VIRGINIA WOOLF

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THREE GUINEAS

ENRICHED EDITION

Virginia Woolf

Three Guineas

Enriched edition.

Introduction, Studies and Commentaries by Kenneth Gale

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Introduction

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A handful of guineas glints like small suns on a table where conscience, experience, and the thunder of distant drums meet, and the question is not merely who receives the coins but what conditions, histories, and allegiances shape the giver’s hand, as a woman writer traces how education, professional life, and the rituals of authority entangle with the causes of war, inviting the reader to weigh the cost of conformity against the price of resistance, and to consider whether money can be turned into an instrument of peace rather than a tribute to the very institutions that demand obedience.

Three Guineas is Virginia Woolf’s 1938 book-length essay, published by the Hogarth Press, and composed in the charged atmosphere of late-1930s Europe. Its premise is at once practical and audacious: a response to letters asking how to prevent war and whether a celebrated author might help by giving money to specific causes. The essay takes the form of replies that consider what a guinea might achieve and under what terms it should be given. Without narrating events, Woolf stages an inquiry into power, gender, and responsibility, asking how private choices bear upon public calamities.

The work is organized as an exchange: three appeals arrive, and three replies unfold, each interrogating a different institution that shapes civic life. Woolf examines appeals for support to education, to professional advancement, and to organized efforts against war. By placing the act of giving at the center, she reframes philanthropy as critique, testing whether gifts can be made without endorsing the very hierarchies that exclude women and enforce obedience. The thread that binds the letters is the relationship between those deemed outsiders and the authorities who speak in the name of the nation, the university, and the law.

Its classic status rests first on literary innovation. Three Guineas fuses the public letter with the essay, employing a cool, lucid voice that turns irony into an instrument of analysis. Woolf layers evidence, appeals to shared observation, and subjects respectable customs to a slow, revealing light. The method is both intimate and forensic, extending the essay beyond personal reflection into a sustained critique of institutions. That combination—stylistic poise, structural daring, and intellectual rigor—made the book a touchstone for readers seeking forms that could carry argument, feeling, and political insight without surrendering to slogan or sermon.

The book also occupies a pivotal place in Woolf’s oeuvre. It extends the economic and educational concerns of A Room of One’s Own into the fevered questions of the late 1930s, when the language of duty and honor was invoked to prepare for war. Here Woolf tests whether a writer, and especially a woman writer recently admitted to public life, can answer such summonses without forfeiting independence. Rather than dramatize the self, she dramatizes the conditions under which the self can act responsibly, turning attention from individual ambition to the moral design of institutions that claim to speak for all.

Historical context sharpens the book’s argument. Britain in the 1930s still bore traces of older exclusions: women had gained partial suffrage in 1918 and equal suffrage in 1928, and many universities and professions retained customs that limited women’s access and advancement. Abroad, militarism surged, and public rhetoric appealed to tradition and hierarchy. Woolf writes in this climate of uniforms, ceremonies, and official pronouncements, tracking how forms of authority teach obedience long before any battlefield is named. The essay's point of view is deliberately peripheral, attentive to what those newly admitted to public life can see that insiders may overlook.

Three Guineas examines the price of belonging. It weighs the allure of titles, robes, and offices against the independence of those who stand aside, and it connects economic dependence to silence in the face of violence. Education, Woolf argues, is not merely a personal good but a public responsibility shaped by funding, traditions, and gatekeeping. Professional life, too, can reproduce deference unless its codes are reimagined. Throughout, the book asks whether conscience can be exercised within institutions built on exclusion, and whether the habits that produce domestic obedience also prepare citizens to accept martial commands.

Stylistically, the essay's courtesy is exacting and strategic. Woolf writes with punctilious respect for her correspondents while turning each polite phrase into a lever for scrutiny. She gathers examples from public discourse, recalls recent changes in law and custom, and juxtaposes official ideals with lived realities. The tone is measured rather than declamatory, a choice that magnifies the force of her conclusions. Readers encounter a mind testing premises, following evidence, and refusing to accept abstractions that come unaccompanied by material conditions—money, access, time, and the freedom to refuse participation.

The book's influence has been wide and durable. It offered later feminist critics, cultural historians, and political essayists a model for linking domestic economies to state power, and for reading institutional ritual as a language of control. Its compositional strategy—letters that become inquiries, inquiries that become proposals—helped shape modern essayistic practice. Debates about pacifism, citizenship, and gender often return to its pages, not because it supplies ready-made answers, but because it teaches how to ask questions that reopen settled arrangements and expose the costs those arrangements conceal.

Three Guineas is a classic because it makes method and ethics inseparable. The careful movement from detail to principle enacts the very discipline it recommends: thinking before joining, asking before endorsing, giving with conditions that safeguard freedom. The book's prose—cool, exact, and quietly impassioned—has ensured its place in classrooms and public discussions. It offers no spectacle of conversion and no climactic revelation; instead, it models the daily, stubborn labor of judgment. In doing so, it preserves the essay as a form capable of resisting both propaganda and indifference.

For contemporary readers, the book offers practical tools as well as perspective. It invites us to examine how we fund education, who thrives in professions, and what rituals confer authority in our own time. It asks how gifts, affiliations, and public statements entangle us with institutions we may wish to reform. The drama lies in the choices before the reader: to accept inherited forms of honor, to refuse them, or to reshape them so that dignity is no longer purchased at the expense of others' freedom and safety.

If its immediate scene is the late 1930s, its relevance endures. Questions about gendered access to power, the ethics of philanthropy, the responsibilities of intellectuals, and the seductions of militarized language remain pressing.

Three Guineas endures because it locates the origins of public violence in everyday habits and incentives, and because it trusts readers to deliberate rather than obey. Returning to it today is to recover a patient, unsparing way of thinking—one that measures the worth of institutions by the freedoms they protect—and to recognize why this book continues to speak across generations.

Synopsis

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Virginia Woolf’s Three Guineas, published in 1938, is a polemical essay cast as a series of letters that answers a gentleman’s question: how can war be prevented? Woolf stages her response from the standpoint of a woman in Britain, conscious of recent political crises and of women’s unequal status. Rather than offering a single program, she traces how money, education, and access to work shape the capacity to resist militarism. The guinea—an upper-class token of donation—becomes her organizing metaphor, a small but symbolically charged sum that can be directed to strategic causes. Across the essay, argument, documentation, and satire intertwine in a sustained, formal reply.

Woolf frames women as outsiders to the male institutions that dominate public life. Excluded for centuries from universities, professions, and decision-making, women have learned to observe the workings of power from a distance. This vantage point, she argues, fosters skepticism toward patriotic rhetoric and ceremonial authority. She assembles contemporary evidence—public statements, reported incidents, and social facts—to show how prestige and obedience are cultivated. By emphasizing women’s legal and economic disabilities within living memory, she links private subordination to the public appetite for command, situating the question of war within the everyday hierarchies that pervade the home, school, and workplace.

One appeal before her requests support for a women’s college. Woolf uses it to examine how education might counter the habits that feed belligerence. Women’s colleges, historically underfunded, need resources to train independent minds; yet she warns that wealth and imitation of elite traditions can reproduce the very values—competition, display, deference—that nourish militarism. Her donation is imagined as conditional: funds should strengthen intellectual freedom, foster breadth of study, and protect the college from the pursuit of prestige for its own sake. Education, in this view, is not merely a gateway to status but a discipline of judgment capable of resisting the glamour of power.

A second appeal comes from a society promoting women’s entry into the professions. Woolf reviews the recent legal opening of careers and the ongoing practical barriers—low pay, bias, and expectations of compliance. She stresses that paid work can secure the independence necessary for moral courage, including the courage to oppose war. Yet the professions themselves, she cautions, are steeped in hierarchies that mirror military organization. Her proposed gift again carries stipulations: equal training and remuneration, and a refusal to glorify ranks, badges, or rituals that confuse authority with virtue. The aim is to align professional advancement with civic responsibility, not with the pursuit of power.

The central letter about preventing war prompts Woolf to scrutinize the institutions led by men—universities, churches, the law, and the armed forces—and the forms of reverence they command. She juxtaposes their ceremonies and uniforms with images of devastation to question what, exactly, society has been taught to admire. By reproducing photographs and citing public pronouncements, she argues that the cult of appearance and rank supports a willingness to coerce. From this analysis follows a guarded stance: assistance may be offered, but not uncritically and not by joining organizations that perpetuate the very structures under examination.

Woolf connects public aggression to domestic rule. Within households, fathers and husbands have long controlled women’s mobility, education, and money. Such control trains both rulers and ruled in habits of domination and submission, shaping the character of citizens who later occupy public offices or acquiesce to them. When economic dependence compels silence, the cost is not only personal dignity but also the capacity to resist collective violence. Thus, for Woolf, the struggle against tyranny cannot be split between the private and the political; reform in one sphere strengthens resistance in the other, making the prevention of war a matter of everyday justice.

From this vantage point, she sketches the ethic of an outsider. Independence of income and mind makes it possible to refuse invitations that compromise judgment—whether they come as honors, committees, or uniforms. The outsider observes, supports, and criticizes without surrendering autonomy. In practical terms, this means directing resources to institutions that cultivate freedom rather than conformity, and measuring success by integrity rather than prestige. The outsider’s stance also tempers zeal: it resists the intoxication of crowds and slogans, insisting on evidence, argument, and the slow work of building conditions in which dissent can survive.

The essay’s title promises three guineas, and Woolf fulfills that promise by distributing them across the causes before her: women’s education, women’s professional advancement, and organized efforts to prevent war. Each gift is paired with articulated expectations, intended to bind recipients to principles that undermine belligerence—intellectual independence, material equality, and suspicion of pomp. Rather than declaring allegiance to any body, she answers the original question concretely: change the conditions that produce obedience to power. The guineas thus function as both financial aid and public argument, tracing a route from private donations to structural critique.

Three Guineas endures as a fusion of feminist analysis and anti-militarist reasoning, composed at a moment when authoritarian movements threatened Europe. Its method—careful citation, visual juxtaposition, and an exacting tone—seeks to alter how readers perceive authority and value. Without relying on exhortation, Woolf supplies a framework for linking peace to equality: where minds are free and livelihoods secure, the appeal of violent prestige weakens. The essay’s closing emphasis falls on vigilance and responsibility, inviting readers to consider how everyday choices of money, work, and allegiance can sustain the conditions of a more just and peaceful public life.

Historical Context

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Three Guineas is set in Britain in the late 1930s, a moment shaped by the interwar settlement and looming conflict in Europe. Published in 1938 by the Hogarth Press, the work addresses a correspondent’s question about how to prevent war and turns it into a broader critique of Britain’s dominant institutions. Universities, the professions, the Church of England, and the state—closely allied with public schools and Oxbridge—form the backdrop. These bodies were overwhelmingly male-led, steeped in ceremony, and anchored by class privilege. Woolf situates her argument within this environment, positioning women—especially “daughters of educated men”—at the threshold of formal inclusion yet still structurally excluded from power.

The book’s pacifist interrogation draws energy from the memory of the First World War. Between 1914 and 1918, Britain mobilized millions, with catastrophic casualties and widespread trauma among veterans and civilians. Commemoration rituals, including the Cenotaph (unveiled in 1920) and Armistice observances, kept the war vividly present. Women’s wartime work created expectations of postwar opportunity that were frustrated by the return of prewar hierarchies. Interwar pacifism grew in this soil, mixing grief with disillusionment over promises of a “land fit for heroes.” Three Guineas addresses war’s causes not only in foreign policy but also in the domestic habits and institutions that trained citizens to obey, compete, and admire authority.

The rise of authoritarian regimes in Europe sharpened these concerns. Mussolini consolidated power in Italy after 1922;

Hitler took control of Germany in 1933; and the Spanish Civil War (1936–1939) exposed the violence of fascist forces. In Britain, the 1930s saw the British Union of Fascists (founded 1932) and a volatile mix of sympathy, fear, and opposition to fascism. Government policy leaned toward appeasement, culminating in the Munich Agreement of 1938. Three Guineas registers this climate by linking fascism’s cult of hierarchy and uniform to domestic forms of patriarchal authority, arguing that the habits that produce obedience at home and in elite institutions can also feed militarism abroad.

Alongside anxiety about war grew an energetic peace movement. Organizations such as the Peace Pledge Union (founded 1934) reflected a broad pacifist current; the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom, founded in 1915, continued its interwar work across borders. The League of Nations embodied hopes for collective security, even as its weaknesses became evident in crises like Manchuria (1931) and Abyssinia (1935–1936). British student debates captured the mood: in 1933 the Oxford Union’s resolution not to fight “for King and Country” stirred national controversy. In this context, Three Guineas responds to a request for practical advice about preventing war by interrogating the social foundations that sanction it.

Political rights for women had expanded recently, yet parity remained distant. The Representation of the People Act (1918) enfranchised many women over 30; the Equal Franchise Act (1928) equalized voting ages with men at 21. Women sat in Parliament from 1919 onward, though their numbers stayed small throughout the 1930s. Formal citizenship did not yield equal access to power, office, or party patronage. Three Guineas insists that suffrage alone cannot dissolve entrenched hierarchies in education, the professions, and the Church. It suggests that political inclusion without economic and institutional transformation leaves intact the structures that normalize deference, competition, and the pursuit of dominance.

Universities stood at the center of the social order Woolf scrutinizes. Women’s colleges had existed in the late nineteenth century—Girton (1869) and Newnham (1871) at Cambridge; Lady Margaret Hall (1878) and Somerville (1879) at Oxford—but recognition was partial and resources thin. Oxford allowed women to take degrees from 1920; Cambridge did not grant them full degrees until 1948. Endowments and fellowships disproportionately favored men’s colleges. In Three Guineas, appeals for a building fund for a women’s college foreground how women’s institutions were expected to rely on private gifts, reflecting broader patterns in which access nominally widened while financial power remained heavily gendered.

The professions opened formally after the Sex Disqualification (Removal) Act of 1919, yet barriers persisted. Women entered the bar from 1922 and could qualify as solicitors, but numbers stayed low and patronage networks were male-dominated. Medicine had admitted pioneering women earlier, yet senior posts and research fellowships largely favored men. The civil service imposed a marriage bar for many posts during the interwar years, and several local education authorities maintained similar rules for teachers. Pay inequities were common. Three Guineas addresses this situation by channeling aid to a women’s professional association with conditions, demanding that inclusion not replicate the competitive, hierarchical ethos that sustains militarism.

Economic pressures intensified these inequalities. The Great Depression, beginning in 1929, brought high unemployment and fiscal retrenchment. In 1931, the May Committee recommended spending cuts; the National Government adopted austerity, constraining public services and education. Scholarships were limited, and women's colleges, with smaller endowments, faced chronic underfunding. For many middle-class families, reduced incomes narrowed daughters' educational opportunities. Woolf seizes on the guinea—the professional-class fee, historically one pound and one shilling—as a symbol of class-marked exchange. By offering three guineas to separate causes under explicit terms, she recasts a familiar currency of privilege into an instrument for institutional change rather than deference.

A culture of uniforms and ceremony tied British institutions to power. Military dress, judges' wigs, clerical vestments, and academic gowns signaled authority in courtrooms, cathedrals, and colleges. Public processions and prize-givings rehearsed obedience and rank. Three Guineas scrutinizes this visual regime, arguing that reverence for costume and ritual can train citizens to admire command, medals, and salutes—the very aesthetics fascist movements exploited. The essay juxtaposes domestic pageantry with images of devastation abroad to question what such spectacles conceal. In this light, the line between legitimate authority and authoritarian display appears dangerously thin when social prestige rests on hierarchy rather than service.

Advances in mass media shaped how Britons saw power and war. By the 1930s, the BBC reached national audiences via radio; newsreels in cinemas narrated world events; and mass-circulation newspapers, increasingly photo-driven, framed political spectacles and conflicts. Coverage of the Spanish Civil War—including images of bombed towns and displaced civilians—brought the costs of modern warfare into British homes. Three Guineas repeatedly urges readers to interrogate photographs and press narratives, treating visual evidence as a test of institutional claims. The essay's method reflects a broader 1930s media literacy: to resist propaganda and pageantry, one must look closely at what is shown and what is omitted.

Elite schooling underwrote the social reproduction Three Guineas critiques. Public schools such as Eton and Harrow, linked to Oxford and Cambridge, fed the civil service, diplomacy, the bar, and Parliament. Informal networks—club memberships, patronage, and references—smoothed careers for the "sons of educated men." Competitive examinations coexisted with advantages in preparation and recommendation. Women, even when nominally admitted, lacked equivalent access to the mentoring and sponsorship that turned credentials into influence. Woolf's phrase "the procession of the sons of educated men" targets this continuum from classroom to boardroom, where loyalty to one's cohort can outweigh public service and suppress dissent.

Religion remained a powerful institution with significant civic reach. The Church of England had seats for bishops in the House of Lords and shaped public debate on morality, education, and nation. In the 1930s, ordination was closed to women; leadership positions were male. Religious rhetoric often reinforced ideals of duty, sacrifice, and obedience that overlapped with nationalist narratives. Three Guineas questions whether churches, invested in hierarchy and tradition, can serve as consistent bulwarks against militarism. Without reforms to their governance and culture, such institutions risk blessing forms of authority that eclipse conscience, elevating unity and discipline over the scrutiny necessary to resist war.

Marriage laws and workplace norms constrained women's autonomy. While the Married Women's Property Acts of the late nineteenth century secured married women’s control over property, interwar economic life still treated marriage as a woman’s primary vocation. Marriage bars in the civil service and parts of teaching remained common, and professional advancement often assumed uninterrupted careers unavailable to many women. Divorce reforms proceeded slowly, and social penalties for nonconformity were strong. Three Guineas insists on independent income as a practical safeguard for thought and speech. Economic self-reliance enables women to refuse enlistment in institutions that demand conformity to militarized values.

Interwar feminism was international, and British activists engaged with cross-border networks. Groups such as the International Alliance of Women and the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom convened congresses, circulated research, and lobbied national and international bodies. Debates divided feminists over pacifism, sanctions, and collective security, especially after the Abyssinian crisis and in Spain. Three Guineas echoes this transnational sensibility by proposing an “outsider” stance that crosses national boundaries: women, newly admitted yet marginal to power, can observe how similar hierarchies operate in different countries. The essay engages with these networks’ belief that institutional reform and internationalism are mutually reinforcing.

Empire and nationalism formed part of the mental world the essay challenges. In the 1930s, Britain remained a global empire, while anti-colonial movements—from India’s civil disobedience to unrest elsewhere—tested imperial governance. The 1935 Government of India Act altered constitutional structures without ending imperial rule. The League of Nations’ failure to stop Italy’s 1935 invasion of Ethiopia exposed the limits of collective security and imperial priorities. Three Guineas suggests that authoritarian habits at home—obedience, hierarchy, reverence for uniforms—mirror practices of domination abroad. By linking patriarchy and imperial swagger, Woolf warns that oppression is not an exception of the battlefield but a continuum nurtured in everyday institutions.

The essay's immediate context includes street-level conflicts over fascism. The British Union of Fascists staged rallies; counter-mobilizations culminated in confrontations such as the 1936 resistance at Cable Street in London. British public debate weighed rearmament, neutrality, and intervention in Spain. Youth culture oscillated between pacifism and anti-fascist activism, while government policy sought stability with limited commitments. Three Guineas enters this contested field by refusing simple alignment with either militarist solutions or passive withdrawal. It argues that preventing war requires dismantling the domestic engines of status and deference that make war plausible—beginning with how one studies, works, gives money, and responds to institutional demands.

Publication and reception underscore its provocations. Issued in 1938 as European crisis deepened, Three Guineas divided reviewers. Some criticized its tone and class inflection; others praised its forensic linkage of patriarchy and militarism. Its conditions on giving—directed to a women's college, a professional women's society, and an anti-war organization—struck many as both pragmatic and unsettling, because they tied philanthropy to structural change rather than gratitude. The essay's style—assembling letters, press clippings, and observations—matched its argument that public claims should be tested against visible evidence. Debate over its pacifism persisted as war approached, confirming the urgency of its questions rather than settling them.

Author Biography

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Virginia Woolf (1882–1941) was an English novelist, essayist, and critic, central to literary modernism in the early twentieth century. Known for pioneering narrative forms that explore consciousness and time, she helped reshape the possibilities of the novel and the essay. As a leading figure associated with the Bloomsbury Group, she engaged in wide-ranging debates about art, ethics, and society. Her body of work spans fiction, literary criticism, biography, and political essays, and continues to influence writers, scholars, and readers worldwide. Woolf's legacy rests on stylistic innovation, intellectual rigor, and a sustained inquiry into gender, knowledge, and the textures of everyday life.

Raised in a highly literary environment in London, Woolf received most of her early education at home, where extensive reading shaped her ambitions. In the late 1890s she attended classes at the Ladies' Department of King's College London, studying history and classics and encountering early waves of feminist and reformist thought. Her critical sensibility developed through reviewing for periodicals and engagement with contemporary debates in aesthetics. The emergence of European modernism, the impact of post-impressionist art in Britain, and the legacy of nineteenth-century fiction informed her methods. She drew on philosophy, psychology, and the visual arts to craft experimental approaches to narrative and voice.

Beginning in the first decade of the twentieth century, Woolf built a career as a reviewer and essayist, contributing to journals including the Times Literary Supplement. Her first novel, The Voyage Out, appeared in 1915, followed by Night and Day in 1919. In 1917 she co-founded the Hogarth Press with Leonard Woolf, an enterprise that enabled her to publish her own work and promote innovative writing. The press became a conduit for contemporary poetry, fiction, and important translations, and helped cultivate a readership for experimental prose. With Jacob’s Room (1922), Woolf moved decisively toward a fragmentary, impressionistic method that reoriented British fiction.

In the mid-1920s Woolf produced the sequence of novels that secured her reputation. Mrs Dalloway (1925) and To the Lighthouse (1927) refined techniques of interiority, shifting perspective, and temporal layering. Orlando (1928) blended biography and fantasy to interrogate history and identity, while The Waves (1931) pushed polyphonic form toward lyrical abstraction. Later fiction such as The Years (1937) considered generational change and social continuity. Across these works, she emphasized pattern, motif, and rhythm rather than conventional plot, seeking to render the flux of perception. Critics increasingly recognized her as a principal architect of modernist prose, even as some readers resisted the formal experimentation.

Woolf was also a major essayist and public intellectual. The Common Reader (first series, 1925; second series, 1932) illustrated her humane, incisive criticism and a distinctive conversational style. A Room of One’s Own (1929) advanced a case for women’s material independence and access to education as conditions for creative work, a thesis amplified by Three Guineas (1938), which linked gender inequality to authoritarianism and war. She wrote experiments in biography, notably Orlando, and a later study of the art critic Roger Fry, and refined the essay as an elastic form. Her nonfiction shaped debates about canons, institutions, and the social structures that enable literature.

Woolf’s later years unfolded amid economic depression and the rise of fascism, contexts that sharpened the political edge of her essays. She continued to experiment in fiction, completing Between the Acts (published 1941), a meditation on community, history, and performance. Throughout her life she experienced periods of severe mental illness that interrupted her work. During the Second World War, the bombing of London and broader turmoil weighed on her. In 1941 she died by suicide in rural Sussex. Editors later issued selections from her diaries, letters, and essays, which deepened public understanding of her working methods and intellectual commitments.

Woolf’s legacy spans literature, feminist theory, and narrative studies. Her explorations of consciousness, the social basis of knowledge, and the ethics of attention have influenced novelists across languages and generations. She remains central to discussions of stream of consciousness, free indirect style, and the relation between form and gender. Scholars continue to revisit her essays for their insights into education, professional life, and the politics of culture. Editions, adaptations, and critical monographs keep her corpus in active circulation. Today, Woolf stands as a writer whose formal daring and analytic clarity illuminate ongoing questions about identity, community, and the value of art.

Three Guineas

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One

Three years is a long time to leave a letter unanswered, and your letter has been lying without an answer even longer than that. I had hoped that it would answer itself, or that other people would answer it for me. But there it is with its question — How in your opinion are we to prevent war? — still unanswered[1q].

It is true that many answers have suggested themselves, but none that would not need explanation, and explanations take time. In this case, too, there are reasons why it is particularly difficult to avoid misunderstanding. A whole page could be filled with excuses and apologies; declarations of unfitness, incompetence, lack of knowledge, and experience: and they would be true. But even when they were said there would still remain some difficulties so fundamental that it may well prove impossible for you to understand or for us to explain. But one does not like to leave so remarkable a letter as yours — a letter perhaps unique in the history of human correspondence, since when before has an educated man asked a woman how in her opinion war can be prevented? — unanswered. Therefore let us make the attempt; even if it is doomed to failure.

In the first place let us draw what all letter-writers instinctively draw, a sketch of the person to whom the letter is addressed. Without someone warm and breathing on the other side of the page, letters are worthless. You, then, who ask the question, are a little grey on the temples; the hair is no longer thick on the top of your head. You have reached the middle years of life not without effort, at the Bar; but on the whole your journey has been prosperous. There is nothing parched, mean or dissatisfied in your expression. And without wishing to flatter you, your prosperity — wife, children, house — has been deserved. You have never sunk into the contented apathy of middle life, for, as your letter from an office in the heart of London shows, instead of turning on your pillow and prodding your pigs, pruning your pear trees — you have a few acres in Norfolk — you are writing letters, attending meetings, presiding over this and that, asking questions, with the sound of the guns in your ears. For the rest, you began your education at one of the great public schools and finished it at the university.

It is now that the first difficulty of communication between us appears. Let us rapidly indicate the reason. We both come of what, in this hybrid age when, though birth is mixed, classes still remain fixed, it is convenient to call the educated class. When we meet in the flesh we speak with the same accent; use knives and forks in the same way; expect maids to cook dinner and wash up after dinner; and can talk during dinner without much difficulty about politics and people; war and peace; barbarism and civilization — all the questions indeed suggested by your letter. Moreover, we both earn our livings. But … those three dots mark a precipice, a gulf so deeply cut between us that for three years and more I have been sitting on my side of it wondering whether it is any use to try to speak across it. Let us then ask someone else — it is Mary Kingsley[4] — to speak for us. 'I don't know if I ever revealed to you the fact that being allowed to learn German was ALL the paid-for education I ever had. Two thousand pounds was spent on my brother's, I still hope not in vain.'[1] Mary Kingsley is not speaking for herself alone; she is speaking, still, for many of the daughters of educated men. And she is not merely speaking for them; she is also pointing to a very important fact about them, a fact that must profoundly influence all that follows: the fact of Arthur's Education Fund[1][2q]. You, who have read Pendennis[2], will remember how the mysterious letters A.E.F. figured in the household ledgers. Ever since the thirteenth century English families have been