any surprises in store. . . . The Germans are not an inventive people; they are merely a thorough people. One never knew for certain.

Is any greater contrast possible than between so implacable, patient, reasonable—and

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above all things *capable*—a being as General Joffre and the rhetorician of Potsdam, with his talk of German Might, of Hammer Blows and Hacking Through? Can there be any doubt of the ultimate issue between them?

There are stories that sound pleasantly true to me about General Joffre's ambitions after the war. He is tired; then he will be very tired. He will, he declares, spend his first free summer in making a tour of the waterways of France in a barge. So I hope it may be. One imagines him as sitting quietly on the crumpled remains of the last and tawdriest of Imperial traditions, with a fishing line in the placid water and a large buff umbrella overhead, the good ordinary man who does whatever is given to him to do—as well as he can. The power that has taken the great effigy of German imperialism by the throat is something very composite and complex, but if we personify it at all it is something more like General Joffre than any other single human figure I can think of or imagine.

If I were to set a frontispiece to a book about this War I would make General Joffre the frontispiece.

§ 4

As we swung back along the dusty road to Paris at a pace of fifty miles an hour and up-

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wards, driven by a helmeted driver with an aquiline profile fit to go upon a coin, whose merits were a little flawed by a childish and dangerous ambition to run over every cat he saw upon the road, I talked to de Tessin about this big blue-coated figure of Joffre, which is not so much a figure as a great generalisation of certain hitherto rather obscured French qualities, and of the impression he had made upon me. And from that I went on to talk about the Super Man, for this encounter had suddenly crystallised out a set of realisations that had been for some time latent in my mind.

How much of what follows I said to de Tessin at the time I do not clearly remember, but this is what I had in mind.

The idea of the superman is an idea that has been developed by various people ignorant of biology and unaccustomed to biological ways of thinking. It is an obvious idea that follows in the course of half an hour or so upon one's realisation of the significance of Darwinism. If man has evolved from something lower or at least something different, he must now be evolving onward into something sur-human. The species in the future will be different from the species of the past. So far at least our Nietzsches and Shaws and so on went right.

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But being ignorant of the elementary biological proposition that modification of a species means really a secular change in its average, they jumped to a conclusion—to which the late Lord Salisbury also jumped years ago at a very memorable British Association meeting—that a species is modified by the sudden appearance of eccentric individuals here and there in the general mass who interbreed—preferentially. Helped by a streak of antic egotism in themselves, they conceived of the superman as a posturing personage, misunderstood by the vulgar, fantastic, wonderful. But the antic Personage, the thing I have called the Effigy, is not new but old, the oldest thing in history, the departing thing. It depends not upon the advance of the species but upon the uncritical hero-worship of the crowd. You may see the monster drawn twenty times the size of common men upon the oldest monuments of Egypt and Assyria. The true superman comes not as the tremendous personal entry of a star, but in the less dramatic form of a general increase of goodwill and skill and common sense. A species rises not by thrusting up peaks but by brimming up as a flood does. The coming of the superman means not an epidemic of personages but the disappearance of the Personage in the universal ascent. That

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is the point overlooked by the megalomaniac school of Nietzsche and Shaw.

And it is the peculiarity of this war, it is the most reassuring evidence that a great increase in general ability and critical ability has been going on throughout the last century, that no isolated great personages have emerged. Never has there been so much ability, invention, inspiration, leadership; but the very abundance of good qualities has prevented our focusing upon those of any one individual. We all play our part in the realisation of God's sanity in the world, but, as the strange, dramatic end of Lord Kitchener has served to remind us, there is no single individual of all the allied nations whose death can materially affect the great destinies of this war.

In the last few years I have developed a religious belief that has become now to me as real as any commonplace fact. I think that mankind is still as it were collectively dreaming and hardly more awakened to reality than a very young child. It has these dreams that we express by the flags of nationalities and by strange loyalties and by irrational creeds and ceremonies, and its dreams at times become such nightmares as this war. But the time draws near when mankind will awake and the dreams will fade away, and then there

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will be no nationality in all the world but humanity, and no king, no emperor, nor leader but the one God of mankind. This is my faith. I am as certain of this as I was in 1900 that men would presently fly. To me it is as if it must be so.

[So that to me this extraordinary refusal of the allied nations under conditions that have always hitherto produced a Great Man to produce anything of the sort, anything that can be used as an effigy and carried about for the crowd to follow, is a fact of extreme significance and encouragement. It seems to me that the twilight of the half gods must have come, that we have reached the end of the age when men needed a Personal Figure about which they could rally. The Kaiser is perhaps the last of that long series of crowned and cloaked and semi-divine personages which has included Cæsar and Alexander and Napoleon the First—and Third. In the light of the new time we see the emperor-god for the guy he is. In the August of 1914 he set himself up to be the paramount Lord of the World, and it will seem to the historian to come, who will know our dates so well and our feelings, our fatigues and efforts so little, it will seem a short period from that day to this, when the great figure already sways and staggers towards the bonfire.

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§ 5

I had the experience of meeting a contemporary king upon this journey. He was the first king I had ever met. The Potsdam figure—with perhaps some local exceptions behind the Gold Coast—is, with its collection of uniforms and its pomps and splendours, the purest survival of the old tradition of divine monarchy now that the Emperor at Peking has followed the Shogun into the shadows. The modern type of king shows a disposition to intimate at the outset that he cannot help it, and to justify or at any rate utilise his exceptional position by sound hard work. It is an age of working kings, with the manners of private gentlemen. The King of Italy for example is far more accessible than was the late Pierpont Morgan or the late Cecil Rhodes, and he seems to keep a smaller court.

I went to see him from Udine. He occupied a moderate-sized country villa about half an hour by automobile from headquarters. I went over with General Radcliffe; we drove through the gates of the villa past a single sentinel in an ordinary infantry uniform, up to the door of the house, and the number of guards, servants, court attendants, officials, secretaries, ministers and the like that I saw

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in that house were—I counted very carefully—four. Downstairs were three people, a tall soldier of the bodyguard in grey; an A.D.C., Captain Moreno, and Col. Matteoli, the minister of the household. I went upstairs to a drawing-room of much the same easy and generalised character as the one in which I had met General Joffre a few days before. I gave my hat to a second bodyguard, and as I did so a pleasantly smiling man appeared at the door of the study whom I thought at first must be some minister in attendance. I did not recognise him instantly because on the stamps and coins he is always in profile. He began to talk in excellent English about my journey, and I replied, and so talking we went into the study from which he had emerged. Then I realised I was talking to the king.

Addicted as I am to the cinematograph, in which the standard of study furniture is particularly rich and high, I found something very cooling and simple and refreshing in the sight of the king's study furniture. He sat down with me at a little useful writing table, and after asking me what I had seen in Italy and hearing what I had seen and what I was to see, he went on talking, very good talk indeed.

I suppose I did a little exceed the estab-

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lished tradition of courts by asking several questions and trying to get him to talk upon certain points as to which I was curious, but I perceived that he had had to carry on at least so much of the regal tradition as to control the conversation. He was, however, entirely un-posed. His talk reminded me somehow of Maurice Baring's books; it had just the same quick, positive understanding. And he had just the same detachment from the war as the French generals. He spoke of it as one might speak of an inundation. And of its difficulties and perplexities.

Here on the Adriatic side there were political entanglements that by comparison made our western after-the-war problems plain sailing. He talked of the game of spellicans among the Balkan nationalities. How was that difficulty to be met? In Macedonia there were Turkish villages that were Christian and Bulgarians that were Moslem. There were families that changed the termination of their names from *ski* to *off* as Serbian or Bulgarian prevailed. I remarked that that showed a certain passion for peace, and that much of the mischief might be due to the propaganda of the great Powers. I have a prejudice against that blessed Whig "principle of nationality," but the King of Italy was not to be drawn into any statement about

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that. He left the question with his admission of its extreme complexity.

He went on to talk of the strange contrasts of war, of such things as the indifference of the birds to gunfire and desolation. One day on the Carso he had been near the newly captured Austrian trenches, and suddenly from amidst a scattered mass of Austrian bodies a quail had risen. That had struck him as odd, and so too had the sight of a pack of cards and a wine flask on some newly-made graves. The ordinary life was a very *obstinate* thing. . . .

He talked of the courage of common men. He was astonished at the quickness with which they came to disregard shrapnel. And they were so quietly enduring when they were wounded. He had seen a lot of the wounded, and he had expected much groaning and crying out. But unless a man is hit in the head and goes mad he does not groan or scream! They are just brave. If you ask them how they feel it is always one of two things: either they say quietly that they are very bad or else they say there is nothing the matter. . . .

He spoke as if these were mere chance observations, but everyone tells me that nearly every day the king is at the front and often under fire. He has taken more risks in a week than the Potsdam War Lord has taken since

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the war began. He keeps himself acutely informed upon every aspect of the war. He was a little inclined to fatalism, he confessed. There were two stories current of two families of four sons, in each three had been killed and in each there was an attempt to put the fourth son in a place of comparative safety. In one case a general took the fourth son in as an attendant and embarked upon a ship that was immediately torpedoed; in the other the fourth son was killed by accident while he was helping to carry dinner in a rest camp. From those stories we came to the question whether the uneducated Italians were more superstitious than the uneducated English; the king thought they were much less so. That struck me as a novel idea. But then he thought that English rural people believe in witches and fairies.

I have given enough of this talk to show the quality of this king of the new dispensation. It was, you see, the sort of easy talk one might hear from fine-minded people anywhere. When we had done talking he came to the door of the study with me and shook hands and went back to his desk—with that gesture of return to work which is very familiar and sympathetic to a writer, and with no gesture of regality at all.

Just to complete this impression let me

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repeat a pleasant story about this king and our Prince of Wales, who recently visited the Italian front. The Prince is a source of anxiety on these visits; he has a very strong and very creditable desire to share the ordinary risks of war. He is keenly interested, and unobtrusively bent upon getting as near the fighting line as possible. But the King of Italy was firm upon keeping him out of anything more than the most incidental danger. "We don't want any historical incidents here," he said. I think that might well become an historical phrase. For the life of the Effigy is a series of historical incidents.

§ 6

Manifestly one might continue to multiply portraits of fine people working upon this great task of breaking and ending the German aggression, the German legend, the German effigy, and the effigy business generally; the thesis being that the Allies have no effigy. One might fill a thick volume with pictures of men up the scale and down working loyally and devotedly upon the war, to make this point clear that the essential king and the essential loyalty of our side is the commonsense of mankind.

There comes into my head as a picture at the other extreme of this series, a memory of

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certain trenches I visited on my last day in France. They were trenches on an offensive front; they were not those architectural triumphs, those homes from home, that grow to perfection upon the less active sections of the great line. They had been first made by men who had run rapidly forward with spade and rifle, stooping as they ran, who had dropped into the craters of big shells, who had organised these chiefly at night and dug the steep ditches sideways to join up into continuous trenches. Now they were pushing forward saps into No Man's Land, linking them across, and so continually creeping nearer to the enemy and a practicable jumping-off place for an attack. (It has been made since; the village at which I peeped was in our hands a week later.) These trenches were dug into a sort of yellowish sandy clay; the dug-outs were mere holes in the earth that fell in upon the clumsy; hardly any timber had been got up to the line; a storm might flood them at any time a couple of feet deep and begin to wash in the sides. Overnight they had been "strafed" and there had been a number of casualties; there were smashed rifles about and a smashed-up machine gun emplacement, and the men were dog-tired and many of them sleeping like logs, half buried in clay. Some slept on the firing steps. As

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one went along one became aware ever and again of two or three pairs of clay-yellow feet sticking out of a clay hole, and peering down one saw the shapes of men like rudely modelled earthen images of soldiers, motionless in the cave.

I came round the corner upon a youngster with an intelligent face and steady eyes sitting up on the firing step, awake and thinking. We looked at one another. There are moments when mind leaps to mind. It is natural for the man in the trenches suddenly confronted by so rare a beast as a middle-aged civilian with an enquiring expression, to feel himself something of a spectacle and something generalised. It is natural for the civilian to look rather in the vein of saying, "Well, how do you take it?" As I pushed past him we nodded slightly with an effect of mutual understanding. And we said with our nods just exactly what General Joffre said with his horizontal gestures of the hand and what the King of Italy conveyed by his friendly manner; we said to each other that here was the trouble those Germans had brought upon us and here was the task that had to be done.

Our guide to these trenches was a short, stocky young man, a cob; with a rifle and a tight belt and projecting skirts and helmet,

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a queer little figure that, had you seen it in a picture a year or so before the war, you would most certainly have pronounced Chinese. He belonged to a Northumbrian battalion; it does not matter exactly which. As we returned from this front line, trudging along the winding path through the barbed wire tangles before the smashed and captured German trench that had been taken a fortnight before, I fell behind my guardian captain and had a brief conversation with this individual. He was a lad in the early twenties, weather-bit and with bloodshot eyes. He was, he told me, a miner. I asked my stock question in such cases, whether he would go back to the old work after the war. He said he would, and then added—with the events of overnight in his mind: “If A’hm lucky.”

Followed a little silence. Then I tried my second stock remark for such cases. One does not talk to soldiers at the front in this war of Glory or the “Empire on which the sun never sets” or “the meteor flag of England” or of King and Country or any of those fine old headline things. On the desolate path that winds about amidst the shell craters and the fragments and the red-rusted wire, with the silken shiver of passing shells in the air and the blue of the lower sky continually breaking

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out into eddying white puffs, it is wonderful how tawdry such panoplies of the effigy appear. We know that we and our allies are upon a greater, graver, more fundamental business than that sort of thing now. We are very near the waking point.

“Well,” I said, “it’s got to be done.”

“Aye,” he said, easing the strap of his rifle a little; “it’s got to be done.”