

PREFACE

FOR the second time since this book's beginning the rose of July had flamed into splendid bloom. I drew breath, for my task approached its ending, and looked up from the yellowed newspaper-records of a great War waged forty-five years ago.

Perhaps I had grown negligent of modern signs and portents, or the web of Diplomacy had veiled them from all but privileged eyes. . . . Now I saw, looming on the eastern horizon, a cloud in the shape of a man's clenched fist in a gauntleted glove of mail.

For days previously the frames of the open windows that look across the garden seawards, had leaped and rattled in answer to the incessant thud-thudding of big Naval guns at sea. One opal dawn showed the grim shapes of Super-Dreadnoughts, Dreadnoughts, pre-Dreadnoughts, and war-cruisers, strung out in battle-line along the glittering-green band edging the horizon, escorted by a flotilla of destroyers and a school of submarines. Night fell, and sea, land and sky alternately whitened and blotted in the wheeling ray of the searchlights. Electric balls danced and gibbered in Admiralty Code. Gulls cradled on the glassy waters of the Channel must have been roused by outbursts of full-throated British cheering, and the crash of the Fleet bands striking into the National Anthem, as the sealed orders of the Supreme Admiral were signalled from the Flagship commanding the Southern Fleet. No