

bruisers, hung upon the walls, winked out the word fight; the tradesmen, nodding meaningly over their gin, in the snugger, repeated the word; the noisier men of the streets, in the tap-room, shouted the word "fight" aloud; the potmen and waiters, scurrying along the passages, stopped, until Will Warr caught them lingering, to whisper of the fight to each other, and to the shabbier loungers in the hall.

In the dining-room, behind the closed doors, a party of forty men were finishing dinner. The cloths were being removed: candles, pipe-lights, and churchwardens were placed on the tables; wine was passing round freely, and the waiters were bringing in spirits and fresh bottles. All were talking loudly, and the word that dominated the meeting was the stormy one used so frequently in the turbulent conversation outside.

A strange company, you would say—and so it was. Through the haze of tobacco an observer might have noted that of the forty or more faces more than half of them were distinctly aristocratic, long lean faces, clean-shaven, with imperious noses and bold, challenging eyes. They were the faces of men of the world; men who were expensively dressed and groomed and quaint perhaps to our eyes in their spotlessly white cravats and coats of many colours, some of these last having gilt or jewelled buttons, and all being elaborately turned back at the collar and lapels, as was the sartorial habit of the period. But a smaller proportion of the men were of a different type. Making some pretence to fashion, they were dressed in a flashier, rougher