

## CHAPTER II

### FACING THE STORM

ALL life has something dreamlike in it. No percipient creature has ever yet lived in stark reality. Nature has equipped us with such conceptions and delusions as survival necessitated, and our experiences are at best but *working* interpretations. Nevertheless, as they diverge more and more from practical truth and we begin to stumble against danger, our dearest dreams are at last invaded by remonstrances and warning shadows. And now this dream that was the life of the Lord Paramount was changing; more and more was it discoloured by doubt and adverse intimations.

He had taken hold of power with an absolute confidence. Mr. Parham talking to an undergraduate had never been more confident than the Lord Paramount evicting Parliament. His task then was to have been the restoration of the enduring traditions of human life to their predominance. His rôle had been the god-like suppression of rebellious disorders. By insensible degrees his confidence had been undermined by the growing apprehension of the greatness and insidiousness of the forces of change against which he was pitted.

The logic of events had prevailed. He was still convinced of the rightness of his ideas, but the god-like rôle had shrunken to the heroic.

The Battle of the North Atlantic had been the decisive accident to shatter his immediate vision of a British Empire rejuvenescent and triumphant, crowning the processes of history and recognizing him as its heaven-appointed saviour. He had to begin over again and lower down, and for a time at least at a disadvantage.

Blow upon blow rained upon him after that opening day of calamity. First came the tale of disaster from the battle itself: this great battleship lost, that cruiser on fire, a score of minor craft missing. At first, both Britain and America accepted the idea of defeat, so heavy on either side was the list of losses. Then followed the relentless unfolding of consequences. The Dominions, with a harsh regard for their own welfare, were standing out. Canada had practically gone over to the United States and was treating for a permanent bond. South Ireland was of course against him; a republican *coup d'état* had captured Dublin, and there was already bloody and cruel fighting on the Ulster border; South Africa declared for neutrality, and in some of the more Dutch districts Union Jacks had been destroyed; Bengal was afire, and the council of Indian princes had gone over *en bloc* from their previous loyalty to a declaration of autonomy. They proposed to make peace with Russia, deport English residents, and relieve the Empire of further responsibility in the peninsula.

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It was appalling to consider the odds against that now isolated garrison.

The European combinations of the Lord Paramount had collapsed like a house of cards. The long projected alliance of Paramuzzi with Germany against France, which had failed to materialize so long as the German republic had held and so long as the restraining influence of Anglo-Saxondom had been effective, was now an open fact. For all practical purposes America, Great Britain, Russia, were all now for an indefinite time removed from the chessboard of Europe, and the ancient and obvious antagonism round about the Alpine massif were free to work themselves out. Europe was Rhineland history again. An unhoped for *revanche* offered itself plainly and clearly to the German people, and the accumulated resentment of ten years of humiliation and frustration blazed to fury. Von Barheim's once doubtful hold upon power lost any element of doubt. He was hailed as a reincarnation of Bismarck, and in a day Germany became again the Germany of blood and iron that had dominated Europe from 1871 to 1914. Liberalism and socialism were swamped by patriotism and vanished as if they had never been.

Within three days of the Battle of the North Atlantic nearly the whole of Europe was at war, and the French were clamouring for the covenanted British support upon their left wing as they advanced into Germany. The French fleet was quite able now to keep the vestiges of

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America's naval forces out of European waters, and there was also the threat of Japan to turn American attention westward. Hungary had lost no time in attacking Roumania; Czecho-Slovakia and Yugo-Slavia had declared for France, Spain had mounted guns in the mountains commanding Gibraltar and became unpleasant to British shipping, and only Poland remained ambiguously under arms and at peace, between a threatening Russia on the east, dangerous Slav states to the south, a Germany exasperated on the score of Danzig and Silesia, and both Latvia and Lithuania urging grievances. The windows of the Polish Embassy in Paris suffered for this ambiguity.

There were pogroms in Hungary and Roumania. Indeed, all over eastern Europe and nearer Asia, whatever the political complexion of the government might be, the population seemed to find in pogroms a release of mental and moral tension that nothing else could give.

Turkey, it became evident, was moving on Bagdad, and a revolt in Damascus seemed to prelude a general Arab rising against France, Britain, and the Jewish state in Palestine. Both Bulgaria and Greece mobilized; Bulgaria, it was understood, was acting in concert with Hungary, but Greece as ever remained incalculable. Public opinion in Norway was said to be violently pro-American and in Sweden and Finland pro-German, but none of these states took overt military action.

The inertias of British foreign policy were tremendous.

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“We hold to our obligations,” said the Lord Paramount, sleepless, white, and weary, and sustained at last only by the tonics of Sir Titus, but still battling bravely with the situation. “We take the left wing in Belgium.”