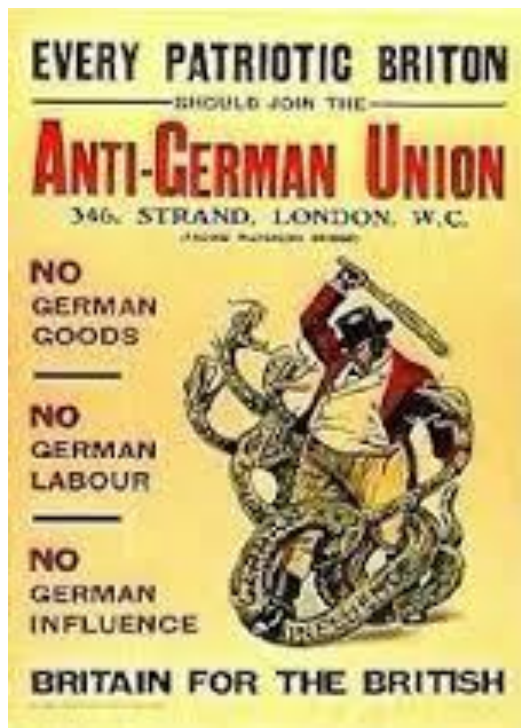


ALIENS?

By Paul Whitfield



Cast

Winifred Burnet
Mrs Burnet
Mr Burnet
Clara
Nellie
Joseph
Neighbour
Captain Turner
Reader 1
Reader 2
Reader 3
Person 1
Person 2
Person 3
Person 4

Scene 1

***Burnet family on stage. Winifred is reading a book. Mr B is reading the paper.
Mrs B is preparing food. Joseph is asleep in a chair. Clara and Nellie are
playing draughts.***

Winifred

[To audience]

This is my family. I live with them at the moment. One day I won't and, much as I love them, I hope that day comes soon.

Mrs B

Winnie...

Winifred

[To audience]

Mother always wants me to help, because I'm the oldest girl. I don't think it's fair, but the world isn't a fair place for young women, not now, not in 1914.

Mrs B

Winnie, will you come and help please...

Winifred

[To audience]

I believe in what Mrs Pankhurst and the other Suffragettes are doing, but now war has started everything else takes second place.

Mrs B

Winifred!

Winifred

I'm reading, Mother.

[To audience]

But they say it will all be over by Christmas.

Mrs B

Put Mr Dickens down. He can wait until after we've eaten.

Winifred

[To audience]

You see? I'm a 21 year old woman trying to improve herself and my family only want me to be their maidservant.

Winifred goes to help Mrs B serving food.

Mrs B

Dinner time! Sit down everyone.

Winifred

[To audience]

Father was allowed to read at the table, but he did share it with the rest of us.

Mr B

Listen to this...

[Reading]

"Sir,-Just now we are reading lots about German and Austrian spies in this country and we are warned to be careful and not trust our alien enemy as a neighbour. What I should like to know is; Who are our German neighbours? Why could not the names of our alien enemies be put up at every police station or post office wherever they register so that people would know whom to watch. All doubt would be removed by letting the English people know who is our enemy and who is our friend,-Yours, etc.,"

Mrs B

Who are they talking about?

Mr B

I think they're frightened of anyone who might be of German descent...

Winifred

Like the royal family?

Mrs B

Winifred!

Winifred

Well it's true.

Clara

Or have a German relative...

Nellie

Or have ever been to Germany...

Clara

Or ever had a German lesson...

Joseph

We are at war with them.

Winifred

So we have to be frightened of everything that's even a little bit German?

Joseph

They are the enemy.

Mr B

I think some people are taking it a little far. There's a man in the paper asking if he has to continue making the payments on his piano because he thinks the man he owes money to might be German.

Clara

Sounds like he just doesn't want to pay.

Joseph

But if what he pays goes back to help the Germans then maybe he shouldn't.

Mr B

I don't think a Sheffield piano seller, whatever his origins, is going to be central to the Kaiser's war effort.

Joseph

The piano seller might be a spy.

Winifred

You're right, of course. The German master-plan is to sabotage piano sales in Sheffield so people can't play music and get so miserable they can't work and the arms factories grind to a halt. It's brilliant!

Joseph

Shut up, Winifred.

Winifred

[To audience]

Joseph and I fight all the time. He's just a little bit older than me and he thinks he is cleverer than I am, whereas I know I'm cleverer than him.

Joseph exits

Scene 2

Winifred

[To audience]

But I miss Joseph when he joins the Army and goes to war. Family life isn't quite the same, although we all try to carry on.

1915 comes...

Mr B

Your Mother's going shopping. What shall we have for tea?

Clara

Sausages!

Nellie

Sausages!

Clara and Nellie

Sausages!

Winifred

[To audience]

Sausages are our family favourite and our weekend treat.

Mr B

And don't forget the Sanatogen.

Winifred

[To audience]

Father insists we all take Sanatogen. It's a tonic. He says it will help us be strong enough to face the worry of the war.

Mrs B

We can't get Sanatogen anymore, remember. Sanatogen was made by alien enemies, a German company. It's been replaced by Sanatos. That's thoroughly British.

Nellie

Are we still allowed sausages? Our sausages come from Hannemann and Sons. Isn't that a German name?

Mr B

Almost every pork butcher in Sheffield has a German name. The German is the pork man 'par excellence'. Without German pork butchers, Britain wouldn't have any sausages!

Winifred

[To audience]

And Margaret Hannemann is one of my best friends. She was born in Sheffield, and so was her father. He ran the shop. His father, Margaret's grandfather, had come from Germany, but the family were now as Sheffield as I was.

Scene 3

Burnet family as opening scene, but without Joseph.

Winifred

[To audience]

Mother is cooking sausages when Father reads the newspaper report that changes everything...

Burnet family. Mr B with paper.

Mr B

Good Lord. I can't believe they've done this.

Nellie

What is it, Pops?

Mr B

What were they thinking?

Clara

Read it to us.

Mr B

Even President Wilson might change his mind about the war now.

Nellie

Tell us.

Mr B

The Germans have only gone and torpedoed the Lusitania.

Nellie

The what?

Winifred

It's an ocean liner. A passenger ship. There would have been hundreds of people on board.

Clara

What does the paper say?

Reader 1

How Lusitania met her Doom

Reader 2

Murder verdict against the Kaiser

Reader 3

Over a thousand perish

Reader 1

Torpedoes fired without warning from a German submarine

Reader 2 and 3
Wilful and Wholesale Murder

Reader 1
Captain William Turner was in charge of the Lusitania.

Reader 3
Replying to questions, Captain Turner stated...

Captain Turner
I heard the second officer call out "There's a torpedo!" There was an explosion and smoke and steam came up between the last two funnels. The ship went down under me in about 18 minutes.

Reader 2
This appalling crime was contrary to international law and the conventions of all civilized nations.

Winifred
[To audience]
It was terrible, but it felt a long way away from Sheffield. But maybe it isn't...

Scene 4

Winifred
[To audience]
Friday evening, May 14th 1915, I am arriving home when my neighbour runs up to me...

Neighbour with newspaper in her hand.

Neighbour
Have you seen this?

Winifred
What is it?

Neighbour
Have you seen what's happening down Attercliffe?

Winifred

[To audience]

When I read it I couldn't believe it.

Reader 1

"Anti-German Rioting"

Reader 2

"Eight Shops in Sheffield Wrecked"

Reader 3

"Indignant people"

Reader 1, 2 and 3

"Exciting scenes at Attercliffe today"

Reader 1

"Shutters pulled down"

Reader 2

"Windows smashed"

Reader 2 and 3

"A host of women invaded the shops"

Reader 1, 2 and 3

"Furious altercations with police"

Reader 1

"Complete destruction."

Neighbour

Doesn't your friend live down Attercliffe? Isn't she one of them German families?

Winifred

Margaret is not a German.

Winifred

[To audience]

I read down further. I see Margaret's family name 'Hannemann'. Her shop has been wrecked. Her home has been attacked. I can't stand by and do nothing. I have to find out if she is alright.

What happens next doesn't feel like real life. It feels more like being in a movie picture. Not 'The Perils of Pauline' but the 'Woes of Winifred'.

Silent movie style sequence.

1 - Winifred goes to Attercliffe.

2 - Rioters on the street in conflict with police.

3 - Hannemann shop wrecked. Margaret outside in tears, but unhurt.

4 - They gather a few of Margaret's things, get in a taxi and return to the Burnet house. They are followed.

5 - A mob gathers and throws things at the house and shouts insults. "Hun lover", "murderer", "blooming German spy", "rotten German spy", "German refugee".

6 - It is too dangerous for Margaret to stay. Reluctantly Winifred lets Margaret go. She leaves her belongings with Winifred.

Winifred

[To audience]

I am so helpless. I don't know where she went. How can people be so cruel?
Father comes back the next morning.

Winifred

You heard what happened?

Mr B

Are you alright?

Winifred

I was so frightened, but I couldn't just leave her.

Mr B

You have to. There's nothing you can do. You have to stay safe.

Winifred

Those people were her neighbours. They'd bought from the Hannemann's shop for years. They'd seen Margaret grow up amongst them.

Mr B

I know, but we're living in difficult times, dark times.

Winifred

It doesn't make sense.

Mr B

Are those Margaret's things?

Winifred

Yes.

Mr B

You have to take them back.

Winifred

What?

Mr B

We can't have them here.

Winifred

But her home is wrecked.

Mr B

People will think we're pro-German. It will make us targets.

Winifred

I can't turn my back on my friend.

Mr B

We won't be safe. Think of your Mother. Think of Nellie and Clara.

Winifred

[To audience]

I try to get a taxi to take me back. None will. Scared of helping a pro-German, I suppose. So I walk, and people in the street shout at me...

Person 1

"Traitor"

Person 2

"Hun lover"

Person 3

"I'll break your jaw for you"

Person 4

"You should be hung"

Person 1

"I'll string you up myself."

Winifred

[To audience]

Our windows are broken. They throw stones at Father. He hasn't done anything.

They stone him until he is ill. It will take more than Sanatos to help him now. I write to the paper to tell my story. I can't think of anything else to do. I say "What is an English girl to do? If it wasn't for the protection of the police I should be at the mob's mercy. I am certainly English, for which I thank God, though one cannot help their nationality."

Burnet family on stage. No Joseph. All look sadder and older.

Winifred

[To audience]

What did the Great War take from me, from my family? It took my brother, which was more than punishment enough, even for those people who hated what I did for Margaret.

It took my Father's health and his humour. It took my Mother's joy. It took away my faith in people, but it didn't take my strength. It didn't take my courage. It made me even more determined to fight for what I think is right.

END

Additional Information

Before July 18, 1917, the British Royal family had a surname of Saxe-Coburg Gotha going back to the time when a German family had inherited the British Crown. They also held various German titles. It was at this point in World War I, that the British Royal family changed their name to Windsor.

Woodrow Wilson was the president of the USA during World War I

Glossary

Kaiser is what the Germans called their King.

Suffragettes were a group of women who famously fought for the right of women to have the vote. They were very active before World War I using lots of different techniques including violence.

Convention is the way in which something is usually done, or an agreement between countries.

Altercation is a noisy argument or disagreement, especially in public.

"Hun" is a name that the British propaganda machine gave to the Germans as a reference to Attila the Hun, who was viewed as a savage – an uncivilised person.

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