

THE OUTBREAK

The men clustered and spoke together: a few started singing. When I had crossed a few days before, the quay had been lined with the usual cheering children, and a few condescending tourists had waved back. Now there was a line of soldiers in the same place. Our passengers rushed to the side and cheered them. A number of French cruisers guarded the entrance. It was the first real proof that we were passing into the facts of war. The odd nightmare feeling of those few first days, that witnessed the collapse of the structure of civilisation upon which our lives had hitherto rested, intensified. The war was true after all; not merely a terrible darkness of sensation into which we kept waking up, with a shrinking discomfort, whenever our attention came back from reading some book or following some ordinary chain of thought.

At Calais there had been no regular train traffic for three days. A number of travellers who had got as far as Calais on previous days decided to return by our boat to England. The porters stood round vaguely, with the distracted strained look that we learned to