

THE  
BATTLE OF THE STRONG

PROEM

THERE is no man living to-day who could tell you how the morning broke and the sun rose on the first day of January 1800; who walked in the Mall, who sauntered in the Park with the Prince; none lives who heard and remembers the gossip of the moment, or can give you the exact flavour of the speech and accent of the time. Down the long aisle of years echoes the air but not the tone; the trick of form comes to us but never the inflection. The lilt of the sensations, the idiosyncrasy of voice, emotion, and mind of the first hour of our century must now pass from the printed page to us, imperfectly realised; we may not know them through actual retrospection. The more distant the scene, the more uncertain the reflection; and so it must needs be with this tale, which will take you back to even twenty years before the century began.

Then, as now, England was a great power outside these small islands. She had her foot firmly planted in Australia, in Asia, and in America—though, in bitterness, the American colonies had broken free, and only Canada was left to her in that northern hemisphere. She has had, in her day, to strike hard blows even for Scotland, Ireland, and Wales. But