The Invasion of 1910

William Le Queux

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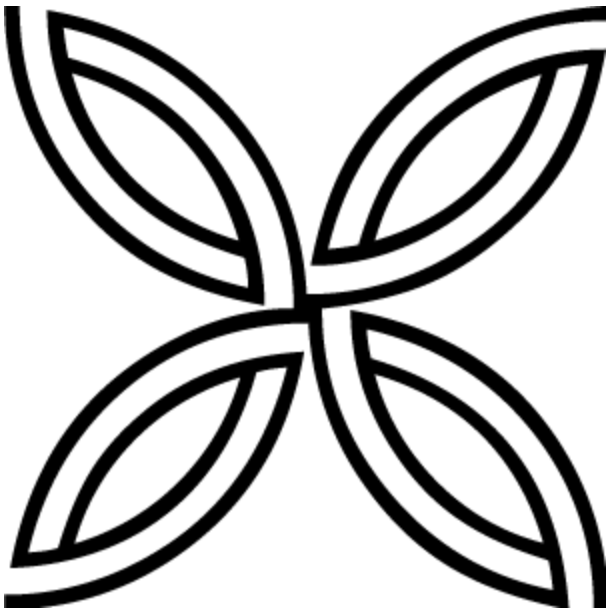

PREFACE

“ I sometimes despair of the country ever becoming alive to the danger of the unpreparedness of our present position until too late to prevent some fatal catastrophe. ”

This was the keynote of a solemn warning made in the House of Lords on July 10th of the present year by Earl Roberts. His lordship, while drawing attention to our present inadequate forces, strongly urged that action should be taken in accordance with the recommendations of the Elgin Commission that “no military system could be considered satisfactory which did not contain powers of expansion outside the limit of the regular forces of the Crown.”

“ *The lessons of the late war appear to have been completely forgotten.* The one prevailing idea seems to be,” said Earl Roberts, “to cut down our military expenditure without reference to our increased responsibilities and our largely augmented revenue. History tells us in the plainest terms that an Empire which cannot defend its own possessions must inevitably perish.” And with this view both Lord Milner and the Marquis of Lansdowne concurred. But surely this is not enough. If we are to retain our position as the first nation in the world we must be prepared to defend any raid made upon our shores.

The object of this book is to illustrate our utter unpreparedness for war, to show how, under certain conditions which may easily occur, England can be successfully invaded by Germany, and to present a picture of the ruin which must inevitably fall upon us on the evening of that not far-distant day.

Ever since Lord Roberts formulated his plans for the establishment of rifle-clubs I have been deeply interested in

the movement; and after a conversation with that distinguished soldier the idea occurred to me to write a forecast, based upon all the available military and naval knowledge—which would bring home to the British public vividly and forcibly what really would occur were an enemy suddenly to appear in our midst. At the outset it was declared by the strategists I consulted to be impossible. No such book could ever be written, for, according to them, the mass of technical detail was far too great to digest and present in an intelligible manner to the public.

Lord Roberts, however, gave me encouragement. The skeleton scheme of the manner in which England could be invaded by Germany was submitted to a number of the highest authorities on strategy, whose names, however, I am not permitted to divulge, and after many consultations, much criticism, and considerable difference of opinion, the "general idea," with amendment after amendment, was finally adopted.

That, however, was only a mere preliminary. Upon questions of tactics each tactician consulted held a different view, and each criticised adversely the other's suggestions. With the invaluable assistance of my friend Mr. H. W. Wilson, we had decided upon the naval portion of the campaign; but when it came to the operations on land, I found a wide divergence of opinion everywhere.

One way alone remained open—namely, to take the facts exactly as they stood, add the additional strength of the opposing nations as they will be in 1910, and then draw logical conclusions. This, aided by experts, was done; and after many days of argument with the various authorities, we succeeded at last in getting them in accord as to the general practicability of an invasion.

Before putting pen to paper it was necessary to reconnoitre carefully the whole of England from the Thames to the Tyne. This I did by means of a motor-car, travelling 10,000 miles of all kinds of roads, and making a tour extending

over four months. Each town, all the points of vantage, military positions, all the available landing-places on the coast, all railway connections, and telephone and telegraph communications, were carefully noted for future reference. With the assistance of certain well-known military experts, the battlefields were carefully gone over and the positions marked upon the Ordnance map. Thus, through four months we pushed on day by day collecting information and material, sometimes in the big cities, sometimes in the quietest and remotest hamlets, all of which was carefully tabulated for use.

Whatever critics may say, and however their opinions may differ, it can only be pointed out, first, that the “general idea” of the scheme is in accordance with the expressed and published opinions of the first strategists of to-day, and that, as far as the forecast of events is concerned, it has been written from a first-hand knowledge of the local colour of each of the scenes described. The enemy’s Proclamations reproduced are practically copies of those issued by the Germans during the war of 1870.

That the experts and myself will probably be condemned as alarmists and denounced for revealing information likely to be of assistance to an enemy goes without saying. Indeed, on March 15th last, an attempt was made in the House of Commons to suppress its publication altogether. Mr. R. C. Lehmann, who asked a question of the Prime Minister, declared that it was “calculated to prejudice our relations with the other Powers,” while Sir H. Campbell-Bannerman, in a subsequent letter apologising to me for condemning in the House a work he had not read, repeated that it was likely to “produce irritation abroad and might conceivably alarm the more ignorant public at home.”

Such a reflection, cast by the Prime Minister upon the British nation, is, to say the least, curious, yet it only confirms the truth that the Government are strenuously seeking to conceal from our people the appalling military

weakness and the consequent danger to which the country is constantly open.

Mr. Haldane’s new scheme has a number of points about it which, at first sight, will perhaps commend themselves to the general public, and in some cases to a proportion of military men. Foremost among these are the provision made for training the Militia Artillery in the use of comparatively modern field-guns, and the institution of the County Associations for the administration of the Volunteers and the encouragement of the local military spirit. Could an ideal Association of this kind be evolved there is little doubt that it would be capable of doing an immense amount of good, since administration by a central staff, ignorant of the widely differing local conditions which affect the several Volunteer corps, has already militated against getting the best work possible out of their members. But under our twentieth-century social system, which has unfortunately displaced so many influential and respected county families—every one of which had military or naval members, relations or ancestors—by wealthy tradesmen, speculators, and the like, any efficient County Association will be very hard to create. Mr. Haldane’s scheme is a bold and masterly sketch, but he will find it very hard to fill in the details satisfactorily. Unfortunately, the losses the Army must sustain by the reduction of so many fine battalions are very real and tangible, while the promised gains in efficiency would appear to be somewhat shadowy and uncertain.

To be weak is to invite war; to be strong is to prevent it. To arouse our country to a sense of its own lamentable insecurity is the object of this volume, and that other nations besides ourselves are interested in England’s grave peril is proved by the fact that it has already been published in the German, French, Spanish, Danish, Russian, Italian, and even Japanese languages.

William Le Queux.

BOOK I THE ATTACK

CHAPTER I THE SURPRISE

Two of the myriad of London’s night-workers were walking down Fleet Street together soon after dawn on Sunday morning, 2nd September.

The sun had not yet risen. That main artery of London traffic, with its irregular rows of closed shops and newspaper offices, was quiet and pleasant in the calm, mystic light before the falling of the smoke-pall.

Only at early morning does the dear old City look its best; in that one quiet, sweet hour when the night’s toil has ended and the day’s has not yet begun. Only in that brief interval at the birth of day, when the rose tints of the sky glow slowly into gold, does the giant metropolis repose—at least, as far as its business streets are concerned—for at five o’clock the toiling millions begin to again pour in from all points of the compass, and the stress and storm of London life at once recommences.

And in that hour of silent charm the two grey-bearded sub-editors, though engaged in offices of rival newspapers, were making their way homeward to Dulwich to spend Sunday in a well-earned rest, and were chatting “shop” as Press men do.

“ I suppose you had the same trouble to get that Yarmouth story through?” asked Fergusson, the news-editor of the *Weekly Dispatch* , as they crossed Whitefriars Street. “We got about half a column, and then the wire shut down.”

“ Telegraph or telephone?” inquired Baines, who was four or five years younger than his friend.

“ We were using both—to make sure.”

“ So were we. It was a rattling good story—the robbery was mysterious, to say the least—but we didn’t get more than half of it. Something’s wrong with the line, evidently,” Baines said. “If it were not such a perfect autumn morning,

I should be inclined to think there'd been a storm somewhere."
" Yes—funny, wasn't it?" remarked the other. "A shame we haven't the whole story, for it was a first-class one, and we wanted something. Did you put it on the contents-bill?"
" No, because we couldn't get the finish. I tried in every way—rang up the Central News, P.A., Exchange Telegraph Company, tried to get through to Yarmouth on the trunk, and spent half an hour or so pottering about, but the reply from all the agencies, from everywhere in fact, was the same—the line was interrupted."
" Just our case. I telephoned to the Post Office, but the reply came back that the lines were evidently down."
" Well, it certainly looks as though there'd been a storm, but——" and Baines glanced at the bright, clear sky overhead, just flushed by the bursting sun—"there are certainly no traces of it."
" There's often a storm on the coast when it's quite still in London, my dear fellow," remarked his friend wisely.
" That's all very well. But when all communication with a big place like Yarmouth is suddenly cut off, as it has been, I can't help suspecting that something has happened which we ought to know."
" You're perhaps right after all," Fergusson said. "I wonder if anything *has* happened. We don't want to be called back to the office, either of us. My assistant, Henderson, whom I've left in charge, rings me up over any mare's nest. The trunk telephones all come into the Post Office exchange up in Carter Lane. Why not look in there before we go home? It won't take us a quarter of an hour, and we have several trains home from Ludgate Hill."
Baines looked at his watch. Like his companion, he had no desire to be called back to his office after getting out to Dulwich, and yet he was in no mood to go making reporter's inquiries.
" I don't think I'll go. It's sure to be nothing, my dear

fellow," he said. "Besides, I have a beastly headache. I had a heavy night's work. One of my men is away ill."
" Well, at any rate, I think I'll go," Fergusson said. "Don't blame me if you get called back for a special edition with a terrible storm, great loss of life, and all that sort of thing. So long." And, smiling, he waved his hand and parted from his friend in the booking-office of Ludgate Hill Station. Quickening his pace, he hurried through the office and, passing out by the back, ascended the steep, narrow street until he reached the Post Office telephone exchange in Carter Lane, where, presenting his card, he asked to see the superintendent-in-charge.
Without much delay he was shown upstairs into a small private office, into which came a short, dapper, fair-moustached man with the bustle of a person in a great hurry.
" I've called," the sub-editor explained, "to know whether you can tell me anything regarding the cause of the interruption of the line to Yarmouth a short time ago. We had some important news coming through, but were cut off just in the midst of it, and then we received information that all the telephone and telegraph lines to Yarmouth were interrupted."
" Well, that's just the very point which is puzzling us at this moment," was the night-superintendent's reply. "It is quite unaccountable. Our trunk going to Yarmouth seems to be down, as well as the telegraphs. Yarmouth, Lowestoft, and beyond Beccles seem all to have been suddenly cut off. About eighteen minutes to four the operators noticed something wrong, switched the trunks through to the testers, and the latter reported to me in due course."
" That's strange! Did they all break down together?"
" No. The first that failed was the one that runs through Chelmsford, Colchester, and Ipswich up to Lowestoft and Yarmouth. The operator found that he could get through to Ipswich and Beccles. Ipswich knew nothing, except that

something was wrong. They could still ring up Beccles, but not beyond.”
As they were speaking, there was a tap at the door, and the assistant night-superintendent entered, saying—
“ The Norwich line through Scole and Long Stratton has now failed, sir. About half-past four Norwich reported a fault somewhere north, between there and Cromer. But the operator now says that the line is apparently broken, and so are all the telegraphs from there to Cromer, Sheringham, and Holt.”
“ Another line has gone, then!” exclaimed the superintendent-in-charge, utterly astounded. “Have you tried to get on to Cromer by the other routes—through Nottingham and King’s Lynn, or through Cambridge?”
“ The testers have tried every route, but there’s no response.”
“ You could get through to some of the places—Yarmouth, for instance—by telegraphing to the Continent, I suppose?” asked Fergusson.
“ We are already trying,” responded the assistant superintendent.
“ What cables run out from the east coast in that neighbourhood?” inquired the sub-editor quickly.
“ There are five between Southwold and Cromer—three run to Germany, and two to Holland,” replied the assistant. “There’s the cable from Yarmouth to Barkum, in the Frisian Islands; from Happisburg, near Mundesley, to Barkum; from Yarmouth to Emden; from Lowestoft to Haarlem, and from Kessingland, near Southwold, to Zandyport.”
“ And you are trying all the routes?” asked his superior.
“ I spoke to Paris myself an hour ago and asked them to cable by all five routes to Yarmouth, Lowestoft, Kessingland, and Happisburg,” was the assistant’s reply. “I also asked Liverpool Street Station and King’s Cross to wire down to some of their stations on the coast, but the reply was that they were in the same predicament as

ourselves—their lines were down north of Beccles, Wymondham, East Dereham, and also south of Lynn. I'll just run along and see if there's any reply from Paris. They ought to be through by this time, as it's Sunday morning, and no traffic." And he went out hurriedly.

" There's certainly something very peculiar," remarked the superintendent-in-charge to the sub-editor. "If there's been an earthquake or an electrical disturbance, then it is a most extraordinary one. Every single line reaching to the coast seems interrupted."

" Yes. It's uncommonly funny," Fergusson remarked. "I wonder what could have happened. You've never had a complete breakdown like this before?"

" Never. But I think——"

The sentence remained unfinished, for his assistant returned with a slip of paper in his hand, saying—

" This message has just come in from Paris. I'll read it. 'Superintendent Telephones, Paris, to Superintendent Telephones, London.—Have obtained direct telegraphic communication with operators of all five cables to England. Haarlem, Zandyport, Barkum, and Emden all report that cables are interrupted. They can get no reply from England, and tests show that cables are damaged somewhere near English shore.' "

" Is that all?" asked Fergusson.

" That's all. Paris knows no more than we do," was the assistant's response.

" Then the Norfolk and Suffolk coasts are completely isolated—cut off from post office, railways, telephones, and cables!" exclaimed the superintendent. "It's mysterious—most mysterious!" And, taking up the instrument upon his table, he placed a plug in one of the holes down the front of the table itself, and a moment later was in conversation with the official in charge of the traffic at Liverpool Street, repeating the report from Paris, and urging him to send light engines north from Wymondham or Beccles into the

zone of mystery.
The reply came back that he had already done so, but a telegram had reached him from Wymondham to the effect that the road-bridges between Kimberley and Hardingham had apparently fallen in, and the line was blocked by débris. Interruption was also reported beyond Swaffham, at a place called Little Dunham.
“ Then even the railways themselves are broken!” cried Fergusson. “Is it possible that there’s been a great earthquake?”
“ An earthquake couldn’t very well destroy all five cables from the Continent,” remarked the superintendent gravely.
The latter had scarcely placed the receiver upon the hook when a third man entered—an operator who, addressing him, said—
“ Will you please come to the switchboard, sir? There’s a man in the Ipswich call office who has just told me a most extraordinary story. He says that he started in his motor-car alone from Lowestoft to London at half-past three this morning, and just as it was getting light he was passing along the edge of Henham Park, between Wangford village and Blythburgh, when he saw three men apparently repairing the telegraph wires. One was up the pole, and the other two were standing below. As he passed he saw a flash, for, to his surprise, one of the men fired point-blank at him with a revolver. Fortunately, the shot went wide, and he at once put on a move and got down into Blythburgh village, even though one of his tyres went down. It had probably been pierced by the bullet fired at him, as the puncture was unlike any he had ever had before. At Blythburgh he informed the police of the outrage, and the constable, in turn, woke up the postmaster, who tried to telegraph back to the police at Wrentham, but found that the line was interrupted. Was it possible that the men were cutting the wires, instead of repairing them? He says that after repairing the puncture he took the village constable

and three other men on his car and went back to the spot, where, although the trio had escaped, they saw that wholesale havoc had been wrought with the telegraphs. The lines had been severed in four or five places, and whole lengths tangled up into great masses. A number of poles had been sawn down, and were lying about the roadside. Seeing that nothing could be done, the gentleman remounted his car, came on to Ipswich, and reported the damage at our call office."

" And is he still there?" exclaimed the superintendent quickly, amazed at the motorist's statement.

" Yes. I asked him to wait for a few moments in order to speak to you, sir."

" Good. I'll go at once. Perhaps you'd like to come also, Mr. Fergusson?"

And all four ran up to the gallery, where the huge switchboards were ranged around, and where the night operators, with the receivers attached to one ear, were still at work.

In a moment the superintendent had taken the operator's seat, adjusted the ear-piece, and was in conversation with Ipswich. A second later he was speaking with the man who had actually witnessed the cutting of the trunk line.

While he was thus engaged an operator at the farther end of the switchboard suddenly gave vent to a cry of surprise and disbelief.

" What do you say, Beccles? Repeat it," he asked excitedly.

Then a moment later he shouted aloud—

" Beccles says that German soldiers—hundreds of them—are pouring into the place! The Germans have landed at Lowestoft, they think."

All who heard those ominous words sprang up dumbfounded, staring at each other.

The assistant-superintendent dashed to the operator's side and seized his apparatus.

" Halloa—halloa, Beccles! Halloa—halloa—halloa!"

The response was some gruff words in German, and the sound of scuffling could distinctly be heard. Then all was silent.

Time after time he rang up the small Suffolk town, but in vain. Then he switched through to the testers, and quickly the truth was plain.

The second trunk line to Norwich, running from Ipswich by Harleston and Beccles, had been cut farther towards London.

But what held everyone breathless in the trunk telephone headquarters was that the Germans had actually effected the surprise landing that had so often in recent years been predicted by military critics; that England on that quiet September Sunday morning had been attacked. England was actually invaded. It was incredible!

Yet London's millions in their Sunday morning lethargy were in utter ignorance of the grim disaster that had suddenly fallen upon the land.

Fergusson was for rushing at once back to the *Weekly Dispatch* office to get out an extraordinary edition, but the superintendent, who was still in conversation with the motorist, urged judicious forethought.

" For the present, let us wait. Don't let us alarm the public unnecessarily. We want corroboration. Let us have the motorist up here," he suggested.

" Yes," cried the sub-editor. "Let me speak to him."

Over the wire Fergusson begged the stranger to come at once to London and give his story, declaring that the military authorities would require it. Then, just as the man who had been shot at by German advance spies—for such they had undoubtedly been—in order to prevent the truth leaking out, gave his promise to come to town at once, there came over the line from the coastguard at Southwold a vague, incoherent telephone message regarding strange ships having been seen to the northward, and asking for connection with Harwich; while King's Cross and Liverpool

Street Stations both rang up almost simultaneously, reporting the receipt of extraordinary messages from King's Lynn, Diss, Harleston, Halesworth, and other places. All declared that German soldiers were swarming over the north, that Lowestoft and Beccles had been seized, and that Yarmouth and Cromer were isolated.

Various stationmasters reported that the enemy had blown up bridges, taken up rails, and effectually blocked all communication with the coast. Certain important junctions were already held by the enemy's outposts.

Such was the amazing news received in that high-up room in Carter Lane, City, on that sweet, sunny morning when all the great world of London was at peace, either still slumbering or week-ending.

Fergusson remained for a full hour and a half at the Telephone Exchange, anxiously awaiting any further corroboration. Many wild stories came over the wires telling how panic-stricken people were fleeing inland away from the enemy's outposts. Then he took a hansom to the *Weekly Dispatch* office, and proceeded to prepare a special edition of his paper—an edition containing surely the most amazing news that had ever startled London.

Fearing to create undue panic, he decided not to go to press until the arrival of the motorist from Ipswich. He wanted the story of the man who had actually seen the cutting of the wires. He paced his room excitedly, wondering what effect the news would have upon the world. In the rival newspaper offices the report was, as yet, unknown. With journalistic forethought he had arranged that at present the bewildering truth should not leak out to his rivals, either from the railway termini or from the telephone exchange. His only fear was that some local correspondent might telegraph from some village or town nearer the metropolis which was still in communication with the central office.

Time passed very slowly. Each moment increased his

anxiety. He had sent out the one reporter who remained on duty to the house of Colonel Sir James Taylor, the Permanent Under-Secretary for War. Halting before the open window, he looked up and down the street for the arriving motor-car. But all was quiet.

Eight o'clock had just boomed from Big Ben, and London still remained in her Sunday morning peace. The street, bright in the warm sunshine, was quite empty, save for a couple of motor-omnibuses and a sprinkling of gaily dressed holiday-makers on their way to the day excursion trains.

In that centre of London—the hub of the world—all was comparatively silent, the welcome rest after the busy turmoil that through six days in the week is unceasing, that fevered throbbing of the heart of the world's great capital. Of a sudden, however, came the whirr-r of an approaching car, as a thin-faced, travel-stained man tore along from the direction of the Strand and pulled up before the office. The fine car, a six-cylinder "Napier," was grey with the mud of country roads, while the motorist himself was smothered until his goggles had been almost entirely covered.

Fergusson rushed out to him, and a few moments later the pair were in the upstairs room, the sub-editor swiftly taking down the motorist's story, which differed very little from what he had already spoken over the telephone.

Then, just as Big Ben chimed the half-hour, the echoes of the half-deserted Strand were suddenly awakened by the loud, strident voices of the newsboys shouting—

" *Weekly Dispatch* , spe-shall! Invasion of England this morning! Germans in Suffolk! Terrible panic! Spe-shall! *Weekly Dispatch* , Spe-shall!"

As soon as the paper had gone to press Fergusson urged the motorist—whose name was Horton, and who lived at Richmond—to go with him to the War Office and report. Therefore, both men entered the car, and in a few moments drew up before the new War Office in Whitehall.

“ I want to see somebody in authority at once!” cried Fergusson excitedly to the sentry as he sprang out.
“ You’ll find the caretaker, if you ring at the side entrance—on the right, there,” responded the man, who then marched on.
“ The caretaker!” echoed the excited sub-editor bitterly. “And England invaded by the Germans!”
He, however, dashed towards the door indicated and rang the bell. At first there was no response. But presently there were sounds of a slow unbolting of the door, which opened at last, revealing a tall, elderly man in slippers, a retired soldier.
“ I must see somebody at once!” exclaimed the journalist. “Not a moment must be lost. What permanent officials are here?”
“ There’s nobody ’ere, sir,” responded the man in some surprise at the request. “It’s Sunday morning, you know.”
“ Sunday! I know that, but I must see someone. Whom can I see?”
“ Nobody, until to-morrow morning. Come then.” And the old soldier was about to close the door when the journalist prevented him, asking—
“ Where’s the clerk-in-residence?”
“ How should I know? Gone up the river, perhaps. It’s a nice mornin’.”
“ Well, where does he live?”
“ Sometimes ’ere—sometimes in ’is chambers in Ebury Street,” and the man mentioned the number.
“ Better come to-morrow, sir, about eleven. Somebody’ll be sure to see you then.”
“ To-morrow!” cried the other. “To-morrow! You don’t know what you’re saying, man! To-morrow will be too late. Perhaps it’s too late now. The Germans have landed in England!”
“ Oh, ’ave they?” exclaimed the caretaker, regarding both men with considerable suspicion. “Our people will be glad

to know that, I’m sure—to-morrow.”
“ But haven’t you got telephones, private telegraphs, or something here, so that I can communicate with the authorities? Can’t you ring up the Secretary of State, the Permanent Secretary, or somebody?”
The caretaker hesitated a moment, his incredulous gaze fixed upon the pale, agitated faces of the two men.
“ Well, just wait a minute, and I’ll see,” he said, disappearing into a long cavernous passage.
In a few moments he reappeared with a constable whose duty it was to patrol the building.
The officer looked the strangers up and down, and then asked—
“ What’s this extraordinary story? Germans landed in England—eh? That’s fresh, certainly!”
“ Yes. Can’t you hear what the newsboys are crying? Listen!” exclaimed the motorist.
“ H’m. Well, you’re not the first gentleman who’s been here with a scare, you know. If I were you I’d wait till to-morrow,” and he glanced significantly at the caretaker.
“ I won’t wait till to-morrow!” cried Fergusson. “The country is in peril, and you refuse to assist me on your own responsibility—you understand?”
“ All right, my dear sir,” replied the officer, leisurely hooking his thumbs in his belt. “You’d better drive home, and call again in the morning.”
“ So this is the way the safety of the country is neglected!” cried the motorist bitterly, turning away. “Everyone away, and this great place, built merely to gull the public, I suppose, empty and its machinery useless. What will England say when she learns the truth?”
As they were walking in disgust out from the portico towards the car, a man jumped from a hansom in breathless haste. He was the reporter whom Fergusson had sent out to Sir James Taylor’s house in Cleveland Square, Hyde Park.

“ They thought Sir James spent the night with his brother up at Hampstead,” he exclaimed. “I’ve been there, but find that he’s away for the week-end at Chilham Hall, near Buckden.”
“ Buckden! That’s on the Great North Road!” cried Horton. “We’ll go at once and find him. Sixty miles from London. We can be there under two hours!”
And a few minutes later the pair were tearing due north in the direction of Finchley, disregarding the signs from police constables to stop, Horton wiping the dried mud from his goggles and pulling them over his half-closed eyes.
They had given the alarm in London, and the *Weekly Dispatch* was spreading the amazing news everywhere. People read it eagerly, gasped for a moment, and then smiled in utter disbelief. But the two men were on their way to reveal the appalling truth to the man who was one of the heads of that complicated machinery of inefficient defence which we so proudly term our Army.
Bursting with the astounding information, they bent their heads to the wind as the car shot onward through Barnet and Hatfield, then, entering Hitchin, they were compelled to slow down in the narrow street as they passed the old Sun Inn, and afterwards out again upon the broad highway with its many telegraph lines, through Biggleswade, Tempsford, and Eaton Socon, until, in Buckden, Horton pulled up to inquire of a farm labourer for Chilham Hall.
“ Oop yon road to the left, sir. ’Bout a mile Huntingdon way,” was the man’s reply.
Then away they sped, turning a few minutes later into the handsome lodge-gates of Chilham Park, and running up the great elm avenue, drew up before the main door of the ancient hall, a quaint many-gabled old place of grey stone.
“ Is Sir James Taylor in?” Fergusson shouted to the liveried man who opened the door.
“ He’s gone across the home farm with his lordship and the keepers,” was the reply.

“ Then take me to him at once. I haven’t a second to lose. I must see him this instant.”
Thus urged, the servant conducted the pair across the park and through several fields to the edge of a small wood, where two elderly men were walking with a couple of keepers and several dogs about them.
“ The tall gentleman is Sir James. The other is his lordship,” the servant explained to Fergusson; and a few moments later the breathless journalist, hurrying up, faced the Permanent Under-Secretary with the news that England was invaded—that the Germans had actually effected a surprise landing on the east coast.
Sir James and his host stood speechless. Like others, they at first believed the pale-faced, bearded sub-editor to be a lunatic, but a few moments later, when Horton briefly repeated the story, they saw that whatever might have occurred, the two men were at least in deadly earnest.
“ Impossible!” cried Sir James. “We should surely have heard something of it if such were actually the case! The coastguard would have telephoned the news instantly. Besides, where is our fleet?”
“ The Germans evidently laid their plans with great cleverness. Their spies, already in England, cut the wires at a pre-arranged hour last night,” declared Fergusson. “They sought to prevent this gentleman from giving the alarm by shooting him. All the railways to London are already either cut, or held by the enemy. One thing, however, is clear—fleet or no fleet, the east coast is entirely at their mercy.”
Host and guest exchanged dark glances.
“ Well, if what you say is the actual truth,” exclaimed Sir James, “to-day is surely the blackest day that England has ever known.”
“ Yes, thanks to the pro-German policy of the Government and the false assurances of the Blue Water School. They should have listened to Lord Roberts,” snapped his lordship. “I suppose you’ll go at once, Taylor, and make

inquiries?”
“ Of course,” responded the Permanent Secretary. And a quarter of an hour later, accepting Horton’s offer, he was sitting in the car as it headed back towards London.
Could the journalist’s story be true? As he sat there, with his head bent against the wind and the mud splashing into his face, Sir James recollected too well the repeated warnings of the past five years, serious warnings by men who knew our shortcomings, but to which no attention had been paid. Both the Government and the public had remained apathetic, the idea of peril had been laughed to scorn, and the country had, ostrich-like, buried its head in the sand, and allowed Continental nations to supersede us in business, in armaments, in everything.
The danger of invasion had always been ridiculed as a mere alarmist’s fiction; those responsible for the defence of the country had smiled, the Navy had been reduced, and the Army had remained in contented inefficiency.
If the blow had really been struck by Germany? If she had risked three or four, out of her twenty-three, army corps, and had aimed at the heart of the British Empire? What then? Ay! what then?
As the car swept down Regent Street into Pall Mall and towards Whitehall, Sir James saw on every side crowds discussing the vague but astounding reports now published in special editions of all the Sunday papers, and shouted wildly everywhere.
Boys bearing sheets fresh from the Fleet Street presses were seized, and bundles torn from them by excited Londoners eager to learn the latest intelligence.
Around both War Office and Admiralty great surging crowds were clamouring loudly for the truth. Was it the truth, or was it only a hoax? Half London disbelieved it. Yet from every quarter, from the north and from across the bridges, thousands were pouring in to ascertain what had really occurred, and the police had the greatest difficulty in

keeping order.
In Trafalgar Square, where the fountains were plashing so calmly in the autumn sunlight, a shock-headed man mounted the back of one of the lions and harangued the crowd with much gesticulation, denouncing the Government in the most violent terms; but the orator was ruthlessly pulled down by the police in the midst of his fierce attack.
It was half-past two o'clock in the afternoon. The Germans had already been on English soil ten hours, yet London was in ignorance of where they had actually landed, and utterly helpless.
All sorts of wild rumours were afloat, rumours that spread everywhere throughout the metropolis, from Hampstead to Tooting, from Barking to Hounslow, from Willesden to Woolwich. The Germans were in England!
But in those first moments of the astounding revelation the excitement centred in Trafalgar Square and its vicinity. Men shouted and threatened, women shrieked and wrung their hands, while wild-haired orators addressed groups at the street corners.
Where was our Navy? they asked. Where was our "command of the sea" of which the papers had always talked so much? If we possessed that, then surely no invader could ever have landed? Where was our Army—that brave British Army that had fought triumphantly a hundred campaigns, and which we had been assured by the Government was always ready for any emergency? When would it face the invader and drive him back into the sea? When?
And the wild, shouting crowds looked up at the many windows of the Admiralty and the War Office, ignorant that both those huge buildings only held terrified caretakers and a double watch of police constables.
Was England invaded? Were foreign legions actually overrunning Norfolk and Suffolk, and were we really

helpless beneath the iron heel of the enemy?
It was impossible—incredible! England was on the most friendly terms with Germany. Yet the blow had fallen, and London—or that portion of her that was not enjoying its Sunday afternoon nap in the smug respectability of the suburbs—stood amazed and breathless, in incredulous wonder.

CHAPTER II EFFECT IN THE CITY

Monday, 3rd September 1910, was indeed Black Monday for London.

By midnight on Sunday the appalling news had spread everywhere. Though the full details of the terrible naval disasters were not yet to hand, yet it was vaguely known that our ships had been defeated in the North Sea, and many of them sunk.

Before 7 a.m. on Monday, however, telegrams reaching London by the subterranean lines from the north gave thrilling stories of frightful disasters we had, while all unconscious, suffered at the hands of the German fleet. With London, the great cities of the north, Liverpool, Manchester, Sheffield, and Birmingham, awoke utterly dazed. It seemed incredible. And yet the enemy had, by his sudden and stealthy blow, secured command of the sea and actually landed.

The public wondered why a formal declaration of war had not previously been made, ignorant of the fact that the declaration preceding the Franco-German War was the first made by any civilised nation prior to the commencement of hostilities for one hundred and seventy years. The peril of the nation was now recognised on every hand.

Eager millions poured into the City by every train from the suburbs and towns in the vicinity of the metropolis, anxious to ascertain the truth for themselves, pale with terror, wild with excitement, indignant that our land forces were not already mobilised and ready to move eastward to meet the invader.

As soon as the banks were opened there was a run on them, but by noon the Bank of England had suspended all

specie payments. The other banks, being thus unable to meet their engagements, simply closed the doors, bringing business to an abrupt standstill. Consols stood at 90 on Saturday, but by noon on Monday were down to 42—lower even than they were in 1798, when they stood at 47¼. Numbers of foreigners tried to speculate heavily, but were unable to do so, for banking being suspended they could not obtain transfers.

On the Stock Exchange the panic in the afternoon was indescribable. Securities of every sort went entirely to pieces, and there were no buyers. Financiers were surprised that no warning in London had betrayed the position of affairs, London being the money centre of the world. Prior to 1870 Paris shared with London the honour of being the pivot of the money market, but on the suspension of cash payments by the Bank of France during the Franco-German War, Paris lost that position. Had it not been that the milliards comprising the French War indemnity were intact in golden louis in the fortress of Spandau, Germany could never have hoped to wage sudden war with Great Britain before she had made Berlin independent of London in a money sense, or, at any rate, to accumulate sufficient gold to carry on the war for at least twelve months. The only way in which she could have done this was to raise her rate so as to offer better terms than London. Yet directly the Bank of England discovered the rate of exchange going against her, and her stock of gold diminishing, she would have responded by raising the English bank-rate in order to check the flow. Thus competition would have gone on until the rates became so high that all business would be checked, and people would have realised their securities to obtain the necessary money to carry on their affairs. Thus, no doubt, the coming war would have been forecasted had it not been for Germany’s already prepared war-chest, which the majority of persons have nowadays overlooked. Its possession had

enabled Germany to strike her sudden blow, and now the Bank of England, which is the final reserve of gold in the United Kingdom, found that as notes were cashed so the stock of gold diminished until it was in a few hours compelled to obtain from the Government suspension of the Bank Charter. This enabled the Bank to suspend cash payment, and issue notes without a corresponding deposit of the equivalent in gold.

The suspension, contrary to increasing the panic, had, curiously enough, the immediate effect of somewhat allaying it. Plenty of people in the City were confident that the blow aimed could not prove an effective one, and that the Germans, however many might have landed, would quickly be sent back again. Thus many level-headed business men regarded the position calmly, believing that when our command of the sea was again re-established, as it must be in a day or two, the enemy would soon be non-existent.

Business outside the money market was, of course, utterly demoralised. The buying of necessities was now uppermost in everyone’s mind. Excited crowds in the streets caused most of the shops in the City and West End to close, while around the Admiralty were great crowds of eager men and women of all classes, tearful wives of bluejackets jostling with officers’ ladies from Mayfair and Belgravia, demanding news of their loved ones—inquiries which, alas! the casualty office were unable to satisfy. The scene of grief, terror, and suspense was heartrending. Certain ships were known to have been sunk with all on board after making a gallant fight, and those who had husbands, brothers, lovers, or fathers on board wept loudly, calling upon the Government to avenge the ruthless murder of their loved ones.

In Manchester, in Liverpool, indeed all through the great manufacturing centres of the north, the excitement of London was reflected.