

1914.

IN a prosperous mining town in the north of France there stands a large, quiet-looking brick building; one built for comfort and not for looks, and yet attractive on account of its very plainness and peacefulness. It stands well back from the road and a little above its neighbours on the slope of the hill-side, adding effect to the small but well-kept garden and winding driveway leading up to the front entrance.

From here, if you look towards the north, you will see a maze of little, red-tiled roofs snuggling cozily in the valley below—all regular in size and shape, yet each a home in itself, the home of some hard-working miner. In the distance, as if to offset so much bright colour, a peaceful hill-side greets the eye with its fields of yellow and green dotted, here and there, with trees.

But let us glance inside to a still more peaceful scene, along the broad, tiled hallway and into the many large, well-lit rooms, fitted with every convenience, with their pretty wall-papers, high, decorated ceilings and beautiful furniture. One room will strike you as especially cosy and home-like, for it is the sitting-room. Here, at a valuable old desk beneath the window, a pretty girl sits gazing dreamily through the window at the peaceful scene outside, with a half-finished letter before her. On the other side of the room, in two large arm-chairs drawn up close to a cheery-looking fire, are two prosperous looking, well filled-out beings—Pa and Ma. Outside in the hallway you can hear the coy, little servant girls tripping up and down as they prepare the evening meal.

Such is the scene of happiness and comfort, a scene so commonplace and natural that no wonder it was taken for granted—and war, well, what difference could war make?

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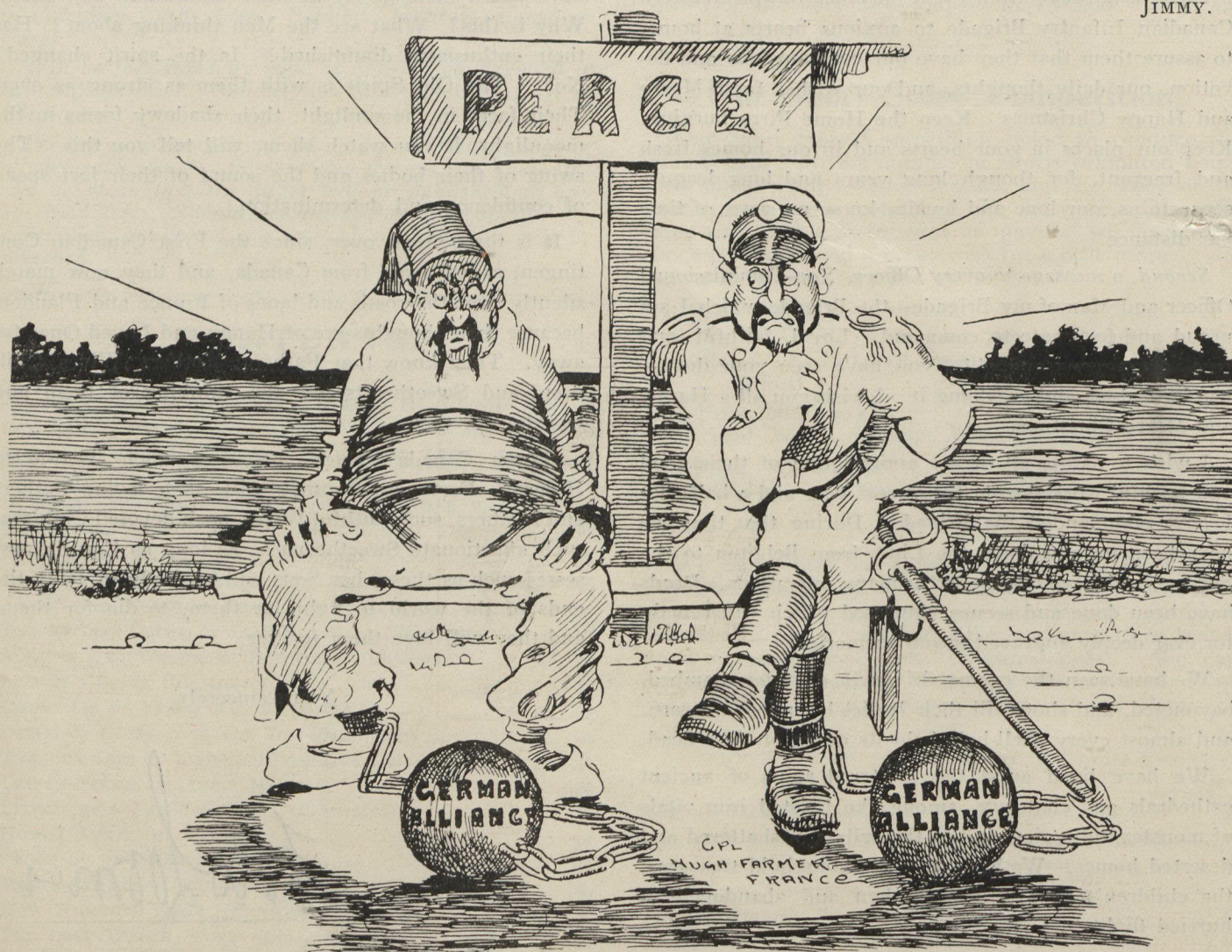
The old house still stands—or part of it—for three years' war has surely left its mark. The trim-looking garden is now a mass of shell-holes, with here and there a little patch of grass and weeds to show where the smooth lawn used to be. Round the house, itself a mass of bricks, débris lies strewn, fallen from the shattered and shell-torn walls and roof. Inside, too, the change is even more pronounced, for the plasterless walls and ceilings, and the paneless windows and damaged floors—long since looted of their furniture—strike the eye painfully. Down below, where Fritz has been and gone, you find a honey-comb of stuffy dug-outs.

Yet, perhaps, what strikes one most of all is the change in the occupants, for now the old brick house is the holder of the proud title, "Battalion Headquarters." In place of those peaceful, quiet-lived folk you find a noisy hustling mob. In that pretty, spotless hallway a hungry bunch of signallers now sit and dine in state; while a powerful smell of "whizz-bangs à la Foreman" fills the air. That quaint, cosy sitting-room now has an awesome, dignified appearance, for between its strengthened, sand-bagged walls sits the Major—playing cards. In the basement, where those pretty, modest little maidens held full sway, you will find—alas! a noisy gang of well-fed batmen; while lower still, the orderly room, that confusing mass of papers, wires and maps, where the Adjutant sits and tears his hair.

It's a sad change, and even the view is not the same, for views of desolate ruins with "minnies" landing in the distance, and five-point-nine shrapnel bursting overhead, soon lose their charm.

Yes, if bricks could talk, I guess that same old brick house could tell a tale to beat the warriors of the Second Battle of Ypres—and that's going some, believe me.

JIMMY.



TURK: "Curses! I'll never get there with this infernal drag."

FERDY: "I could have told you that a year ago."