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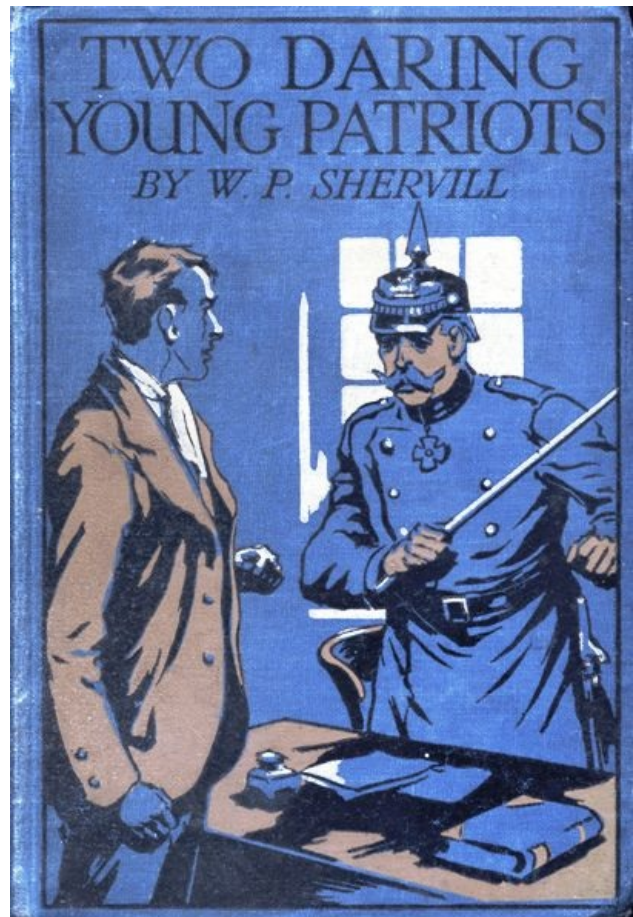
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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK TWO DARING YOUNG PATRIOTS; OR,
OUTWITTING THE HUNS ***



TWO DARING YOUNG PATRIOTS

Or, Outwitting the Huns

BY W. P. SHERVILL

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Illustrated by Arch. Webb

**BLACKIE AND SON LIMITED
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LIKE A WHIRLWIND THEY FLUNG THEMSELVES UPON THE HATED FOE

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TWO DARING YOUNG PATRIOTS

CHAPTER I

Trouble in the Crew

"Here come Benson's!"

The speaker leaned over the edge of the tow-path and watched an eight-oared boat swing swiftly round a bend in the river a hundred yards away and come racing up to the landing-stage.

"Eee—sy all—!" came in a sing-song from the coxswain, perched, for better sight, half upon the rear canvas, and eight oars instantly feathered the water as their boat slanted swiftly in towards the shore.

"Hold her, Seven."

With almost provoking sloth, after the smartly executed movements already described, Number Seven dug his oar deeply into the water, making up somewhat for his tardiness by the fierceness of the movement. The nose of the boat turned outwards almost with a jerk, and the craft slid in close to and parallel with the landing-stage.

"Seven's got the sulks again, Jones," commented the watcher on shore, a middle schoolboy named Walters, as he eyed the proceedings critically. "His time's bad. It's just as well they get to work to-morrow."

"Yes," assented his companion. "But, you know, it beats me why they didn't put Montgomery at stroke instead of seven. He's a far better oar than Durend—the best in the school—and it would have upset nobody."

"His style may be better," admitted Walters a little reluctantly, "but he hasn't got that tremendous shove off the stretcher that makes the other so useful a man to follow. Besides, he has too much temper to be able to nurse and humour the lame ducks and bring them on as Durend has done."

"Maybe—his temper certainly doesn't look sweet at the moment," replied Jones, gazing with a grim sort of amusement at Montgomery as the latter released his oar from the rowlock and stepped out of the boat, his handsome clean-cut face sadly marred by an undeniably ugly scowl.

"Durend's work isn't showy, but I hear that Benson thinks a lot of it," Walters went on. "It's a pity Monty takes it so badly, for the crew has come along immensely and with ordinary luck ought to make a cert of it."

"Riggers!" the stroke of the crew sang out, and the crew leaned out from the landing-stage and grasped the boat. "Lift!" and the boat was lifted clear of the water and up the slope to the boat-house hard by.

From bow to stern the faces of the crew were smiling and cheerful, albeit streaming with perspiration, as they passed through the admiring knot of their school-fellows assembled to watch them in. All, that is, save Seven, aforesaid, and Stroke, who looked downcast, and whose lips were set firmly as though he found his task no very pleasant one, but had nevertheless made up his mind to see it through.

In the dressing-room Montgomery vented his ill-humour somewhat pettishly, flinging his scarf and sweater anyhow into his locker and his dirty rowing boots violently after them. "I don't care a fig whether we win or lose," he growled. "I'm sick of being hectorated by a coach who never was an oar, and a stroke who knows about as much about rowing as my grandmother."

"Shut up, Monty!" replied another member of the crew good-naturedly. "Another week and it will be all over, and we shall be at the Head of the River for the first time—what?"

The thought of Benson's first victory in its history seemed, if anything, to incense Montgomery still more, for he glared angrily at Durend's set face and went on: "It's always *my* time or *my* swing that's wrong, too, when everyone used to say that I was the best oar in the school. Bah! it's to cover up his own faults that he's always blaming me. For two pins I'd resign, Durend; and I will, too, if you're not a deal more careful."

"You needn't," replied Durend shortly, but with a significance that was not lost upon those present.

"What d'ye mean?" demanded Montgomery.

"You're no longer in the crew."

"What! *You* turn me out? I'll take that from Benson, and from no one else, my boy!"

"Mr. Benson has left it to me, and I say you're no longer in the crew," replied Durend coldly, and with no hint of triumph in his voice. He knew, in fact, that his action was probably the death-knell

of all the hopes of his crew.

Montgomery's face blazed with passion, and he sprang violently upon Durend and struck fiercely at him. The two boys nearest grasped him and dragged him back, though not before he had left his mark in an angry-looking blotch upon the left cheek of his former chief. Through it all Durend said no word. He merely defended himself, looking, indeed, as though only half his mind were present, his interest in the matter being far out-weighed by concern for the threatened destruction of his beloved crew, the object of his deepest thoughts and hopes for a period of six crowded weeks.

The incident closed, for, Montgomery's first anger over, he saw the foolishness of making so much of losing a seat he had all along affected to despise. The crew dispersed, and soon the affair was the talk of the whole school. Benson's—the favourites—crippled by the loss of their Seven on the very eve of the race! Stroke and Seven at blows! Stroke licked, and no doubt spoiled for the race! The news, soon distorted out of all recognition, provided Hawkesley with matter for gossip such as it had not enjoyed for many a long day.

CHAPTER II

The Races

"Well, Stroke?" asked the Benson's cox, as the two slowly made their way from the boat-house towards the school. "What's to do now? I'm afraid we're done for. Mind," he went on in another tone, "I'm not blaming you. Any other fellow with a spark of spirit in him would have jibbed. But have you counted the cost?"

"Yes, Dale, I've counted the cost, and know what I'm going to do."

"So?"

"Three must come down to Seven and Franklin must come into the boat at Three. If only we had a week of practice before us I should not fear for the result, but to-morrow——"

Stroke's voice died away as he dug his hands deeply into his trousers pockets and walked moodily on. Suddenly he turned to his companion: "After all," he said, "we may stand a chance. If not on the first day or two of the races, then on the last. Rout out Franklin for me, Dale, and tell him what's afoot, and that we row at seven this evening with him at Three. Then tell the others. There'll be no hard work, only a paddle to help Franklin find the swing. One thing—he's fit enough."

"Yes, and I must say we have you to thank for that, old boy. Those runs before breakfast that used to make Monty so savage have done us a good turn by keeping Franklin fit, not to mention the occasional tubbing we have given him."

"Aye, he's not bad; and if the rest of the crew buck up well we may yet do things. Now good-bye, Dale, until seven o'clock! See that every man is ready stripped sharp to time for me, for I must now see Benson, and tell him all my plans."

The further news that Benson's were going out again with their spare man at Three, coming upon the sensational story of the quarrel between Stroke and Seven, spread like wildfire through the school. Every boy who was at all interested in the Eights—and who was not?—made a note of the matter, and promised himself that he would be there and see the fun for himself.

When seven o'clock arrived, therefore, the tow-path in front of Benson's boat-house was thronged with boys; some there in a spirit of foreboding, to see how their own crew shaped after its heavy misfortune, some to rejoice at the evidence they expected to see of the impending discomfiture of a redoubtable foe, some to jeer generally, and others—a few, but the more noisy—in out-and-out hostility to the crew which had turned out from among its number their favourite, Montgomery. So great was the crowd that the crew had almost to push its way through the press, at close quarters with a medley of cheers and groans that did not do the nerves of some of them much good.

The outing was a short one. Mr. Benson, who had coached the crew himself so far as his time permitted, did not put in an appearance, and Durend had the field to himself. All he did was to set an easy stroke, and to leave Dale, as cox, to keep a sharp watch upon the time and swing of Three and Seven. The change naturally upset the rhythm of the crew a little, but not so much as was generally expected. In fact, on the return to the boat-house, cheers predominated, as though others besides themselves had been agreeably surprised.

The Eights week at Hawkesley always stood out prominently from the rest of the year as a kind of landmark. It marked the highest point of the constant struggle between the several Houses into which the school was divided, and all energies were therefore concentrated upon it for weeks in advance. As may have been surmised, the Eights races were not direct contests, with heats, semi-finals, and finals, but bumping races, for the little River Suir would hardly permit of anything else. For a short stretch or two, perhaps, a couple of boats might have raced abreast, but it would not have been possible to have found a reasonably full course for a race to be decided in that

way. Consequently the boats were anchored to the shore four boat-lengths behind one another, and by the rules of the game they were required to give chase to one another, and to touch or bump the boat in front to score a win.

A win meant that the victors and vanquished changed places, and the whole essence of the contest was that the stronger crews gradually fought their way forward into the van of the line of boats. There were six Houses to the school, and the same number of crews competed, for the honour of their respective Houses. Six days were allotted to the task, and it was no wonder that the crews had to see to it that they were in first-rate condition, for racing for six days out of seven was bound to try them hard.

The legacy left the Benson crew by their comrades of the year before was the position No. 3 in the line. The position the year before that had been No. 5, so it was not surprising that the Bensonites had great hopes that this year would see them higher still. Cradock's was just in front of them, with Colson's at the Head. Both were strong crews, and so was Johnson's, just behind—too strong, indeed, for Durend to feel very comfortable with an unknown quantity at his back.

The race was timed to start at eleven, and a minute or two before the hour all the crews had taken up their position, stripped and made ready. The crews were too far apart for signals by word of mouth or by pistol to be effective, so a gun was fired from the bank—one discharge "Get ready!" two "Off!" and three—after a lapse of ten minutes—as the "Finish".

"Boom!" went the first gun, and men ceased trying their stretchers or signalling to their friends on shore. A few words of caution from the stroke, and then all was still in tense expectation. The mooring-ropes were slipped, and the boats left free to move slowly forward with the stream.

"Boom!" Simultaneously forty-eight oars dipped and churned the water into foam. Like hounds suddenly unleashed, the six boats leapt forward and began their desperate chase upon the waters of the Suir.

The strongest point of Benson's crew had been its lightning start, and Durend had always counted upon this giving him at least half a length's advantage at the outset. Striking the water at his usual rate, he hoped—almost against hope—that this advantage still remained to him. Less than half a dozen strokes, however, were sufficient to convince him that the hope was a vain one. The perfect swing of the boat was marred by a jar that became more pronounced with every stroke. He knew well enough what it was: it was the new half-trained man, Franklin, vainly trying to keep up the pace of a trained crew.

It was a bitter disappointment, but Durend was not one to let such feelings cloud his judgment, and without a moment's hesitation he let his racing start fall away into a long, steady swing. Victory—for the moment, at any rate—must be left to others, while his crew were brought back once more to the swing and rhythm they had lost.

For some time Durend kept his stroke long and steady, and the boat travelled evenly and well, though at no great pace. By that time Cradock's, in front, were almost lost to sight, but Johnson's, behind, were very much within view, and coming up fast. The situation seemed so critical that Dale at last could contain himself no longer. For some minutes he had been nervously glancing back at the nose of the boat creeping up behind, and wondering when he must forsake his straight course for the forlorn hope of an attempt to elude the bump by a pull at the rudder line.

"Durend, they'll have us, if you don't draw away a little."

Durend nodded. He had not been unmindful of the boat creeping up behind, but he had a problem, and no easy one, to settle. Should he press his crew to the utmost, or should he hold his hand for another time? It was a terribly difficult thing to decide for the best, with Johnson's creeping up and every fibre in him revolting against surrender and calling out for a desperate spurt right up to the end.

Suddenly Durend quickened up. His men were waiting and longing for a spurt and caught it up at once. But again the swing was marred by Franklin's inability to support the terrific pace. After the first stroke or two the boat began to roll heavily, the form and time became ragged, and there was much splashing.

One glance at Dale's agonized face and Durend again allowed his stroke to drop back into its former steady swing, and doggedly, with sternly-set face, plugged away as before, refusing to look again at the crew drawing inexorably up behind. Twice the boats overlapped, but both times Dale managed, by skilful steering, to avoid a bump. The third time no trick of steering could avoid the issue, and the nose of the Johnson boat grated triumphantly along the side of Benson's.

At the touch, both crews ceased rowing. The race for them was ended for that day at least, and they could watch and see how the other crews had fared. But the other races were also over, for the third and last "Boom" rang out within a few seconds of the termination of their own.

Defeat is always hard to bear, and the Benson crew were no exception to the rule. It was obvious to every one of them that they had not been allowed to have their full fling, and angry and discontented thoughts surged into the brains of the disappointed men as they leaned over their oars and tried not to hear the jubilant chatter of those insufferable Johnsonites. Why had Stroke set so wretchedly slow a stroke that defeat was certain? The members of the beaten crew were, for the most part, fresher far than the winning crew. Why had not Stroke given them the opportunity of rowing themselves right out instead of tamely surrendering thus?

No answers to these discontented queries were forthcoming. Durend could have spoken, but would not. Dale might have spoken; for though he knew not the plans of his chief, his position at the rudder enabled him to conjecture a great deal. But he, too, was dumb. So it was that the Benson crew could answer the questions of their distressed friends only by referring them with disparaging shrugs of the shoulders to their worthy Stroke.

Durend had never been a popular boy. He was respected for his steady persistence and his capacity for unlimited hard work, but popular he could not be said to be, even with his crew. He held himself rather aloof, and never really took them into his confidence. He seemed to think that if he did his best as Stroke, both in rowing and in generalship, he had done all that was necessary. His plans, his hopes, and his fears he kept strictly to himself. Why worry his men about them? he reasoned, and in the main, no doubt, he was right, though he carried it much too far. As a consequence the crew, with the possible exception of Dale, were left to conjecture his reasons for all that he did, and in most cases to put a wrong construction upon them.

But, though they growled, they were too sportsmanlike and too loyal to their House to do more, and 11 a.m. next day saw them at their places every bit as eager as before. This time, without a doubt, they told one another, Durend would set them a faster stroke and give them a chance to show the stuff they were made of.

Unhappily they were doomed to fresh disappointment. Twice, indeed, Durend quickened up his stroke, but almost immediately he felt the time and swing of the crew again becoming ragged. In his judgment it was useless to persist in hope of an improvement; so, with the decisiveness that was one of his chief characteristics, he promptly dropped his stroke back into his old rate of striking. His men fretted and fumed behind him, and one or two even went so far as to shout aloud for a spurt. A sharp reprimand was all they got for their trouble, and in high dudgeon they relapsed again into a savage silence. Fortunately, though they saw nothing of the crew ahead, they managed to keep a length of clear water between them and the weak Crawford crew travelling in their wake.

No cheers heralded their return. The doings of Benson's attracted little attention now, for all interest had centred upon the desperate struggles between the three leading boats, Cradock's, Colson's, and Johnson's—for the first two had now changed places. It is almost as hard to be ignored as to be scoffed at, and it was a very sore crew indeed that put their craft upon its rack that day and filed upstairs to the dressing-room of Benson's boat-house.

Self-contained and preoccupied though he was, Durend could not help noticing that his conduct of the races was being severely and adversely commented upon. But he only shrugged his shoulders, hurried on his clothes, and left the building perhaps a little more quickly than usual. Some strokes would have given explanations to their crews, but it never occurred to Durend to do so. Dale followed him from the room.

"See here, Max," he said, as he overtook him, "I think you should know that our fellows are tremendously sick at the poor show we are making. They feel that your stroking of the crew is not giving them a fair chance."

Durend stopped abruptly. "So long as I am stroke, Dale, I shall set the stroke I think proper. I am doing what I think is best for the crew, and shall follow it out until the last race is over—lost or won."

"I know, I know, old man," replied Dale hastily. "But what is your game really? You must know you can't win races with a funereal stroke like that, so what's the good of trying it?"

Durend opened his lips as though about to make an angry reply. Apparently he thought better of it, for he closed them again, and for some minutes walked on in silence. When he spoke it was in the quiet measured tones of one who has thought out his subject and has no doubts in his own mind of the wisdom of his conclusions.

"After six weeks' hard work, Dale, we've managed to get the crew into pretty good form—everybody says so. Is it all to be lightly thrown away? Can we really expect Franklin to keep up the pace of the rest of us without rushing his slide, bucketing, or something of the sort? Can we now?"

Dale, but half convinced, returned to the charge. "Well, I don't know. Something's got to be done. I heard three of the fellows just now whispering something about asking Benson to put Montgomery back in the boat."

"Where?"

Dale hesitated.

"I see. At stroke. Well, I may be prejudiced, but I don't think it would answer, old man. Anyhow, we'll leave all that to Benson, and those three fellows too. Come, Dale, I'm sick of thinking about this, so let's try and talk about something a little more cheerful."

Dale was a light-hearted, cheery fellow enough, and found no difficulty in turning the talk into other and more pleasant topics. The two, though so opposite in point of character and physique, were very good friends. Dale was a slim, lightly-built young fellow of eighteen, with a fair complexion and an open boyish face. He was a general favourite, and, though not athletically inclined, was always ready to assist in acting cox or kindred work. Max Durend was dark-

complexioned, somewhat reserved, and of a more thoughtful disposition. He also was eighteen years of age, was of medium height but strongly built, and possessed a great capacity for hard work. As has already been explained, he was not popular, and that may have been partly due to his reserve, and partly to the fact that he was only half English, namely on his mother's side.

The race on the following day was even less exhilarating than the last. Benson's still rowed at their provokingly slow stroke, simply retaining their position at No. 4, while Johnson's and Colson's, after a terrific struggle, changed places. Thus Cradock's remained at the Head with the Johnson and Colson crews second and third.

It needed all Dale's persuasion and plentiful supply of hopeful suppositions (partly derived from his talk with Durend, but mostly made up out of his own head) to keep the Benson crew from breaking out into open revolt. Every day they had finished the race half fresh, and not one of them could see the use of parading up and down the course as though uncertain whether they were in the race or not.

And through it all Mr. Benson just looked grimly on, indifferent, apparently, to all their woes, and said no word save a little—a very little—commendation, no doubt intended to keep them from entering the very last stages of despair. It seemed as though he had given the whole thing up as a bad job, and did not intend to interest himself further in the matter.

Another day came just like the last, and listlessly the dispirited crew turned their oars on the feather and waited for the signal to start. Quite suddenly they woke up to the fact that Stroke was leaning back towards them and speaking.

"Now, you fellows," he was saying in a quiet but tense voice, "I am going to give you a racing start at last. See to it, then, that you pick it up and keep it. Don't forget. Franklin, I rely upon you to do your utmost to keep up with us. Now, boys!"

"Boom!"

There was scarcely a soul about to see Benson's start; nearly everyone was watching the struggles going on ahead, where strong crews were striving in the last days to secure and hold a higher position for the Houses they had been called to represent. So it was that the Benson start passed unnoticed until it dawned upon Colson's, the crew ahead, that the Benson boat had drawn unaccountably nearer. And Benson's, too! It could only be a fluke, and with that conviction Colson's settled down grimly to the task of shaking them off.

But somehow or other it did not seem at all easy to shake them off. In fact, to their dismay, the end of the great spurt saw the gap between the boats no wider. Suddenly, too, Benson's spurred in their turn, and the nose of their boat drew closer at a speed that wellnigh paralysed Colson's.

Indeed, in the Benson boat, the pent-up energies of three days of enforced self-restraint were being let loose in a series of desperate spurts for the mastery. Even Durend could contain himself no longer, and Franklin, though he had not yet reached anything like the form of the rest of the crew, was yet able to do his part in the struggle with a fair measure of success. Within five minutes of the start Benson's had overlapped Colson's, and, almost immediately after, the bump came.

We need not describe the joy and relief in the Benson crew at their unexpected victory—unexpected to all of them, for even Durend, though he had hoped and planned, had not anticipated it so soon. To the rest of the school the whole affair was so unexpected as to be stupefying. Only the most penetrating and experienced observers could give a reason for their sudden recovery, and the remainder explained away the sensational victory by a disparaging reference to the utter weakness of Colson's. Had not Colson's dropped in three days from Head of the River to No. 3, and was that not enough proof of weakness? they argued. Gradually the general view crystallized down to the opinion that Benson's had had their fling, and could hope to make no impression upon the two really strong crews now in front of them.

Nevertheless, though this seemed the general opinion, the following morning found the whole school on the tow-path opposite the Benson boat. No one wanted to see the struggle between Cradock's and Johnson's, but everyone was anxious to see the start of the Benson crew, and to learn whether any fresh surprises were in store for them.

There could be no doubt about the spirit of the crew. Hope and confidence seemed to exude from every pore, and it was clear that for them the week was only just beginning. At the report of the gun, Durend took his men away with a racing start that recalled those they had made before Montgomery left the crew. The form was well kept; even Franklin, who had improved rapidly with every day's work, keeping well in with the swing of the rest of the crew. Dropping the stroke a little soon after the start, Durend led them along with a strong, lively stroke that was soon seen to be gaining them ground slowly, foot by foot, upon their old foe, the Johnson crew. The latter were, however, in no mood to yield an inch if they could help it, and made spurt after spurt in the desperate endeavour to keep well away.

For the first eight or nine minutes of the race, Durend did not allow himself to be flurried into any answering spurt. He knew that he was within reach, and to him that was, for the time, sufficient. His watch was strapped to the stretcher between his feet, and he was carefully measuring the time he could allow Johnson's before calling them to strict account.

It wanted one minute to the time when the finishing gun would boom out before Durend

quickened up. His men were waiting in confident expectation for that moment, and answered like one man. From the very feel of the stroke they had known what a reserve of power their stroke and comrades possessed, and they flung themselves into the spurt with all the energy of conscious strength. The boat leapt to the touch, and up and up, nearer and nearer, the nose of their craft crept to the boat ahead.

A hoarse and frantic appeal from the stroke of the Johnson boat, and his men strove to answer and stave off that terrible spurt. But they had spurted too often already, and another and a greater was more than they could bear. Their time became ragged; some splashed and dragged, and the boat was a beaten one before the end came.

It was a thrilling moment when the boats bumped, and the straggling crowds upon the tow-path shouted and yelled with delight and deepest appreciation. Rarely had there been such a race in the school's annals; never one in which the winning crew had thus fought its way up from previous failure and defeat.

After witnessing that achievement, the opinion of the school veered completely round, and everyone confidently predicted that Benson's would win their way to the Head of the River on the following morning. It had now become as clear as noonday to all that the stroke of Benson's had been playing that most difficult of all games, the waiting game. He had held his crew inexorably in until the new man had had time to settle down into his place and catch the form and time of the rest of the crew. Clearly, too, the crew was rowing better every day, and no one believed that Cradock's would be able to keep them off in the full tide of their swing to victory.

This time the opinion of the school was right, and the following day Benson's caught up and bumped Cradock's within three minutes of the start. They had settled down and become a great crew, confident in themselves and even more confident in the power and judgment of their Stroke.

The ovation they received on the return to their boat-house they long remembered. The noisy and enthusiastic tumult was indeed something to remember and be proud of, but to Durend the few words of commendation of Mr. Benson counted for far more.

"Well done, Durend!" he said simply. "I saw you knew your business, and that is why I did not interfere. But even I did not expect so splendid a success. Your men have done well indeed, but it is to you and your fixity of purpose our win is mainly due. I have never known an apparently more hopeless chase; and, to you others, I say that it shows that there is almost nothing that fixity of purpose will not achieve in the long run."

Even more pleasurable were the words of Montgomery, touched with real contrition, as he grasped his old Stroke by the hand and begged his pardon for doubting his ability and power to stroke a crew to victory.

CHAPTER III

Max Durend at Home

It was only two days after the close of the races when the head master called Durend into his room. He held a slip of paper in his hand, and in rather a grave voice informed the lad that his father was seriously ill. His mother had cabled for his return, and he was to get ready to catch the 2.15 train for Harwich at once.

Max obeyed. His preparations did not take long, and there was still a little time to spare before he needed to start; therefore he sought out Dale to say good-bye.

"But you will come back, of course, Durend?" the erstwhile cox protested, rather struck by the earnestness of his friend's adieu.

"I have a feeling that I shall not, Dale. I cannot help it, but I keep on acting almost unconsciously as though this were the last I shall see of Hawkesley."

"Don't say that, Max. Why should you think your father is so ill as all that? The cablegram doesn't say so. No, I can't take that. You simply *must* come back. There are lots of things we have promised to do together."

"Can't help it, Dale. But there's one thing you must promise me before I go, and that is, that if I should not come back you will come over and see me. Spend a fortnight at our place at Liège in the summer—eh?"

"You're coming back, old man," replied Dale with determination. "But all the same, I will give you the promise if you like. My uncle and aunt—all the relatives I have—would not mind, I know."

"Thanks, old man—you shall have a good time."

Presently Durend left, and in forty-eight hours he was back in his own home in Belgium on the outskirts of Liège. Prompt as he had been, he found he was too late, for his father had died at the time he was on the boat on the way to Antwerp.

Though not altogether unexpected, the blow was a severe one to Max Durend. He had been very fond of his father, who had latterly treated him more as a chum than anything else, and had talked much to him of his plans for the time when he could assist him in his business. His mother was, of course, even more upset, and though Max and his sister, a girl of twelve, did their best to comfort her, she was quite prostrated for some days.

It was now more than ever necessary that Max should enter his father's business, and, when old and experienced enough, endeavour to carry it on. From the nature of the business it was evident that this was no light task, and would require a great deal of training and an immense amount of hard work if it were to be done successfully. But the prospect of hard work did not appeal Max, and within a fortnight of his father's death he was busy learning the details of the vast business carried on under his name.

Monsieur Durend had been the proprietor of very large iron and steel foundries and workshops in Liège. The business was an immense one, and, beside the manufacture of all kinds of machinery and railway material, worked for its own benefit several coal and iron mines, all of which were in the district or on the outskirts of the town. The business had been a very flourishing one, and had been largely under the personal direction of the proprietor, assisted by his manager, M. Otto Schenk, to whose ability and energy, M. Durend was always ready to acknowledge, it owed much of its success. The latter was now, of course, the mainstay of the business, and it was with every confidence in his ability that Madame Durend appointed him general manager with almost unlimited powers.

M. Schenk was indeed a man to impress people at the outset with a sense of strength and of power to command. He was over six feet in height, broad, but with rather sloping shoulders, and very stoutly built. His head, large itself, almost seemed to merge in a greater neck, and both were held stiffly erect as he glowered at the world through cold and rather protruding eyes, much as a drill-instructor glares at his pupils. He was florid-complexioned, with short, closely-cropped grey hair and a short, stubby, dirty-white moustache. Of his grasp of the affairs of the firm and his business ability generally, people were not so immediately impressed as they were with his power to command, but they invariably learned to appreciate this side of his character in time.

The matter of the direction of the affairs of the firm settled to everyone's satisfaction, the question as to what was to be done with Max came up for discussion.

"I think it will be best, Max, if you go into M. Schenk's office and assist him there," said Madame Durend at last. "You will there pick up the threads of the business, and when you are two or three years older we can consider what we are going to do."

"But, Mother," replied Max, "that was not the way Father learned his business. You have often proudly told me how he used to work as a simple mechanic, going from shop to shop and learning all he could of the practical side of the different processes. How he then bought a small business, extended it and extended it, until it grew to its present size. And the whole secret of his success was that he knew the work so thoroughly from top to bottom that he could depend upon his own knowledge, and needed not to be in the hands of men with more knowledge of detail but vastly less capacity than himself."

"Yes, Max, that is true; but the business is now built up, and is so big that it does not seem necessary for you to go through all that. We have an able manager, and from him you can learn all that you will ever need to know of the work of directing the affairs of the firm."

"I should then never know the work thoroughly. I should always be dependent upon those who had learned the practical side of the work, Mother. Let me spend a year or two in learning it from the bottom. I shall enjoy the work, and shall then feel far more confidence in myself."

Max spoke earnestly, and his mother could see that he was longing to throw himself heart and soul into the work. It was, indeed, the spirit in which he had flung himself into the task of lifting Benson's to the Head of the River over again. Though she had a mother's dislike to the idea of her son's donning blouse and apron and working cheek by jowl with the workmen, she had also a clear perception that it would be a mistake to discourage such energy and thoroughness. She therefore resolved to consult M. Schenk on the morrow, and, if he saw no special objection, to allow Max to have his way.

M. Schenk did see several objections, foremost among which was his view that for the master's son to work like a common workman would tend to lessen the present extremely strict discipline in the workshops. Max, however, scouted such an idea as an unfair reflection on the men, and continued to press his point of view most strenuously. In the end he managed to get his way, and within a week had started work at the firm's smelting furnaces.

This story does not, however, deal with the experiences of Max Durend in learning the various activities of the great manufactory founded by his father. It will, therefore, suffice if we relate one incident that had, in the sequel, an important influence upon his career, an incident, too, that gives an insight into his character and that of the different classes of workmen that would, in the course of time, come under his control.

Max was at the time working at a huge turret lathe in one of the turning-shops. Around him were other workmen similarly engaged. Across the room ran numerous great leather driving-bands, running at high speed and driving the great machines with which the place was filled. Apparently

the material of one of the driving-bands was faulty, for it suddenly parted, slipped off the driving-wheels, and became entangled in one of the other bands. As this spun round the loose band caught in the machine close by, wrenched it from its foundation and turned it over on its side, pinning down to the floor the workman attending to it.

The man gave a screech as he was borne down, a screech that was broken off short as the heavy machine fell partly upon his neck and chest, choking him with its fell weight. A straggling cry of alarm was raised by the other workmen who witnessed the tragic occurrence, and many pressed forward to his aid. But the great band which had done the mischief was being carried round and round by the driving-band in which it had become entangled, and was viciously flogging the air and floor all about the stricken man.

Some of the men shouted for the engines to be stopped, others ran for something that could be interposed to take the rain of blows from the flying band. Max, however, saw that something more prompt than this was necessary. From the look on the man's face it was clear that if the pressure on his throat and chest were not immediately relaxed he would be choked to death.

Crawling forward beneath the flogging band, and bowing his head to its pitiless flagellations, Max grasped the overturned machine and strove to lift it off the unfortunate man. The weight was altogether too great for him to lift unaided, but he found he could raise it a fraction of an inch and enable the man to gain a little breath.

Holding it thus, Max grimly stood his ground with his head down, his teeth firmly set, and his back arched against the rhythmic rain of blows from the great band. Soon the clothes were flogged from off his back, and the band touched the bare skin. Almost fainting, he held on, for the eyes of the man below him were staring up at him with a look of dumb and frightened entreaty that roused in him all the strength of mind and fixity of purpose he possessed.

The shouts for the engines to be stopped at last prevailed. The bands revolved more slowly, and then ceased altogether. Many willing hands were laid upon the overturned machine, and it was lifted off the prostrate man just as Max's strength gave out, and he sank limply to the floor in a deep swoon.

Neither Max nor the workman was seriously injured. Both had had a severe shock, and Max, in addition, had wounds that, while not dangerous, were extremely painful. After six weeks at Ostend, however, he was himself again, and ready to continue his work in yet another branch of the firm's activities. This time he was to learn the miner's craft, and to see for himself all that appertained to the trade of hewing out coal and iron from the interior of the earth and lifting it to the surface.

On the evening of his return to Liège from Ostend he was sitting in his study alone, reading up the subject that was to be unfolded in actual practice before his gaze on the morrow, when there came a knock at the door.

"Come in," he yelled.

The door opened, and the maid ushered in a middle-aged workman in his Sunday clothes, accompanied by a woman whom Max guessed to be his wife. The man he recognized at once as the workman he had succoured in the accident to the driving-band.

"Monsieur Dubec—he would come in," explained the servant deprecatingly, as she withdrew and closed the door.

The man looked furtively at Max, twisted his cap nervously in his hands, and stood gazing down at the floor in sheepish silence. His wife was less ill at ease, and, after nudging her spouse ineffectually once or twice, blurted out rapidly:

"He has come, Monsieur, to thank you for saving his life, and to tell you that he will work for you and serve you so long as he lives. He is my man, and I say the same, Monsieur, though I do not work in the shops, and cannot help. But if ever ye should want aught done, Monsieur, send for Madame Dubec, and she will serve you with all her heart in any way you wish."

The woman spoke in a trembling voice, and with a deep and earnest sincerity that showed how much she was moved. Her emotion, indeed, communicated itself to Max, and he felt as tonguetied as the man Dubec himself. It had somehow not occurred to him that he would be thanked, and the whole thing took him by surprise. Still, he had to say something, and he struggled to find something that would put them at their ease.

"I am sure you will, Madame Dubec, and I will remember your offer indeed. But make not too much of what I have done. I was near at hand, and came forward first, but many of your husband's comrades were as ready, though not quite so quick. It was the aid of one comrade given to another, and one day it may be my turn to receive and your husband's to give."

The man shook his head vigorously in dissent, and in so doing seemed to find his tongue.

"Nay, sir, 'tis much more than that. Some there are who would have helped; but the more part of my fellow-workmen would not lift a hand to help another in distress. As ye must have noticed, sir, there are two classes of men in your father's works. There are the Belgians born and bred, who loved your father and hated, and still hate, the tyrant Schenk and the German-speaking workmen who have joined in such numbers of late that we others fear a time will soon come for us to go.

The Belgians are good comrades, and would have come to my aid had they the quickness to have known what to do. The others would have seen me die unmoved—I know it."

"But they, too, are Belgians, are they not?"

"Aye, sir, they are Belgians so far as the law can tell; but they speak not our tongue, and are not really of us."

"They are good workmen, and M. Schenk thinks much of them."

"True. But they do not hold with the rest of us, and we do not like them. Nor do we trust them, sir."

The man spoke in an earnest, almost a warning, tone, and Max looked at him in some surprise. It seemed more than the mere jealousy of a Walloon at the presence of so many men, alien in tongue and race, in a business which had once been exclusively their own. Max had himself noticed the two classes of workmen, but had, if he thought about it at all, put it down as inevitable in a town so near the frontiers of three States.

"Well, never mind them, Monsieur Dubec," he replied reassuringly. "They have not been with us long, and it may be they will be better comrades in a few years' time. And now good-bye! Think not too much of your accident, and it will be the better for you and me."

"Good-bye, and may the bon Dieu bless you, sir!" replied both Monsieur and Madame Dubec in a fashion that told Max that he had gained two friends at least, and friends whose staunchness could be depended upon to the utmost.

M. Schenk's view of the whole affair was blunt and to the point. "You are foolish," he said to Max, "to trouble yourself about these workmen. They are cattle, and it is always best to treat them as such. That has always been my way, and it has answered well. Consider them and humour them, and the next minute they want to strike for more. Bah! Keep them in their place; it is best so."

"But," urged Max, quite distressed as he thought of Dubec, and recalled the accents of trembling sincerity of his spouse—"but surely many of them are better led than driven—the best of them, at any rate? I know little of business as yet, but something tells me that it is well for us to get the goodwill of our men."

"It is not worth a straw," replied M. Schenk with conviction. "The goodwill, as you call it, of your managers, and perhaps even of your foremen, is of value, but the goodwill of your men—your rank and file—is of no account. So long as they obey, and obey promptly, you have all that is necessary to carry on even a great undertaking like this successfully."

"Well," replied Max rather hotly, "all I can say is that when I direct the affairs of the firm, I shall give the other thing a trial. I don't like the idea of treating men as cattle, and I cannot help thinking too many men have been discharged of late because they have shown a little spirit."

M. Schenk looked at Max in a way that made the latter momentarily think he would like to strike him. Then the manager half turned away, as he replied in an almost contemptuous tone: "You will be older and wiser soon, and we shall then see whether any change will be made. Until then it is I who direct the affairs of the firm, and it is *my* policy which must prevail."

Max felt uncommonly angry. He had been conscious for some time past that M. Schenk was acting as though he expected to rule the affairs of the firm for all time, and the thought galled him greatly. Was not he, Max, sweating and struggling through every workshop solely in order that he might fit himself to direct affairs? How was it, then, that this man, in his own mind, practically ignored him? Was it because he was so incompetent that the manager thought he never would be fit to take his place? Max certainly felt more angry than he had ever done before, and, unable to trust himself to speak, abruptly left the manager's presence and walked rapidly away.

One good result the conversation had, and that was to redouble Max's ardour to learn, and learn thoroughly, every branch of the work in every part of the vast concern.

CHAPTER IV

The Cataclysm

The second summer since Max Durend had left Hawkesley had come, and for the second time Max invited his friend Dale to come over to Liège and spend a few weeks with him. The previous summer they had spent most pleasantly on a walking-tour through the Ardennes, and they were now going to do the same thing along the Middle and Upper Rhine. Max had originally planned a tour in Holland, but M. Schenk recommended the Rhine valley as much more varied and picturesque, and Max had agreed readily enough to follow his recommendation.

Behold them then setting out from Bonn railway station, knapsack on back and walking-stick in hand, full of spirits and go, for a four or five weeks' tramp, first through the Drachenfels and then on through the pretty Rhine-side villages, making a detour here and there to visit the more

picturesque and broken country through which the Rhine made its way. They marched light, their only baggage besides their knapsacks being a large Gladstone shared between them. This they did not take with them, but used, merely to replenish their knapsacks occasionally with clean linen, by sending it along a week or so ahead of them to such towns as they expected to visit later on.

Their days were full of happiness, peace, and contentment, and the last days of July, 1914, drew to a close all too rapidly for them. They knew next to nothing of the fearful storm brewing, until Dale happened, towards the end of the second week of their holidays, to take up and glance down the columns of a German newspaper lying on the table of the hotel at which they were about to dine. His knowledge of German was small, but was sufficient to enable him to grasp the purport of the thick headlines with which the journal was plentifully supplied.

"Hullo, Max, look at this," he cried, pointing to the thick type. "German ultimatum to Russia. Immediate demobilization demanded." "That looks serious, eh?"

"Phew! It does," cried Max, taking the paper and rapidly scanning the chief columns. "You may be sure that if Russia is in it France will be too. My hat! what a war it will be!"

"Yes, and—By the way, this explains why those two Frenchmen we met at the hotel yesterday were in such a hurry to be off without waiting for breakfast. They had seen the news and were afraid that, if they didn't get back at once, they wouldn't get back at all."

"That's it. There's one comfort, anyway, Dale, and that is, that neither of us is likely to be concerned. There seems no earthly reason why England or Belgium should come into this."

"No, and a good job too. We have enough troubles of our own all over the world without butting in on the Continent."

For the next few days Max and his friend were again more or less buried from the outer world. They had not, however, altogether forgotten the great events that were taking place, and on reaching Bingen went so far (for them) as to purchase a paper. Matters, they found, had grown far more serious. Germany was already at war with Russia and France, and had demanded of Belgium free passage for her troops to enter and attack France.

Max was thunderstruck. He had never expected anything like this. That Belgium, peace-loving Belgium, with her neutrality guaranteed by practically all the great civilized Powers, should, in spite of it, be about to be forced into a great European war had seemed unthinkable. Yet so it was, and it seemed that war was inevitable, for Max did not believe Belgium would ever allow foreign troops to cross her territory to attack a country with which she was at peace. With Belgium, then, on the verge of war, it behoved him to look to his own safety; for it was obvious he was not safe where he was.

"I think we had better make tracks for home, Dale," he said soberly. "I dare say I can pass with you as an Englishman, but it won't do to take risks. Our bag should be at the Central Post Office, so let us get it and take the first train back to Liège."

"If there are any trains bound for the frontier that are not crammed with troops," responded Dale somewhat significantly.

"Oh, shut up! Come along and let's see."

They lost not a moment in getting their bag and having it conveyed to the railway station. Fully alive to the situation, they now kept their eyes well open and noticed things they would never have noticed before. For one thing, it struck them that the post office official who handed their bag over to them seemed decidedly over-curious, and remarked that he supposed they were going to the railway station. That was disconcerting enough, but when they arrived at the station, and were almost immediately accosted by a man whom they both remembered seeing inside the post office, they felt almost as though they were already under lock and key.

Not that the man was unfriendly. He was quite the reverse. He seemed anxious to strike up an acquaintance, wished to know exactly where they were going, and gave them to understand that there was nothing he desired more than to be allowed the privilege of making a part of the journey with them.

Max presently gave Dale a meaning glance. It was all very well for an Englishman like Dale, he felt, but for him, virtually a Belgian, the situation was wellnigh desperate.

"I say, Dale," he said casually, "we must have some sandwiches to eat in the train. Stay here by the bag while I get some—or perhaps this gentleman wouldn't mind looking after it for a moment?"

The young German hesitated a second, and then nodded. Max and his friend strolled coolly off, arm in arm, towards the refreshment buffet. Neither looked back, but their conversation was far from being as airy and unconcerned as their manner might have seemed to indicate.

"We must leave the bag and get clear at once," cried Max emphatically. "The fellow has been set to watch us and see that we don't get out of the country. I think he must believe we are both English, and it therefore looks as though the Germans think England is on the point of coming in too. See, now, let us stroll quietly in at this door and slip out again at the end one. Then into the street and somewhere—no matter where—so long as it is out of the way of spying eyes."

They did so with an unhurried celerity that might have deceived a smarter man than the supposed spy. Soon they were clear of the town and in the open country beyond, and it was not till then that they felt as though they could talk unrestrainedly together.

"Now what shall we do, Max? Walk to the next station out from Bingen and see if we can get a train for home?" enquired Dale, not too hopefully.

"No, old man; we must keep clear of railways and railway stations. Let us make tracks for the frontier as we are, and go all out."

"It will be dark in another hour."

"Never mind. We must foot it all night. We have no time to lose, and we must not throw away a single hour. In fact, it is hardly safe for us to be about in daylight anywhere. You look as English as they are made, and I'm not much better."

"All right! I'm game for an all-night tramp. Come on."

"We have about seven hours of darkness before us, and I reckon we ought to be able to do four miles an hour. That gives us about thirty miles. It's less than that to the frontier, and we ought to be able to manage it, even if we have to leave the road and cut straight across country. Come along; we'll keep to the road while we can, but if too risky we must go helter-skelter, plumb for the frontier."

That night march neither of them is ever likely to forget. For an hour or so they tramped along the road unmolested. Then they began to find soldiers and policemen very much in evidence, and, fearing to be questioned, they left the road and took to the fields and open country. It was desperately rough going in many places, and instead of doing four miles an hour they could oftentimes do no more than two. But they stuck gamely to their task, and plodded steadily on all through the night, realizing more surely with every step they took that it was a plain case of now or never.

For every time they neared a road they found it alive with soldiers, all marching steadily in one direction—towards the Belgian frontier. The still night air resounded with the tramp of innumerable feet, and now and again they could catch the distant rumble of heavy guns.

When day broke they were still in Germany, but near the frontier, and in a sparsely peopled district. They were both nearly dead-beat, covered with mud from head to foot, and with their clothes torn half off their backs. It seemed a risky business to let themselves be seen anywhere in that condition, but finally Max chose a lonely farm-house, and, after cleaning himself up as much as possible, managed to make a purchase of a good supply of food. They then tramped on for another mile or two, ate a good meal, hid themselves in a dry ditch, and instantly dropped asleep.

It was ten o'clock when they awoke, and after some discussion they decided to make the few miles between them and the border at once, and then to purchase cycles and press for home. This they did exactly as they planned, and, though often delayed and compelled to make wide detours to avoid bodies of German cavalry, they managed to reach Liège safely in the evening of the same day.

The sights that met their gaze on the latter part of their journey made them doubly eager to get within the safety of the ring of forts surrounding Liège. Peasants were fleeing from the frontier villages, and their tales of what the Germans had done to their homes and dear ones made the blood of Max and his friend alternately freeze with horror and boil with rage. Their tales were a long catalogue of deeds of ruthless barbarity, cold-blooded cruelty, lust, and rapine. The smoke of burning houses seen in the distance gave emphasis to their tales of horror, and Max and Dale at last felt as though the world must be coming to an end. Indeed, the world of make-believe German civilization was coming to an end in a wild outburst of unrestrained cruelty and lust.

But at Liège, they told one another, things would be different. There the invaders would come against something more than villages peopled with frightened peasants and trustful countryfolk, and would realize in their turn something of the terribleness of war.

CHAPTER V

The Fall of Liège

Arrived at his home, Max was astonished to find that his mother and sister had fled over the border to Maastricht, taking two of the servants with them. A letter had been left for him, however, and this he tore feverishly open. In a few words his mother explained why she, as an Englishwoman and one getting on in years, preferred to seek safety in Holland to remaining in a city which obviously would soon be the storm-centre of a terrible struggle. She then reminded Max that he had not yet reached a man's age, and could not be expected to take a man's part. Would he not leave the affairs of the firm to M. Schenk and join her in Holland? But his conscience must decide, she finally conceded, though it was clear how her own desires ran. But whether he left or stayed, she expected him to take no part in the fighting that was bound to come.

Questioning the servants, Max found that his mother's flight had been arranged at the urgent solicitation of M. Schenk, and without more ado he left the house and hastened to the works to see the manager, and gather what further particulars he could. He did not doubt the wisdom of his mother's precipitate flight, for even now scouting parties of the Germans had appeared before the eastern forts, and no one could doubt that the city was on the point of being invested and besieged.

M. Schenk was clearly surprised to see Max and his friend, and was at no pains to hide it.

"A letter was left for you, Monsieur Max," he said in his ponderous way, "telling you that your mother wished you to join her instantly. Did they not hand it to you?"

"Yes," replied Max, "I have received the letter, and I have come to learn something more about their flight. Have they taken money enough for what may be a long stay? And can we send them more before the city is invested?"

"All that is seen to, Monsieur Max. I have had a large sum of money transferred to a bank in Maastricht for their use. They will be safe and well there, and I strongly advise you to join them. You will certainly not be safe here."

"Why not? Why should I go if you can stay—if you *are* staying?"

"Because, sir, you are half an Englishman, and before the day is out England will have joined in this conflict. No Englishman will be safe here if the Germans enter, and I strongly urge you and your friend to escape before the city is surrounded. I will carry on the business, and do my best in the interests of the firm and your good mother."

"Yes, yes, I know; but I am a Belgian as much as an Englishman, and I am not going to fly the country like that. If I cannot yet fight for her I can work for her, and I have made up my mind to stay, Monsieur Schenk."

"As you will," replied M. Schenk, shrugging his shoulders in indifference, "but do not blame me if things do not go as you wish."

"That's all right," replied Max quickly. "Now, as to the work of the firm. I have been thinking that we might use our great works to assist in the defence of the town. Soon the forts will be in action, and if the city is invested they can only replenish their stores from within the town itself. Why should we not begin to cast shells instead of rails, and see whether we cannot make rifles and machine-guns instead of machinery? There are many things we could do at once, and many others in a little while."

"That is true, sir, and you will find that I have not been behindhand. I have already seen the commandant, and our casting-shops are almost ready to begin casting shells. I am not letting the grass grow under my feet, I can assure you, and in a week or two we shall be able to do great things in the defence of the town. Come down to the works with Monsieur Dale, and see the preparations we are making for turning out shells for big guns. You will see that the Durend workshops are going to be well to the fore here as elsewhere, and I prophesy that they will be so until the end of the war."

As they made the tour of the works, Max was both astonished and delighted at the evidence he saw of the energy and ability displayed in turning over the vast manufacturing resources of the firm from peace to war. The rapidity with which the works had been transformed was indeed remarkable, and his opinion of M. Schenk's capacity, already great, became almost profound.

"Now, Dale, what are you going to do?" demanded Max as the two friends parted company with the manager at the door of the last shop. "I think you had better get clear while you can. This place is my home and I must stand by it, but you are not concerned and ought to get out of it, if only for your people's sake."

"My people! My uncle and aunt, you mean. *They* won't bother their heads about me," replied Dale decidedly. "No, Max, I came over here to see the sights, and I am going to see 'em, come what may. If England is in it, well and good; it will then be my quarrel as much as yours, and we will work or fight against Germany together. Hurrah!"

Max grasped his friend's hand. "I ought not to encourage you, Dale, but I can't help it, and I'm jolly glad. Let us go into this business together—it will seem like old times. D'ye remember the fight we put up for Benson's?"

"Who could forget it?" cried Dale with enthusiasm.

"And how it ended?"

"Aye—and it was fixity of purpose that did it, so said Benson. Well, let us do something of the sort again. Hark! d'ye hear that?"

"Rifle-shots. The fun has commenced. Come along, and we will see what we can of it before the day is out. To-morrow I am going to start work in the casting-shops, and I hope you will come and help me."

"I will. Come along."

The sound of rifle-shots was quickly succeeded by the distant boom of guns. Then the sound was

swallowed up in the roar of the big guns of the forts, and it seemed as though a tremendous attack was in progress. The streets of the town instantly began to fill with excited people, until it appeared as though everyone had left his work to discuss the situation and listen to the noise of battle. Through the crowds pressed small bodies of soldiers dispatched as reinforcements to the ring of forts surrounding the town.

Max and Dale followed one of these parties at a respectful distance, and climbed with them from the cup-like hollow in which Liège is situated to the hills beyond. The soldiers were bound for one of the forts on the eastward side, and, as they reached the higher ground, the two lads caught their first glimpse of the fighting. Darkness was coming on, and away in the distance they could see the intensely bright flashes of high-explosive shells bursting on or around the forts, as well as the flame of the fortress guns belching forth their replies. As it grew darker the duel grew more intense, and lasted without intermission throughout the night till three or four o'clock in the morning.

By that time the forts were apparently thought to have been sufficiently damaged to permit of an assault, and the German infantry were flung against them in massed formation. Unfortunately for them, however, the guns had not been heavy enough to make any impression on the steel cupolas which sheltered the big guns of the forts, and, as the infantry pressed forward to the attack, they were literally swept away by a devastating shell-fire from the forts attacked and those flanking them.

Again and again fresh masses were sent forward to the assault, only to meet with a similar fate. In the attack on one of the forts the infantry, favoured no doubt by the formation of the ground, were able to get so close that the guns could not be depressed sufficiently to reach them. They believed the fort as good as won, and with cheers of exultation pressed on to the final assault. But at the corners of the forts quick-firing guns were stationed, and these and the infantry lining the parapets mowed them down as surely as the big guns.

In the wide spaces between the forts the Belgian field army had entrenched, and with rifle-fire and frequent bayonet attacks frustrated every attempt of the German infantry to break through.

The infantry assaults lasted until eight o'clock in the morning, when the Germans withdrew, heavily shaken. They had hoped to rush the forts with heavy masses of infantry, supported only by light artillery, and they had failed. They now waited for the heavy guns, which were already on the road, to arrive, and very soon forts Fléron and Chaudfontaine were deluged with an accurate fire of enormous shells, so powerful as to overturn the massive cupolas and to pierce concrete walls twelve feet thick as though they were made of butter. Such shells as these they had never been built to withstand, and it was not long before they succumbed, thus opening a way for the invaders towards the town itself.

Forts Evegnée and Barchon soon shared the same fate, and the Belgian field army, which had continued to maintain an heroic resistance, began to fall back on the town.

Max and Dale had not been allowed to see much of these events. Before midnight they were accosted by a patrol and ordered to return to the safety of the town.

Early the following day, before the fall of the forts and the retreat of the Belgian army, Max and Dale carried out their intention of presenting themselves at the casting-shops and lending a hand in the making of shells. To their satisfaction they found the work going forward with splendid energy and smoothness, and, with their own ardour kindled by the sights they had seen the previous night, they joined zealously in the work.

Presently it came home to Max that there had been considerable changes in the personnel of the shop since he had last worked there. The men he looked out for—those with whom he had been on most friendly terms when he was there—were gone, and their places were taken by other and, for the most part, younger men, all quite strangers to the place so far as he could see.

But, most strange of all, the language of the shop was German. The Walloon, or Flemish-speaking Belgians, were the men who had gone, and German-speaking workmen had taken their places.

On making a few cautious enquiries, Max learned that the men who had gone had been transferred to shops which were still engaged in executing peace-time orders, rails, axles, wheels, and the like, and that the whole of the shell output was being handled by the newer German-speaking workmen.

Max felt no particular resentment at this. He did not like it, but he knew the manager's preference for these men as workmen, and he could not deny that they were a hard-working, docile lot, nor that the work was well organized and being carried on with splendid spirit and energy.

It seemed hard, however, that the Belgian-born men should not have a chance of directly working for their country's benefit, and, as soon as he could, Max took an opportunity of representing the matter to M. Schenk.

"Why have you withdrawn all the older men from the shell-shops, Monsieur Schenk? They were good men, and have served the firm well. Upon my word, while working there and hearing naught but the German tongue, one might have fancied oneself in the enemy's country."

"They are loyal Belgians, Monsieur Max," replied M. Schenk reassuringly. "They are as ready as

Flemings or Walloons to work to the utmost, casting shells for our gallant army. That speaks sufficiently for their sentiments. I have filled the shop with them because they work well together, and there is no jealousy. We must do our best for Belgium in this crisis, and should be swayed by no consideration save that of finding the best men for each of our great tasks."

"Well done, Monsieur Schenk!" cried Max impulsively. "I also will go where you think best. Where shall it be?"

"Thank you!" replied the manager, smiling. "I think you are doing so well where you are that I cannot improve upon it. Remain at work in the casting-shop and aid me to increase the output of shells. It is my belief that we can turn out double the number with no increase of staff, and I shall leave no stone unturned to make my opinion good."

Greatly heartened by this evidence of the manager's energy and patriotism, Max and his friend did stick to their work and fling themselves into it even more whole-heartedly than they had done before.

On the morrow, the 7th August, however, events happened that entirely changed the aspect of affairs. Forts Fléron, Chaudfontaine, Evegnée, and Barchon had fallen, and early in the morning of that day German infantry entered Liège. The forts on the north, south, and west of the town still held out for a time, but the town from that moment remained in German hands. To the people, and especially the workers of Liège, this made a vital difference. The output of the numerous factories, in so far as it was useful to the German armies, was at any moment liable to be requisitioned by them; and it was as clear as noonday that all who toiled in the manufacture of such articles were assisting the enemy in their attack upon their own kith and kin, and strengthening the grip he had already laid upon their native land.

CHAPTER VI

A New Standpoint

To Max and his chum these were days charged high with excitement. Their day's toil in the shops over, they raced away to the points where the most exciting events were to be seen. They were witnesses of most that went forward, and actually lent a hand in the rounding-up, from among the civil population of the city, of the band of armed Germans who attempted to assassinate the commandant of the fortress, General Leman.

The entry of the Germans was to both of them a fearful blow. They knew little of military matters, and vaguely believed that the town and forts were strong enough to stand a regular siege. And yet on the third day after the attack the town had fallen! As they watched the young German troops marching into the town they could not help feeling deeply disappointed and discouraged.

"I wish now that you had gone home, Dale," remarked Max in a gloomy voice as they slowly made their way towards the works. "Now that the place has fallen you can do no good here. And as you are not a native you may be taken for a spy and shot off-hand."

"Shut up, Max! We've agreed to go through this business together, and there's an end of it. Liège is lost, but the war's still on, and it will be hard if we can't find some way of giving our side a shove forward."

"Aye to that, Dale. Well, if you don't mind being here in a conquered town I'm jolly glad to have you. Now, I suppose we can still go on helping to cast shells—why no, Dale! We simply can't do any more of that work; it's absolutely useless."

"Of course it is. You may be sure the Germans won't let shells be sent away from Liège except to Germany. Your works had better get on with the other work. Shells are out of the question."

"I must see Schenk about this," replied Max thoughtfully. "It needs thinking out what work—if any at all—we can do without helping the Germans. It's an awkward business, but I have no doubt Schenk can see daylight through it."

"I should think so, but—hallo! What's that?"

Dale stopped suddenly, and stood gazing down a side street, the end of which they were just about to cross. A sudden burst of screams and shouts, quite startling in its intensity, assailed their ears, and made them look and look with a feeling of foreboding new to them. At the far end of the street they could see a group of men in the grey-green uniform surging to and fro before a house from which the screams seemed to issue.

"The Germans—doing the same dirty work as they did at Visé!" gasped Max, turning away his head and clenching his fists in his pockets. "I hardly know how to keep from rushing down there, utterly useless though it is."

"It is women they are ill-treating—how can we walk away?" cried Dale in acute distress. "Let us go down, and if we cannot fight, let us beg them to desist. Perhaps if we offered them money —?"

"Useless," muttered Max, though he stopped and gazed down the road in irresolution. "And yet how *can* we pass by, Dale?" he went on with a groan. "I know I shall always call myself a coward if I do nothing. Let's walk a little closer, and see if we can do anything."

Dale eagerly agreed, and they walked quickly down the road towards the group of soldiers and their victims. As they drew nearer, and could see something of what was happening, their anger increased, until they were almost ready to throw themselves upon the soldiers and oppose their bayonets with their bare fists.

The house before which the outrage was taking place seemed, for some reason, to have been singled out from the others which lined both sides of the street, possibly because the head of the house was well known as an opponent of the Germans or because of some act of hostility committed against the soldiers. At any rate, an elderly man, evidently dragged from the house, had been tied to the front railings, and was being subjected to treatment so cruel that it almost amounted to torture.

The womenfolk of the house had apparently rushed out and endeavoured to intervene, but had been forcibly held back, and were at that moment being subjected to brutal indignities that angered Max and Dale even more than the cold-blooded cruelty to the man himself.

The two had arrived within some forty yards of the scene, and were still pressing on as though drawn by a magnet, although neither knew what he was going to do, when one of the soldiers drew the attention of his fellows to the two young men advancing towards them. At the same time he picked up his rifle, took quick aim, and discharged it directly at them.

The bullet whizzed between them, and, on the impulse, Max seized Dale by the arm and dragged him through the open doorway of the nearest house. A roar of laughter from the soldiers at their rapid exit followed them, and made the anger of one at least of them burn with a still fiercer resentment.

"Right through and out at the back," cried Max in urgent tones, and the two passed through the house, which appeared to be deserted, and found themselves in an open space intersected only by low garden fences.

Max laid his hand on his friend's arm. "I am going to move quietly along until I reach the back of the house where those curs are at work," he said in a hard, suppressed voice. "I must do something, but do not you come, Dale. There is no need for you——"

"I am already in it, I tell you," almost shouted Dale as he impatiently shook him off. "It's as much my affair as yours. Come on."

The two made their way rapidly but cautiously along until they reached the house they sought. The doors were open at the back, and the shouts and screams were almost as audible there as at the front.

"We have no weapons; let us arm ourselves with these," cried Max, pointing to some blocks of ornamental quartz bordering a little fernery. Even in the midst of his excitement it struck Max how strangely the orderliness of the tiny, well-kept garden seemed to contrast with the deeds of violence being committed outside.

Rapidly but quietly the two lads filled hands and pockets with the heavy missiles. Then they crept inside the house and up the stairs to the floor above. The house was quite empty, for all within had rushed or been dragged to the scene in front.

The bedroom windows were wide open, and the instant they entered both lads began with one impulse to hurl with all their strength the great stones upon the German soldiery below. They were both wild with rage at what they had witnessed, and utterly reckless what fate might ultimately be theirs, so long as they could inflict some punishment upon the cowardly wrongdoers.



BOTH LADS BEGAN TO HURL THE GREAT STONES UPON THE GERMAN SOLDIERY

The soldiers, completely taken aback by this sudden rain of missiles almost from the skies, immediately scattered to the opposite side of the road and took refuge in the gardens there. Not one of them had his rifle to hand, for their arms had been stacked against the wall of the house they were attacking, and even the man who had fired at Max and Dale had put down his rifle once more. Thus, for the moment, the soldiers were impotent, and Max shouted rapidly in the Walloon dialect to the women below to release the man tied to the railings and escape through the house.

With a promptitude that was wholly admirable, one of the women drew a pair of scissors from her pocket and cut the cords that bound the man to the fence. With a cry of joy the poor fellow staggered to his feet. But, stiffened by his bonds or exhausted by the cruel treatment he had received, he could barely stand, and had to be half supported and half dragged by two of the women back into the house.

"Tell them to be off, Dale," cried Max rapidly. "I will hold back these men for a minute. Take them right through into the street beyond and get them out of sight. I will follow in a moment."

Dale obeyed, and under his guidance the whole party made their way rapidly through the house, into the gardens, and through the houses opposite into the road beyond. At the disappearance of their prey the soldiers set up a howl of rage, and made a concerted rush for their weapons. But Max redoubled his efforts, and, his supply of quartz exhausted, rained down upon them jugs, mirrors, pictures, and everything movable he could lay hands upon, holding them in check for a few precious moments. Then, after one final fling, he bolted from the room into the bedroom at the back and leapt out of the window. Landing in a flower-bed unhurt, he rushed without a pause at the low garden fence in front of him, cleared it at a bound, and dashed through the house opposite in the wake of Dale and the fugitive people.

Meanwhile, out in the roadway, the soldiers had seized their weapons, and, hardly knowing what to expect, poured two or three volleys into the empty house. Then they cautiously reconnoitred, and by the time they had come to the conclusion that the house was indeed empty, the fugitives were completely beyond their reach. Characteristically enough, they vented their rage and disappointment on the inanimate objects within their reach. The crash of furniture soon rose above their shouts of fury, and in the end smoke rolled from the windows and poured upwards to the sky as a silent witness to the new spirit that had come to dominate the land.

Max and Dale hurried the people they had rescued away from the scene of the outbreak, and would not allow them to slacken speed until they had put a mile of streets between them and their savage foes. It was then, Max judged, high time to find a haven of refuge of some sort, for, with one exception, the women were half crazed with fear and the man quite exhausted with ill-usage. Any German soldiers or spies who passed them could hardly fail to remark that they were fugitives, and they would soon find themselves in as bad a case as before. Questioning a woman who still retained a show of self-possession, Max learned that they had friends in another part of the town, and towards their house he promptly directed their retreat.

Without further misadventure they reached the house they sought, and Max and Dale saw their charges safely inside the door. Then they hurried away, for it was obviously dangerous both for them and for the fugitives to be in one another's company a moment longer than necessary.

Thanks were not thought of; the rescued were not ungrateful but were altogether too upset for expression, and the rescuers were only thankful to have been of use, without a thought of anything else.

"By George, Max, how I did enjoy that!" cried Dale with enthusiasm, as they turned their steps once more towards the works. "I feel an inch taller, and can face the world as an honest man."

"Aye, Jack, I feel like that too. How should we have felt had we let that business go on unchecked?"

"And it has done a bit of good, too, I imagine. Those cowardly Germans will not forget that rain of quartz in a hurry, and may leave the poor folk alone another time."

"I am not so sure. But the question is, what are we going to do now? We cannot go on casting shells which will be certain to be seized by the Germans. If we make railway material it will only be used to convey soldiers into the field against our men. No. I must see Schenk, and get him to close all branches of the works that might be of use to the enemy. That is the only thing to be done. Then I shall try to get through to join the Belgian army."

"And I too, Max. I will join with you. We have started on this business together and we will finish it together."

CHAPTER VII

A Few Words with M. Schenk

Arrived at the Durend works, Max went straight to M. Schenk's office. Two men, whom Max had not seen before, were coming out as he entered, but the manager was at that moment alone. He looked up as Max came in, and, when he saw who it was, smiled in a way that our hero did not altogether like. It seemed less a smile of welcome than of tolerant amusement, and instead of commencing diplomatically, as he had intended, Max burst out rather heatedly:

"Monsieur Schenk, we must close the works. We cannot go on making shells now that the Germans are in occupation of Liège. It is not loyal to Belgium, and I am certain my mother would not wish us to do such a thing."

The manager gazed at Max almost blankly for a moment, as though quite taken by surprise. Then he smiled again, almost pityingly, as he replied:

"I do not think you understand the position, Monsieur Max. The Germans are now masters here, and what they order us that we must do. The German commander only an hour ago sent word that he would hold the heads of the firm responsible for any decrease in the output of the Durend works; so what can I do? Would it help Belgium if you and I were replaced by men from Krupp's? No; it were better that we—or at any rate I—remain, so that the firm's interests are not wholly forgotten."

"But if we refuse to work, the workmen will do so too," cried Max earnestly. "If we continue at work, they may continue also. We have an example of patriotism to set, and set it we must."

"Bah! If Krupp's run these works the workmen will have to work, make no mistake on that point. Now, Monsieur Max, pray leave me, for I must to work again. You may rest assured that I am looking after the interests of the firm. Think no more about such matters, but take heed to yourself, for your end will be swift indeed if the Germans think you actively hostile to their occupation of the town."

"I care not," cried Max recklessly. "Let them take us both and let Krupp's take over the firm—at least our hands will be clean of treachery to our country. Once more, Monsieur Schenk, as my mother's representative, I appeal to you not to aid the enemy by running the works for their help and benefit."

The manager snorted indignantly. "I am responsible here, and I am going to exercise my own judgment," he cried sharply. "And now, leave me. You are too young to discuss these matters and you weary me."

Turning round sharply on his heel, Max left the room. He had never been spoken to like that before, and it cut him to the heart. He wanted time to think out the situation and to make up his mind what action he should take. True, this man was manager and entrusted with great powers; but Max stood to some extent in the position of owner, and that he should be treated thus seemed an indignity in the highest degree. It was a relief to pour his woes into the ear of the faithful Dale, and together these two paced through the yard, conning over earnestly all the bearings of the situation. It was while they were thus engaged that a fleet of thirty or forty great military motor-lorries rattled by.

"The beginning," cried Max bitterly, nodding towards them.

"Yes, I fear so. I wonder what they are after?"

"Let us follow and see. We may as well know the worst."

The wagons came to a stand alongside one of the largest of the stacks of empty shells which now dotted the yard, and, with a promptitude that showed that everything had been arranged beforehand, the tarpaulins that covered the stacks were thrown aside and the shells passed one by one into the wagons.

"Now that seems queer to me," remarked Dale, as he watched the men with a thoughtful face. "What can the Germans want with shells that will only fit the Belgian guns! Queer, I call it."

"They may be going to use them in the captured guns," replied Max. "Let us look in again at the casting-shops and see if they have started on shells for German guns. 'Pon my word I have half a mind to appeal to the men to cease work, strange as it would be coming from the owner's son while the manager of the works made no sign. The place is running at top speed too—see, Dale?"

It was evident that there was no relaxation here. The whole of the buildings and furnaces engaged in the castings were simply humming with energy, and when they entered the nearest door they were amazed. Double the number of men that were at work the day before were now engaged and were working with an intensity that seemed inexplicable to Max.

As they entered, one of the foremen came up to them.

"Keep a still tongue, Dale," muttered Max beneath his breath.

"You are late, Monsieur," he said, addressing Max and gazing at him somewhat closely. "Are you going to work this morning?"

"I think not," replied Max, shrugging his shoulders. "I see you are pretty well full up with men."

"Yes, we have had a lot more hands placed at our disposal here. I estimate that we shall turn out at least three times as many shells as yesterday."

"The new men are German-speaking, of course?"

"Of course. This business will be profitable for the firm no doubt?" The man looked at Max as though not quite certain of the state of affairs.

"Undoubtedly. Has Monsieur Schenk given any orders for a change in the calibre of the shells?"

"No. We are still on the same gauge. But I suppose we shall be making all sizes soon. There is no help for it, of course; we must submit to the inevitable?"

Max turned away. "This trebling of output does not seem like unwilling submission to the inevitable, Dale," he whispered savagely. "Come, let us get out of this—I'm choking here. The place reeks to me of treachery. If I had the strength of Samson I would bring the roof down and bury the whole villainous crew beneath the ruins."

"There's certainly something dirty going on," agreed Dale. "But if we're not Samsons we have strength enough to put a spoke in their wheel, I fancy. Let us wait a bit and see."

In savage silence the two lads left the casting-shops and walked mechanically on towards the buildings which had been engaged on peace-time work. Here all was quiet and almost deserted. Only a machine here and there was running, and at first they thought that the whole of the workmen had been diverted to the other shops. But at the farther end of the yard they presently noticed groups of men congregated together, much as they were wont to do in the dinner interval. But it was not the dinner interval now.

"What's the matter here? This looks as though some part of Schenk's plans had gone awry. Are they dismissed, or are they refusing to work?"

"Refusing to work, by the look of the armed guards yonder," replied Max, nodding towards a body of German soldiers, a dozen or more strong, posted at a corner of one of the buildings within easy reach of the entrance. "Let us have a talk with one or two of the men and find out what's afoot."

"Aye, but don't let our German friends see us talking to them. They will think it a conspiracy."

The two lads joined themselves to one of the groups, and began questioning them as to the reason for their presence there instead of in the workshops. But somehow the men seemed to view Max and Dale with coldness and suspicion, and either refused to reply or answered in sullen monosyllables. Max was about to turn away, in disappointed perplexity, when he noticed the man Dubec. In sudden relief he appealed to him to tell him what was happening.

"It is because we will not work if the goods are to be seized by the Germans. We are true Belgians—not like those traitors who fill the shell-shops—and we cannot work against our country."

"And you are right," cried Max warmly. "I am with you heart and soul."

"Huh! But what our men cannot understand is why the firm does not close down. Why is it left to us poor workmen to show our patriotism? Why does not the firm take the lead? We would stand by them to the death if need be."

"I believe you," cried Max, with difficulty gulping down the lump that rose in his throat. What a

cur he felt—he, the owner in the sight of these men, helpless to influence in the slightest degree the affairs of the great works called by his name. "But, lads—to my shame I say it—I am helpless. I am but just come from demanding of Monsieur Schenk that the works should be closed. He will not hear of it, and it is he who has the power, not I. And behind him stand the Germans. I can do nothing, and I feel the shame of it more than I can say."

Max's voice trembled with earnestness and sincerity, and the men clearly believed him. Their cold looks vanished, and the one or two near him seized him by the hands and wrung them vigorously.

"That is good, Monsieur. We are glad to hear that you are for us. It makes our stand easier now that we know that the owners at least are on our side. As for that Schenk, we have always hated him as a tyrant, and now we doubly hate him as a traitor as well."

"Aye," broke in another of the men, "he is the cause of the mischief. And we have sworn not to work so long as the Germans hold the town. If we were ready to strike and suffer long for wages, will we not do so for the good of our country?"

The man gazed round at his comrades, who gave a half-cheer in answer to his appeal. The attention of the German guards was attracted by the sound, and the non-commissioned officer in charge instantly ordered his men to advance on the offending party.

"Disperse!" cried Max and one or two more, and the group broke up, most of the men walking out of the yard into the open road. The regular tramp of heavy-booted feet and harsh commands that followed them were a further reminder, if one were needed, of the utter change that had come over the scene of their humble daily toil.

CHAPTER VIII

Treachery!

"What is to be our next move, Max?" enquired Dale presently, after they had walked almost mechanically nearly a mile from the Durend works upwards towards the hills on the western side of the town. Twice he had to repeat his question, for Max was too immersed in thoughts bitter and rebellious to pay much heed.

"I care not where we go, Jack. For me everything seems to have come to an end."

"I know, I know, Max, just how you feel; but do not give way to it. There is Belgium to live for; and you have what I have not—a mother. Let us go home and think things out."

"I cannot rest at home, Dale—yet. Let us walk on for a while. We shall feel free on this side of the town. Thank God, the forts here are still holding out, and the Germans have not yet over-run the countryside. Presently we shall reach the Crofts, and we will sit in the cottage or the old summer-house while we talk it all over."

On the western side of the town, at a distance of some six miles or so, Madame Durend owned a little old-fashioned cottage, picturesquely planted in a large garden and wood. It was a favourite resort of the family in summer-time, and Max and Dale had had their full share of its pleasures. For one thing, there was an asphalt tennis-court there which had claimed a large part of their spare time, not to mention that of Max's sister and her friends.

Avoiding the road, in order to lessen their chance of encountering enemy patrols, Max and his friend travelled across fields and along bypaths towards the cottage. They had come to within half a mile or so of the place when they were startled beyond measure, and almost stunned, by a tremendous report like the explosion of an enormous gun. It was close at hand, too, and seemed to come from the general direction of the cottage. Almost immediately there was another similar report, followed by others at a greater distance. Max and Dale looked at one another significantly.

"Attacking either Fort Loncin or Fort Hollogne," said Max resignedly. "I wonder we have got so far unnoticed."

"Yes; but now we are here we may as well see the fun. Let us go to the Crofts, and climb the big oak as of yore. We shall see everything from there."

"And be seen too, I'm thinking. Never mind; I feel reckless enough for anything this afternoon."

"Well, reckless or no, we may as well move cautiously. Let us keep well under cover of this hedge. Whew! What a row there is!"

As the two friends drew nearer to the cottage they became convinced that not only was the firing taking place quite near the Crofts, but that it was going on in the very garden itself. Closer and closer they crept, their curiosity keenly whetted by this unexpected discovery, until they reached a little clump of thick undergrowth which overlooked the garden. Here the greatest discovery of all awaited them.

Two big 28-cm. guns were in position in the centre of the garden, and being loaded and fired without a moment's respite. The sight was fascinating—nay, awe-inspiring—enough, but to the two lads the thing that most caught and fixed their attention was the fact that both guns were planted full on their asphalted tennis-court. To Dale this was merely curious, but to Max it had a significance so terrible and nerve-shaking that it was all he could do to prevent himself crying out.

"What's the matter, Max?" cried Dale in alarm, as he caught a glimpse of his friend's pale, drawn face and staring eyes.

"Come away—quick! Let us get away and I will tell you," cried Max in a hoarse voice, and, followed by his friend, he sped swiftly from the scene towards a thick wood a short distance away. Once well within the shelter of its leafy screen, he stopped and faced Dale excitedly, his face aflame.

"That scoundrel Schenk! He is at the bottom of it all. He is a paid traitor and spy of the German Government, and, fool that I was, I never saw it before!"

"Why, what has happened to tell you this? A traitor I dare say he is, but why so suddenly sure?"

"That tennis-court. Do you know that Schenk, when he heard we were thinking of one, pressed us to have an asphalt one for use in all weathers. He saw to it himself, and dug down six feet for the foundations. I asked him why he was doing that, and he said he had a lot of material, concrete or something, over from something else—I didn't take much notice what it was—and that it would make it all the better. It was all a ruse to lay down solid concrete gun-platforms ready to blow our forts to pieces. The utter scoundrel!"

"Ah! And that was why he replaced the Walloon and Flemish workmen by naturalized Germans! I see. He wanted to have men he could be sure of and to have the works ready for running without a hitch directly the Germans entered. And the shells——"

"Yes," almost shouted Max, grasping his friend roughly by the arm, "yes, their calibre will be that of German, not Belgian, guns! They never were for Belgian guns! That was why they were kept covered up so closely in the yard."

"Phew! It was a risky game to play; but no doubt he expected the town to fall quickly—perhaps even more quickly than it did."

"And there are other things," Max went on in a quieter tone. "Why was it Schenk persuaded us to go to Germany instead of to Holland for our holiday? Why—why? Simply because he wanted to get us out of the way. Then do you remember those men who were captured after trying to assassinate General Leman in the town? I thought I had seen two or three of them somewhere before. I remember now. They were some of the workmen of the shell-shops, and one was a foreman. The plot was hatched by Schenk, not a doubt of it."

"Not a shadow of a doubt. The whole business is as plain as a pikestaff. But who would have dreamed of such devilish forethought? He must have been planning it for years!"

"Yes, he has been my father's right-hand man for nine or ten years at least. He must have come for no other purpose—and my father never knew it! How glad I am my mother is out of it all, safe and sound."

For some time the two friends discussed the great discovery in all its bearings. Matters stood out in a fresh perspective, and one of the first things to appear prominently was the peril in which both of them now stood. In peril from the Germans they had known they stood, but the peril from Schenk was new and far greater. At any moment he might come to the conclusion that their continued presence about the works or in the town was inconvenient, and denounce them as hostile to the occupation. In fact—and a bitter realization it was—they were only saved from this by the manager's contempt of them as adversaries and his calm assurance that they were really not worth considering one way or the other.

"Well, Max," said Dale at last, "what line are we now going to take? It is time we made up our minds once and for all. We are clearly outclassed by this Schenk—he holds all the cards—and the best thing we can do is to make tracks to join the Belgian army before it is too late to get away."

"Yes, Dale, that is the best thing—for you. Only *I* cannot come with you. You go and join the British army. My place is here more than ever, and leave it I will not."

"Come now, Max, don't be obstinate! There is nothing to be done here. You are absolutely helpless pitted against Schenk and his friends the Germans. You must recognize it. Come with me and we will see what we can do for the good cause elsewhere."

Max shook his head decidedly. His face was very downcast, and it was clear to his friend that he felt most keenly the way in which his father's name and resources had been exploited by the enemies of their country; but his lips were firmly set, and in his eyes was the steady look Dale remembered so well during the dark days of the struggle for Benson's. Benson's! The recollection brought back again to Dale the words spoken by the master at the close of the races: "Fixity of purpose ... there is almost nothing that fixity of purpose will not accomplish."

"No," Max said simply, after a moment's pause, "I am going to keep watch and ward over the Durend workshops. Cost what it may I am going, by all means in my power, to hinder the use of

them for the enemy's purposes. What influence I have—little enough I fear—with the real Belgian workmen, I will exert to keep them from aiding Schenk. The works are mine—I speak for my mother—and I will not hesitate to destroy them if I find opportunity. There must be many ways in which I can make trouble, and I am going to strain every nerve to do so. Let Schenk look out; it is war to the knife!"

"Hurrah!" cried Dale excitedly. Then he went on in a sober tone: "But it is risky work, Max. Schenk will very soon suspect us—he has agents and spies everywhere, you may be sure."

"We must be as cunning as he is—more so. We must outdo him at his own game. We—I, I should say, for you must go back to England—I am going to disappear and emerge as a simple workman, with German sympathies of course. Then the fight will begin."

"Yes, and I'm in it, Max," cried Dale joyously. "I wouldn't miss it for worlds. It sounds good enough for anything. To outwit the Germans is great, but to outwit Schenk is ten times better. Come along, let's get to work."

"All right!" cried Max, smiling at his friend's enthusiasm. "We'll get back at once, and, as a start, go home and fetch away some of our things. It will have to be the last time we go there."

Quickly, and yet with caution, the two lads retraced their steps to the town. They knew every foot of the country, and, though there were numerous patrolling parties of Germans between them and the town, they were able to pass them without difficulty. At the door of his house one of the servants met Max and handed him a note.

"A young man brought it, Monsieur, an hour ago. He has come all the way from Maastricht with it. It is from Madame, your mother, and he said it was very important."

Rapidly Max tore away the cover and opened the missive. His senses were perhaps preternaturally sharpened, for he felt a sense of foreboding. After many fond messages, and repeated injunctions that he would take care of himself and not offend the Germans, the note went on:

"And now, Max, I want to tell you something that distresses me extremely, though I have hopes that it may be all a mistake. When I left, bringing only a few things and a purse with such money as I had by me at the moment, M. Schenk, on my explicit instructions, assured me that he would arrange at once for a large sum of money to be transferred to my account at the Maastricht Bank. I have been there repeatedly, asking about it, but none of the officials know anything of the matter. They say they have not been approached, and though they have enquired of other banks in the place they can learn no tidings. They have been very good to me, for, hearing who I was, they advanced me a small sum for my immediate use. Will you now please see M. Schenk and have this matter—which is so distressing—put right?"

Max clenched the paper in his hand. The blood flooded up into his head with such force that he had to put his hand against the doorpost to steady himself.

"What's the matter?" cried Dale, again in alarm at the look on his face. "Is it bad news?"

"Aye—the worst—the blackest treachery," cried Max in a voice which trembled with the intensity of his emotion. "I must see Schenk—and wring from him the money he has stolen," and, turning impetuously on his heel, Max strode rapidly away from the house in the direction of the works.

Dale darted after him and caught him up. "You must do nothing rash, Max," he cried earnestly. "Wait a while until you are calm; you are no match for Schenk like that. Let us walk slowly along while you tell me what has happened."

Max thrust at him the crumpled letter. Then in a few broken words he told him, what was scarcely needed, that the manager had tricked his mother into leaving the country, and had then left her stranded without a penny to live upon. The baseness of it all came as a shock, even on the top of their knowledge of the man's deep treachery.

"There's more behind it, I believe," said Dale, after a few minutes' cogitation in silence. "I think this may be a lever to get *you* out of the country. He will think you will be compelled to go to your mother and work for her support."

"He knows he can get me out of the way at any time by denouncing me to the Germans," replied Max in dissent. "No—that will not explain it. But as sure as I live I will wring the truth from him before another hour is gone."

Dale gazed in some apprehension at his friend as he strode feverishly along towards the Durend works. He feared that he might, in his anger, do some rash act that would destroy all. But presently, to his relief, he saw that he was regaining control over his feelings, and, by the time they reached the works, he seemed his usual self again. The only evidence of his past emotion was to be found in his somewhat gloomy looks and in lips tightly compressed as though to hold in check feelings that struggled for an outlet.

CHAPTER IX

The Opening of the Struggle

The manager was in his room, and stared in some alarm at Max and his friend as they strode unceremoniously in. Then he touched a bell and his secretary entered.

"Remain at the door, Erbo. I shall want you in a moment," he said coolly.

It was a declaration of distrust, if not war, and both sides knew it. It robbed Max's words of any circumlocution he might otherwise have used, and he went straight to the point.

"You have not sent my mother the money that she instructed you to send, Monsieur Schenk. Why is that?"

The manager cleared his throat. "The German commander has forbidden any moneys to be sent out of the country, Monsieur Max, and it is unfortunately now impossible for me to do so."

"I have not heard of any such order. But why did you not do it before the Germans entered? You had ample time."

"I gave instructions, but the tremendous pressure a day or two before the Germans entered—you know how I worked to cast shells for our armies and the garrisons of the forts—caused it to be overlooked. I regret this very much, but it is now too late to do anything."

The manager looked squarely and unblushingly at Max as he boasted of the way in which he had aided the Belgian troops, and the latter was hard put to it to keep back the torrent of wrathful words that rose to his lips. But other and more pressing matters claimed attention just now, and, choking down his indignation, he replied temperately:

"It is *not* too late, Monsieur Schenk. Hand me the necessary moneys or securities and I will convey them to Maastricht. My mother must not be left destitute."

The manager shook his head decidedly. "No, Monsieur Max, I cannot do that. You would be certain to be taken, and I should have to pay the greater share of the penalty. No, I cannot think of it; but there *is* a way out of the difficulty which would indeed simplify matters in another direction. You are in great danger here and are doing no good. Go to Maastricht and support your good mother. I will obtain for you a passport through the Germans and a letter to a friend of mine who will see that you secure well-paid work. Yes, that is the best way out of the difficulty, Monsieur Max, and you and your mother will live to rejoice at having taken it."

"If your friend can get me well-paid work, can he not advance money to my mother, Monsieur Schenk?"

"No, he is in a position to get you a berth, but he has no great means. Come now, Monsieur Max, be guided by me and leave Liège without delay. The works are running splendidly, and I shall have a good account to give of my stewardship after the war."

The man's cool effrontery and the tone of lofty regard for the interests of the owners of the Durend works almost stunned Max, and for a moment he could but stare at him in dumb astonishment. That his faithful stewardship of the Durend works now ran counter to the vital interests of the country seemed not to matter to him one straw. Ceasing to plead his mother's cause, Max asked with sudden directness:

"How is it, Monsieur Schenk, that the shells we are casting for the Belgian guns will not fit them, but yet do fit the German guns?"

It was a shot at a venture, but it went home. The manager was obviously taken aback, although he recovered himself almost instantly as he replied:

"You have noticed that then? Yes, there was a misunderstanding about the size with the commandant. Apparently he was speaking about the calibre of the shells thrown against the forts, when I was under the impression he was discussing the calibre of the shells most urgently required for use. It was a ridiculous mistake, but not so strange when one considers the turmoil and confusion of those early days."

At this Max could contain himself no longer. "Monsieur Schenk—Herr Schenk, I should say—you are a traitor to Belgium, and I denounce you here and now. You are a base schemer, and the biggest scoundrel in Liège, if not in Belgium. You have the upper hand at present, but I declare to you that I shall spare no pains in the distant future to bring you to justice and to see that you get your deserts. I know your plans—or some of them. The concrete tennis-court—the filling of the shops with German workmen, the plot against General Leman, and, greatest of all, the fearful shell treachery. Oh, the shame of it should tell, even upon a German!"

It certainly seemed to tell a little upon M. Schenk. He gasped, flushed up, and opened his mouth, apparently to deny the accusations. Then he apparently thought better of it, for he controlled himself by an effort and replied coldly:

"Very well, Monsieur Max; it is war between us, I see. And it will soon end—in your discomfiture!"

"We shall see. Good day, Herr Schenk!"

This mode of addressing him seemed to sting the manager more than anything else, for he burst

out angrily:

"Fool of a boy! Do you think to measure your puny strength with mine? Bah! I shall crush you before ever you can raise your hand against me. As for my name, Herr Schenk suits me well enough. I am a German, and I hate these decadent peoples we call Belgians. Let Germany rule—she is strong and virile, and before her the world must—and shall—bow down. You, whether you call yourself English or Belgian, shall know what it is to have your country crushed and beaten, and to have brains—German brains—to direct and rule you. Go—and see if I'm not right."

"I am going—and going to do my best to prove you wrong," replied Max proudly as he strode quickly from the room. Dale followed him, venting his own indignation, as he turned away, by shaking his fist full in the manager's face.

"We must not dally here," cried Max as they left the building. "We had better make ourselves scarce at once. We have burnt our boats, and both Schenk and the Germans will be after us from now onwards."

"And a good job too," replied Dale, who did not appear at all alarmed at the prospect. "The fight now begins."

"Quick—round here," cried Max, turning a corner sharply. "Let us lose ourselves in these narrow streets for a while. We will then go to Madame Dubec's."

"Madame Dubec's?"

"Yes, we must not go home. Madame Dubec—the wife of the man whose life I saved, you remember—she will shelter us for a day or two while we look about us. We will get her or her husband to buy us rough clothes, so that we can pass as workmen. We must not go about like this any longer."

"Aye, we must act the part of honest sons of toil. Always have a spanner sticking out of a pocket, and a hunk of bread and cheese tied up in a coloured handkerchief in our hands. Hurrah!"

Madame Dubec gave them a quiet but sincere welcome, and for the remainder of the day and the following night they sheltered beneath her roof. She was anxious that they should stay permanently with her, when she learned that they were in danger, but neither Max nor Dale would hear of it. Should Schenk or the Germans learn that she had sheltered them it might go hard with her, and neither cared to contemplate such a thing. As soon, therefore, as they had been provided with workmen's clothes, they took a room in a poor quarter of the town well away from the Durend works and made active preparations for their campaign. Although Max had not dared to go to his home to fetch any of his belongings, he had managed to get a few of the more necessary things by sending one of Madame Dubec's daughters with a note to one of the domestics whom he knew he could trust.

To Max, the great campaign he had in mind against Schenk and the Germans was momentarily eclipsed by the urgent need for doing something to relieve the distress of his mother and sister. He tried at first to think of friends, who, knowing the value of their property, might be disposed to advance a sufficient sum of money upon its security. It was in the midst of these reflections, and the angry thoughts of Schenk that naturally coloured them, that a wild and desperate idea occurred to him. He dismissed it at first as an absurdity, but the thought kept coming back again, until, weary of resisting it, he allowed his mind to dwell upon it at will. It was while heedlessly immersed in these rambling thoughts that a sudden recollection came which considerably altered the aspect of affairs. From a wild and desperate dream it changed into a project, difficult and perilous indeed, but one by no means hopeless of achievement. In the end it took such firm hold upon him that he thought it out seriously and at last unfolded it to Dale.

That worthy welcomed it with such unbounded admiration and delight that the question as to whether it should or should not be attempted was settled out of hand, and the preparations for carrying it into effect promptly begun.

The project was, briefly, to go and take by a *coup de main* the moneys belonging to his mother that Schenk had wrongfully and treacherously refused to hand over. It seemed a most risky venture, but Max had a recollection that his father long ago had entrusted to his mother the duplicate key of his safe in case anything should at any time happen to him. It had never been used, and his mother, likely enough, had almost forgotten she possessed it. Nevertheless, Max believed it was still in her possession, and he resolved to settle the point by sending a messenger to fetch it. More important still, he believed that Schenk was quite unaware of its existence. If the key could be secured it would simplify matters immensely, and, as Max was naturally familiar with the building in which the manager's office was situated, the enterprise was one which seemed likely to succeed if resolutely attempted. The safe, he knew, ought to contain all the money and securities of the firm, unless, indeed, Schenk had already handed them over to the Germans. This did not seem likely, however, and Max would not allow so disappointing a thought to interfere with his calculations.

Monsieur Dubec's eldest daughter was promptly dispatched to Madame Durend with a letter asking for the key. Max entered into no details, and his mother may possibly have supposed that M. Schenk's failure to send her the money he had promised was due to the loss of the original

key. At any rate, to the delight both of Max and Dale, the key duly arrived the following day.

Tools were needed, and these were of course easily obtained. Max, as we have seen, had been through most of the shops in the Durend concern, and knew how to use almost any tool as well as the best of the firm's mechanics. No difficulties, therefore, were to be anticipated on that score. In fact, the more the details of the scheme were discussed the more feasible it seemed and the more the spirits of the two plotters rose.

The third night after the break with Schenk, Max and Dale set out from their lodging at midnight and made their way to the Durend workshops. Dale was carrying a good-sized bag, in which was a lantern and an assortment of tools and other articles, one or two of them of such a nature that to be stopped and the bag examined would have been fatal to their liberty of movement for many a long day. It was, therefore, necessary for them to move with caution, and Max accordingly went on a hundred yards ahead, ready to give the agreed signal—a stumble forward on the pavement—whenever it was advisable for Dale to disappear.

The offices of the Durend Company were situated in a separate building just inside the main entrance gates. The latter were ordinarily guarded by a watchman, but since the Germans had entered Liége a guard of German soldiers had been established there, and the sentinel on his beat passed within view of the front and two sides of the offices. It was pretty obvious, therefore, that the rear of the building would have to be the part attacked.

It was close on one o'clock when Max and Dale scaled the outer wall well away from the entrance, and moved cautiously up to the rear of the building which was their objective. They had had only one alarm so far, and this had been so easily disposed of that they had begun to feel quite elated.

"This window gives access to the drawing-office, Dale, and ought to suit us well. Give me a lift on to the sill, and hand up the tools."

In a surprisingly short space of time the window was forced open, and Max clambered into the room. A whispered word, and Dale handed up the bag and sprang quietly up after it.

"Heat No. 1 pulled off at a paddle," commented Dale exultingly.

"The door is open, as I expected," whispered Max, who was too intent upon the work in hand to heed his friend's playfulness. "Now I will light the lantern and we will go upstairs. The door of the manager's room is sure to be locked, but we shall make short work of that."

As Max expected, the door was locked, but they had come provided with tools for all eventualities, and in ten minutes the whole of the bottom panels right up to the framework had been neatly sawn out in one piece. Through the aperture the two lads crept, drawing the bag through after them.

"Heat No. 2 won by a dozen lengths," cried Dale joyously.

The room was a fairly large one, and contained the manager's desk, a really handsome piece of furniture which had been Max's father's, two or three tables, bookcases, a screen, and a large and massive safe.

Max lost no time. Setting Dale to keep watch and ward at the window which commanded a view of the entrance-gates, he placed the lantern on the desk, so that its light fell upon the safe, and then advanced upon it, key in hand. This was the crucial moment. Had Schenk appropriated the money and securities committed to his charge, or were they still there, awaiting the strange midnight visit from their rightful owner? It was, indeed, a strong indictment of the methods of the invaders that the legitimate owner should have to come by stealth at dead of night, while the unfaithful steward could do as he listed in the broad glare of day.

Max's hand trembled, and the lock seemed to stick. Then the lever seemed to jamb, until he feared that, after all, something had happened that would balk him at the last moment. But it was only his momentary nervousness, and the door swung ponderously open at last.

"Well, Max, how goes it?" enquired Dale excitedly, turning to watch his friend as he explored the open safe.

"All's well, I think. It seems full enough."

"Semi-final won by a clear length—eh?" cried Dale in great glee. "Seems a regular walk-over. If we want any real excitement we shall have to go and throw stones at the German guard."

"We haven't done yet," replied Max more soberly, though his voice was confident enough. "Here, I'm not going to examine all these papers and documents now. I'm going to cram the whole lot into the bag and be off. We can see what our capture is when we get back to our room."

"Right you are. By George, though, what's that?"

Both stood stock-still and listened. The sound of voices and the tramp of feet upon the stairs was plainly audible.

Max darted an angry look at Dale. In the excitement of the opening of the safe the latter had forgotten that he was on guard at the window, and no doubt this was the result. "You see, Dale?" he cried sharply.

"I'm sorry, old man," replied Dale miserably.

"No matter. Cram these things into the bag while I lock the safe. Mind, not a sound!"

The safe locked, Max sprang noiselessly to the door, replaced the cut-out panels and secured them in position, against anything but a blow or strong pressure, by two or three sharp nails pressed in with his fingers. Flight was out of the question, but it might be possible to make good their escape later on if they could only hide themselves successfully for a little while. For a hiding-place Max had no need to look. He had played at hide-and-seek in that very room with his sister years ago, too often to forget that the best shelter was inside the well of his father's—now the manager's—desk.

The panels replaced, Max knelt down and gently blew away the tell-tale sawdust. Then he turned and eagerly scanned the room. Dale had already packed the bag, and was looking vainly round for a hiding-place.

"Under here—quick!" cried Max, indicating the desk, and in Dale scrambled, dragging the precious bag after him. There was only one thing left which needed to be disposed of, and that was the lantern. Max knew that if he blew it out and hid it under the desk the smell would inevitably betray them. Therefore he took it to the fire-place, blew it out close under the chimney, and instantly thrust it as far up as his arm would reach and lodged it there.

The noise of voices and the tramp of feet had, during the few moments that these preparations had taken, been growing stronger, and the lantern had scarcely been disposed of before the approaching persons halted at the door. The rattle of keys, as someone—no doubt the manager—drew a bunch from his pocket, could now be distinguished, and as Max crawled in under the desk, and packed himself in on top of Dale, the key turned in the lock.

Several men entered, talking together in the German tongue. One voice only Max and Dale recognized, and that, as they expected, belonged to the manager, Otto Schenk.

"... take severe measures against any workman adopting a hostile attitude. Would this meet with approval in Highest quarters?"

"Certainly. You may rest assured, Herr von Schenkendorf, that the Government of His Imperial Majesty has no intention of showing aught but the utmost sternness and rigour towards the whole Belgian population, whether workmen, property owners, or their families."

"Thank you, General."

"Serious consequences have ensued from the unexpected delay caused to our armies by the resistance of the Belgian army, and it is the Belgians who shall be made to pay for it. And to make them pay for it in a literal sense is, as you know, the reason of my presence here now."

"True, General," replied the manager as he switched on the light; "but if I am to develop these works to the utmost, and to support our armies with ample supplies of guns and shells, I must be able to pay my workmen."

"The gold and securities handed over will be replaced by notes of our Imperial Reichsbank or by Belgian paper money, which I have good reason to believe we shall shortly commence to manufacture. You will thus be as well off as before, and the Government will have securities which it can sell in neutral countries."

"Oh, I am not objecting, General! The plan is excellent, and should yield much profit to our country. As for these Belgians, they have brought it on themselves by their foolish obstinacy. Ha, ha! A large part of the securities I am about to hand to you, General, were, by the explicit instructions of the widow of Monsieur Durend, to have been sent into Holland for her use. I thought I could find a better use for them than that, however, and they will doubtless be made to render important service to the Imperial Government. Only two days ago, too, that young English cub, Monsieur Durend's son, attacked me in this room and demanded money for his mother's use. I told him to go and work for her, and sent him about his business."

There was a rumble of laughter, and the desk creaked as one of the officers—there seemed two men beside M. Schenk—sat down on the side of it.

"And what sum will it be, Herr von Schenkendorf? It must be a large one. My Government will expect much from so large and prosperous a business."

"I can give you 1,500,000 marks in money and securities," replied the manager as he drew his keys from his pocket and approached the safe. "If you wish I will hand the sum to your aide-de-camp now."

"I do wish it, Herr von Schenkendorf," replied the officer decisively.

Max and Dale held their breaths in suspense as they heard the key turn in the lock and the door of the safe swing heavily open. There was a sharp exclamation, followed by a dull sound as though the manager had flung himself down on his hands and knees, the better to peer into the inside.

"Mein Gott!" he cried in a strangled voice. "Gone—all gone!"

"No tricks, sir!" cried the general in a rasping voice, getting up suddenly from the desk on which

he had been sitting. "I will not be trifled with."

The manager made no reply, but Max could hear him breathing heavily and fancied he caught a groan.

"What is the matter, von Schenkendorf? Have you been robbed?" demanded the officer.

"Yes, General," replied the manager after a pause in which he vainly endeavoured to find his voice. "Mein Gott—yes—robbed! How—I know not. Last evening I left all—"

"Bah! You *are* trifling with me!" cried the officer in a stern voice. "This is altogether too opportune to be the result of accident. I come to you demanding a contribution to His Imperial Majesty's exchequer and you tell me you have just been robbed. I begin to have grave doubts of your faithfulness to our cause."

"General," cried Schenk in a voice which positively trembled with vexation, "General, I assure you that it is a pure coincidence. Never before has the firm been robbed, and how or why it should happen now I do not know. But it shall be fully investigated and I will leave no stone unturned to recover possession of the valuables—be assured of that."

"So! Well, well, you have had a good reputation with our Government in the past and I will let matters rest for the moment," replied the officer in a voice which contained more than a suspicion of a threat. "By the way," he went on suddenly, his voice again taking on a rasping tone, "I am no doubt right in assuming that those siege-gun plans which I handed to you yesterday are in safe custody?"

"I will look after them, General, have no fear," responded Schenk in a voice which made Max, who knew its usually firm tones so well, grasp the bag on which he leaned with a sudden new affection. "I fully realize their vast importance to our common cause."

Apparently the officer also noticed something amiss. "Show me the plans," he replied curtly.

There was a few moments' suspense. Max could hardly suppress his impulse to laugh aloud, for, although he could not see, he could picture without the least difficulty the manager's utter misery and discomfiture.

"I have them not. They were with the valuables locked in the safe," replied Schenk in a stammering voice. "But, General, they shall be recovered. I have agents everywhere, and no efforts shall be spared to recover them."

The officer strode the length of the room and back. Then he sat heavily down again on the side of the manager's desk, cleared his throat, and responded slowly and impressively:

"This matter, Von Schenkendorf, is now beyond my powers. I must report the matter to my Government. Till then you must not move from Liège without my permission."

The manager made no reply.

"This room," the officer went on, "must be kept locked until it has been thoroughly investigated by officers whom *I* shall send. But you may make such enquiries through your own agents as you think fit. If you succeed, it will, of course, influence matters considerably to your advantage."

"General," replied the manager humbly, "General, I will do so. But let me beg you not to let this one mischance, which might have happened to anyone, wipe out the recollection of my many great services to the State."

"All shall be considered," replied the officer coldly as he strode towards the door. It was obsequiously opened for him, and the three men passed out, the manager locking the door behind them.

"Give me the key," demanded the officer. It was handed over, and the party moved with heavy tread along the passage and down the stairs.

CHAPTER X

Getting Ready for Bigger Things

"Now for it, Dale; it's now or never," cried Max in a voice of suppressed eagerness, as he emerged from under the desk the moment the party of Germans moved away along the passage. "If we do not get clear at once I rather think we never shall."

"Yes, we are what you might call 'right on the post' and rowing neck and neck. 'Twill be a near thing whoever wins," replied Dale, again breaking out into rowing jargon, as he was apt to do whenever excited.

"The prize is bigger than you imagine," responded Max, dragging out the bag and glancing quickly about the room. "Could you follow what was said well enough to understand why they rounded on Schenk, or Schenkendorf, as his name seems to be?"

"No, old man, my German isn't nearly equal to the job, especially when I'm submerged in trunks and desks."

"Well, among the papers we've stuffed into this bag are the plans of some special siege-guns the Germans seem to set no small store on. Schenk was just going to wire in making them, by the look of it. We've upset the whole business, and if he isn't under arrest he's very near it. But come along; we must get out of this."

The bottom panels of the door were quickly removed and Max and Dale crawled through, carrying the now doubly precious bag with them. The manager and the two officers had by this time reached the front entrance of the building but appeared to have halted there and to be talking earnestly together. Hastily removing their boots, Max and Dale crept quietly down the stairs to the door of the drawing-office. They paused and listened before opening it, and heard the party at the entrance descend the steps, still talking together, and the scrunch of the gravel under their feet as they strode away. Then, almost immediately, they heard a harsh command and the rapid tramp of feet as the guard turned out at the entrance to the works.

Max whipped open the door of the drawing-office and they entered and closed it behind them. The window through which they had come an hour or two before gaped before them, and they eagerly moved to it and peered out. All seemed clear for the moment, but they could hear men in motion somewhere, and in the passage they had just left they were startled to hear the voice of the manager talking in a peremptory tone to someone, one of the guard they imagined, and the tramp of their feet as they passed the door and began ascending the stairs.

"Quick; jump out," whispered Max, and he assisted his friend to drop as noiselessly as possible to the ground. Then he handed down the bag and lowered himself down after it. In silence and in great trepidation they sped towards the outer walls at the point at which they had entered. Without mishap they helped one another up and over, and fled at the top of their speed towards their lodging. At any moment they feared a general alarm might be sounded, and the truest caution seemed to be to throw caution momentarily to the winds.

They reached the door of their lodging in safety, and as they entered Dale whispered triumphantly to his friend: "We've won the final too. By George we have!"

Day was just beginning to break as the two friends left the town on the northward side and made their way across country towards the Dutch frontier. They carefully avoided the roads, and their progress was slow; but it was sure, and as soon as they were well away from the neighbourhood of the town they regained the roads and made more rapid progress. Before the day was out they reached Maastricht, and Max found his mother and sister safe and sound, though indeed in great distress.

The relief of Madame Durend at the return of her son from beleaguered Liège was intense. The stories told by the numerous refugees from the towns and villages of Belgium were so terrible that she could not be other than most anxious for his safety. Now he had arrived, and had brought, she soon learned, sufficient funds to enable them all to live in comfort and security for a long time.

But it was not until Max and his friend unfolded their story that she fully realized in what peril they had been, and at what cost they had been able to bring the much-needed assistance. Their story was indeed amazing. Schenk a traitor, and Schenk outwitted! Priceless German plans captured, and funds that the enemy had hoped to secure removed from beyond their grasp! Madame Durend could not but be proud of her son's exploits, but it was a pride with many a tremble at the frightful dangers run.

A fuller examination of their captures revealed to Max and Dale how valuable their prize had been, and sent them both hotfoot to the house of the nearest British consul, into whose care they confided the precious plans, with instructions that they wished them handed over to the British War Office without delay.

A statement briefly describing who the captors were, and how the *coup* had been brought about, was drawn up and signed, and, in high glee at the shrewd blow struck against Schenk and his Germans, they returned once more to the lodging of Madame and Mademoiselle Durend.

A few days spent there in safety, and almost in idleness, were, however, sufficient to make Max and Dale, and especially the former, restless and dissatisfied with their inactivity. The onward march of the Germans, their terrible unscrupulousness and rapacity, and the tales of the terrific fighting with the English and French vanguards reached their ears and made them long to be doing something, however small, to aid the great cause. Max, in addition, had a constant sense of irritation at the thought that his father's great works were running night and day in the interests of the Germans and to the vast injury of his own countrymen. He could not get away from the feeling that he had a responsibility towards the Durend works—a responsibility which he seemed in honour bound to discharge. This feeling grew and grew until it became so intolerable that he was impelled to announce to his mother that he must, without delay, return to his post in the stricken city.

"But surely you have done enough, Max?" cried Madame Durend, almost in consternation. "You

are not yet of man's age, and ought not to think of taking upon yourself such fearful tasks. It is no fault of yours that our property is being used by the Germans. Many other factories and workshops besides ours have been seized, and who can fairly put the blame upon the owners?"

"I know, Mother," replied Max in a quiet voice, and with a far-away look in his eyes. "I know it is no fault of ours. But our workmen—the faithful and real Belgian workmen—are there bearing alone in silence the pain and misery of seeing the great business they helped to create worked to the destruction of their own liberties. They feel nothing so much as the thought that their masters have deserted them, and left them to fight the battle for their land and liberties alone. I must go back and join them, if only to let them know we are with them, hand and foot, heart and soul. I feel, Mother, that so long as one workman still holds out against tyranny and oppression, the owners of the Durend workshops must be by his side to give him both countenance and aid."

Max's voice grew stronger, and thrilled with a deeper and deeper earnestness, as he went on. It was clear to each of his hearers that the guardianship of his father's works had become the one great object and aim of his existence. With such a burning, passionate desire in his heart, it was almost impossible that he could be persuaded to abandon his project if he were not to be rendered miserable for life, and Madame Durend realized almost at once that she dare not attempt it. But the thought of the desperate character of the undertaking made her mother's heart sink with dread.

"I dare not say you nay, Max, my son," she said tremulously, after a long pause, "for I should feel that I was setting my own wishes against what is, perhaps, your duty to your country, and still more your duty to your dear father's name. Go, then—only do not—do not run unnecessary risks. Be as cautious as you can—and come back to me often."

"We will be as cautious as we honourably can, will we not, Dale?" cried Max, appealing to his friend. "It is stratagem that we shall use in making our war—not force. We have thought it all out together, and hope to give a good account of ourselves without giving the Germans a chance to pay us back with usury."

"Yes," replied Dale cheerfully, "we are not going to give the enemy a chance. Why, you have no idea how cautious and full of dodges Max is. He just bristles with 'em, and I think we shall give Schenk and his friends a warm time."

Madame Durend sighed deeply. "It seems terrible to me to think of two such boys returning to that dreadful place to do battle unaided with those men. How I pray that you may come safely back!"

"No fear of that," cried Dale confidently, and Max gazed into his mother's face and nodded reassuringly.

The next day they left the hospitable streets of Maastricht and arrived safely in Liège, still in their disguises as Walloon workmen. A visit to a clever hairdresser before they left had completed their disguise. Their fresh complexions were hidden beneath a stain that darkened the skin to the tints of the swarthiest Walloons of the Liège district.

Max, as he was by far the better known and ran the greater risk of detection, had, in addition, his brown hair dyed a much darker hue and his eyebrows thickened and made to meet in the centre. A few lines skilfully drawn here and there about his face gave him the appearance of a much older man than Dale, and enabled them to pose as brothers aged about twenty-eight and twenty respectively. Their hair was allowed to run wild and mat about their brows and ears; hands and wrists were left, much to their discomfort, to get as grubby as possible, and in the end they were ready to meet the gaze of all as Belgian workmen of the most out-and-out kind.

The necessity for the constant renewal of their various disguises was not overlooked, and the hairdresser was prevailed upon to part with a supply of his dyes and to tell them exactly how and when to apply them.

Max of course could maintain the part of workman to perfection, even if questioned at length, but Dale was under the necessity of answering only in monosyllables, as his knowledge of the language was at present not very great. With Max at his elbow, however, this was not a serious drawback, and neither anticipated any difficulty on that score.

Max was now a broad-shouldered, well-built young fellow of twenty. He was not much above medium height, but his rowing and running at Hawkesley and his hard work in the various shops of the Durend concern had given him a muscular development that most of the real workmen might have envied. His responsibilities as stroke at college, and, later, as the future head of the firm, had given him a self-reliant attitude of mind that was reflected in his bearing, and enabled him to maintain with unconscious ease his sudden increase in years over his more youthful-looking comrade.

Dale was still slim and boyish-looking. He was wiry enough, however, and was, as we have seen, extremely cool and courageous in any tight corner. He was quick, too, and the pair made an ideal couple to hunt together. Had Schenk known that they were bending all their energies to the task of hindering his use of the Durend workshops for the benefit of the Germans he would probably have bestowed more than a passing thought upon them. And had he had an inkling that they were at the bottom of the shrewd blow already dealt him within the sacred precincts of his office he would, no doubt, have spent a sleepless night or two.

The few days that had elapsed since Max and Dale left Liège had already witnessed yet another development in the rapid conversion of the Durend workshops into a first-class manufactory of war material for the German army. A large building on the outskirts of the town had been taken over and converted into a filling-shop, and the shells manufactured within the works were conveyed thither on a miniature railway, and there filled with high-explosive drawn from a factory situated about a mile and a half away, well outside the limits of the town. This new shop was being staffed with men drawn partly from Germany and partly from former workmen of the less determined sort, who were gradually returning to work under stress of hunger.

On Max and Dale applying for work they were promptly drafted to this shop. Fortunately for them, perhaps, the foreman who was now engaging fresh workmen was a man sent from Germany, a bullying, overbearing, Prussian foreman who was expected to bring the methods of the Prussian drill-sergeant to bear upon the poor half-starved wretches applying for work, and to reduce them to a proper state of submission. Max had no difficulty in satisfying the man, especially as he made no demur to working in the night shift. Few workmen cared for the night shift, and the foreman was therefore the more ready to clinch the bargain. Soon Max and Dale were being shown the way to fill the shells and finish them off, ready to be sent on their mission of destruction.

"Things couldn't have happened better, Dale," remarked Max at the first opportunity.

"Why, Max? We are safe inside; is that what you mean?"

"Not exactly. What I mean is our being sent to the filling-shops. It's no end of a piece of luck."

"Ah, I see! You are thinking of wrecking the place, eh?"

"Possibly, later on. But what I mean is that for our plans we need explosives, and plenty of them. Well, here they are, ready to hand, and all we have to do for a start is to get what we want away unseen."

"Aye; accumulate a store of our own ready for the day we want them?"

"Yes; the best place to attack we can settle later. In fact we may have to seize our opportunities as they come along."

"The best places to choose are these filling-shops, old man. Heaps of explosives about, and, although they watch everyone pretty closely, we ought to get a chance before long. If this place were blown sky-high it would damage a lot of the other shops, and probably get Schenk the sack. He seems to have got over that other affair all right."

"Yes, but I can't bring myself to blow up this great place with all the workmen in it, Germans or renegade Belgians though they are. I want to cripple the works, not kill the work-people."

"Don't see much in your scruples, Max. If we don't kill them they are left to go on sending shells out to kill our men."

"True, old man, but all the same I should like, if I can, to do the business without causing any loss of life among the workmen. There is the power-house now. If we could wreck that we should bring the whole of the works to an absolute standstill."

"Phew! Yes. Well, and why shouldn't we?"

"I've been thinking, and I believe we ought to be able to do it. Of course you know there is a soldier always posted at each entrance?"

"We must dispose of him—that's all."

"Or else we must get jobs as stokers. But enough of this—see that man coming along there eyeing the benches?"

"Yes."

"I believe he's a spy. He is really looking more at the men than at the benches. We must be very careful, or one of those fellows will get in our way."

"It will be the worse for him," muttered Dale under his breath, as he went on with his work with redoubled energy.

"And for us too," replied Max, lifting a heavy shell with an ease that many of the regular workmen, practised though they were, could not have excelled.

The man stopped when he reached the bench on which Max and Dale were working. "Where are you from?" he enquired sharply, in very indifferent Walloon.

"Yonder," replied Max, nodding towards the poorer quarter of the town. "Back of Rue Gheude."

"You're a Belgian, eh?"

"Yes," admitted Max with an appearance of reluctance.

"Why do you come here to work? Many of your countrymen refuse to work."

"One must live," replied Max sullenly. Then he went on in an angry tone: "We have been deserted

and left to starve. Why shouldn't we work? They should protect us, these French and English, if they want us to remain on their side. Are we to let our little ones perish for their sakes?"

"You are right, my friend," replied the man approvingly. "These English and Frenchmen care naught so long as their country is safe. Why should Belgians fight their battles for them? No, no, my friend."

Max nodded and turned back to his work. The man watched him for a minute or two and then continued on his way along the shop, scarcely glancing at Dale, who was to all appearances too engrossed in his work to pay much attention to what was going on about him.

"End of round No. 1," whispered Max to his friend. "We've got the better of Mr. Ferret so far, but I fear we shall have trouble in getting many live shells away from under the noses of him and his tribe."

"We shall do it," replied Dale confidently. "We may get the job of loading them up on the lorries presently and find an opportunity. If the worst comes to the worst we must carry medium-sized ones away one by one in our folded coats."

"H'm!" grunted Max. "We must find a safer way than that I fancy. I doubt if our ferret friends would let us do much of that sort of thing."

Dale shrugged his shoulders in contempt of the whole of the spy crew, and the conversation dropped.

For some two weeks Max and Dale worked in the filling-shops, observing the routine and making careful note of every circumstance that seemed to offer a chance of making off with supplies of finished shells. They soon found that they had reason to congratulate themselves upon having joined the night shift. Max had accepted the foreman's offer of the night shift for two reasons: first, because he thought that their disguises were less likely to be penetrated in artificial light, and, secondly, because they might reasonably expect to be quite safe during their journeys to and fro in the dark. But he found that an even greater advantage to their projects lay in the fact that the shop was only half manned at night, the work, and especially the supervision, were less efficient, and the yards, while well lighted, contained plenty of deep shadows suited to shelter those on dubious errands.

As soon as he could, Max got into touch with his friend Dubec and the workmen who had remained faithful to their country's cause. He had brought ample funds with him from the moneys recovered from the firm, and hoped to relieve any who might be in acute distress. He soon found plenty of outlet for his funds, for the men who refused to work in the shops were drawing terribly near the edge of starvation.

As Max had expected, the knowledge that their employers were standing by them, and were ready to aid them at every opportunity, greatly heartened the men, and a small but loyal band steadily refused to work, and fought a gallant battle with starvation in the cause of their country's freedom. Between Max and these men an unbreakable, unforgettable bond of union was gradually forged; and several times, to their unbounded delight, he was able to use them in furthering his projects. He found them particularly useful in obtaining information and in keeping watch over the movements of M. Schenk and his numerous spies. Patriotism, resentment at their sufferings, and hatred of Schenk, all combined to render them zealous auxiliaries, and lightened, in some measure at least, the heavy task fate seemed to have cast upon Max's own shoulders.

CHAPTER XI

The Attack on the Power-house

Some three weeks after Max and Dale had so unobtrusively re-entered the Durend works, their plans were laid and their preparations complete. Eight large shells had been carried off one by one and secreted in a hole in the bank of the Meuse, at a spot where it was well shaded by thick bushes. The power-house had been carefully reconnoitred, and the times and habits of the men and of the sentries carefully noted. The bulk of the great engines which provided the power required to run the various workshops were underground, and all the approaches to the building were commanded by two sentries stationed at opposite corners.

The success of their enterprise was dependent upon one of these sentries being put out of action for some minutes. This was no easy matter, but by dint of much discussion and careful observation they reached the conclusion that it could be done; and, better still, done so that no alarm need be given.

A Sunday night was fixed for the attempt, because Max and Dale had never worked on Sundays, and their absence would not therefore be likely to arouse any subsequent suspicion that they had had anything to do with the matter. Moreover, all departments of the works were run on reduced staffs, and the staff of the power-house was reduced proportionately. The loss of life which both Max and Dale feared might ensue from the realization of their plans was thus brought to a minimum.

Shortly after midnight, Max, Dale, and Dubec made their way silently to the little cache of shells in the river bank, and began transporting them to a point as near the power-house as they could expect to get without attracting notice. There was a bright moon, but there were also clouds, and they patiently bided their time, and moved only when the moon was obscured. It was one o'clock before the whole of the shells had been transported within easy reach of the power-house.

The sentries were changed at two o'clock, and Max and Dale waited only until this had been completed. Then they drew near, and took a long look at the sentry upon the least-exposed corner of the building. He was a young fellow, and while not looking particularly alert, yet seemed fully alive to his duties and determined to carry them out. As has already been explained, he was posted at a corner of the building, and could command a view of two sides. One of these sides was flooded with the light of the moon, but the other was in shadow, except at intervals where it was cut by the light from the windows of the power-house, which were here on a level with the ground.

After a whispered word or two, Dale left Max and worked his way round until he was near the side of the building which was in shadow. Watching his chance, he slipped into the shadow at a moment when the sentry was gazing the other way. Max now retreated some distance, and then began boldly advancing towards the building, his feet crunching heavily into the gravel and giving the sentry every warning of his approach. The sentry watched him with lazy indifference, but, as he drew near, lifted rifle and bayonet and challenged.

"Who comes there?"

"A workman with message to the engineer," responded Max in a casual voice, slackening his pace and coming to a stop a few paces away.

"Pass," replied the sentry indifferently, letting the butt of his rifle drop again to the ground. Max slouched on again, directing his steps so that he would pass just in front of the young soldier.

The sentry idly watched the supposed workman, who slouched along gazing at the ground in front of him in the most stolid fashion. Just as he was on the point of passing the sentry, however, he shot out a hand, seized the man's rifle, and tore it from his grasp.

Simultaneously a hand appeared from behind, and a cloth was clapped over the soldier's nose and mouth and held firmly in position, while another hand and arm grasped him round the middle.



A CLOTH WAS CLAPPED OVER THE SOLDIER'S NOSE AND MOUTH

Noiselessly grounding the captured rifle, Max in his turn sprang upon the sentry and wound both his arms about him, crushing his arms to his side and preparing to subdue his wildest struggles. Almost immediately, however, the man's muscles relaxed, as the chloroform, with which the cloth had been sprinkled, took effect, and Max and Dale lowered him to the ground.

"Now, Dale, off with his tunic and helmet and put them on," cried Max rapidly. "Then take his rifle and stand on guard. All is well, and I believe we shall win through without a hitch."

Dale did as he was bidden. The soldier's tunic and helmet were removed, and his body was dragged into the shadow close to the wall of the building. Then Max walked quickly back to the spot where the shells had been deposited. Here Dubec crouched in readiness.

"Bring them along," whispered Max. "The sentry is disposed of, and we ought to meet with no interruption."

"'Twas splendidly done," replied Dubec with enthusiasm. "The man seemed to be overcome as though by magic, and I heard scarce a sound."

In three trips the shells were transported to the power-house and laid along the wall. Then Max went to one of the windows and looked in.

The power-house was largely underground, and the windows, which ran around all sides on a level with the ground at intervals of about six feet, were high above the great boilers. In fact, as Max gazed down he had a bird's-eye view of the interior, and could see workmen flitting to and fro, stoking the great furnaces in blissful ignorance of the fact that a bolt which might destroy them with their engines was on the point of being shot.

Drawing back his head, Max drew a bomb of his own manufacture from his pocket and lit the fuse. Then he leaned through the window, and, shading his mouth with his hands so that his words might carry downwards and be heard above the roar of the engines, cried in quick, urgent, warning tones:

"Fly for your lives—the engine-house is being blown up! Fly! fly! fly!"

The workmen looked up, startled, and into their midst Max flung his bomb. The men scattered to right and left, and a second or two later it burst with a splutter, sending out a great puff of white, pungent smoke. It was quite harmless, but the men did not know that, and a great cry of alarm went up and a terrific stampede began towards the nearest exit.

"Now, Dubec," cried Max energetically, "light the fuses and fling them in. It matters little where they fall so long as we cover a wide area."

In a few seconds the shells had been flung down into the power-house, right in among the boilers and machinery. Then the two men took to their heels and fled, followed by Dale, who had already divested himself of his borrowed plumes and donned his own.

The success of their enterprise was complete. Hardly had they got clear of the building before a series of heavy explosions occurred in the interior of the power-house, followed by the upward burst of great clouds of smoke and steam. Instantly all the lights in the whole of the Durend workshops and the great lights in the yard went out, and the roar of machinery slackened and gradually ceased. The entire works were at a standstill, and the whirr of lathes and clink of hammers were succeeded by shouts of alarm from the thousands of workmen as they poured excitedly out into the open air.

The alarm and excitement were not decreased when, almost immediately, there was a great outburst of flame in one of the large workshops devoted to the building of the bodies of railway carriages and trucks, and the chassis of motorcars. With extraordinary rapidity the flames leapt up from floor to floor, until the great yards in the vicinity, a moment before plunged in blackness by the destruction of the electric-light plant, were again as light as day.

"See that, Max?" whispered Dale in an awestruck voice as the flames leaped up. "Surely our raid on the power-house cannot have done that?"

"I expect that something was upset in the mad rush for the doors. The place is full of inflammables, and they will never get the fire out—you see."

The scene was of absorbing interest, and Max and Dale and the faithful Dubec mingled with the crowds of excited workmen and thoroughly enjoyed themselves. Alarm-bells were sounding and bugle-calls ringing in all directions, and in a few minutes two or three engines dashed into the yard and began a hopeless fight against the raging fire. Max and his friends continued to gaze on at the exciting scene until the former was recalled to himself by the heavy tramp of what seemed to be detachments of soldiers outside the walls of the yard.

"Listen, Dale, I can hear a lot of troops marching outside. I don't think their presence bodes any good, and I think we had better be off. The Germans will be most awfully savage, and will be firing on the mob, or something of the sort."

"Shouldn't wonder, old man. Well, we've done enough for one night, so let us join this crowd and leave by the main entrance."

A number of workmen, who were probably of the same mind as Max and did not like the look of things, were moving towards the gates, and to these our three friends joined themselves. On reaching the gates, however, the whole party came to a standstill. The gates were closed, and a dozen soldiers with fixed bayonets stood on guard in front of them.

"We made a mistake, Dale, in not getting away at once," whispered Max. "We shall have trouble

now, you may be sure."

As he spoke, the gates were opened and a motorcar drove through. It contained the manager, M. Schenk, and two officers, and came to a stand on the outskirts of the crowd collected at the gates. The manager immediately stood up in the car and addressed the crowd in such stern and peremptory tones that it would have seemed fitter, Max thought, had the words been uttered by one of the officers at his side.

"Listen, men. A dastardly outrage has just been committed in these works, and I am determined to bring the guilty ones to justice. I shall allow no one to leave until he has been thoroughly examined, however long it may take. Stand aside, therefore, and await your call quietly, or I shall have recourse to sterner measures."

The car moved on, and the workmen addressed stopped obediently where they were and began discussing the affair in low, excited tones.

"This sort of thing won't suit us, Dale," whispered Max, as he edged out of the crowd and began moving away from the gates. "Examinations are not a strong point with us at present."

"No, we require to study a little more—in strict seclusion," replied Dale in the same spirit, as they got away from the crowd into the blackness between a long workshop at a distance from the burning building and the outer walls.

"Where now, Master," asked Dubec, looking at Max enquiringly as the three came to an involuntary halt.

"Over the walls and away, I think. We have done enough for one night, and I fancy Schenk will think so too—eh, Dale?"

"Aye, and say so, if ever he gets the chance," replied the latter.

The party moved to the walls at the darkest point they could find and prepared to clamber over. The wall was here nearly ten feet high, and it was necessary for Dubec to plant himself against it and allow Max, assisted by Dale, to climb on his back. He could then help Dale up also before clambering on to the top. The rest would be easy enough. But a rude awakening was in store for them, for Max had no sooner put his head above the wall than he was greeted by a rifle-shot from the road below, and a bullet whizzed close overhead.

"Down, Max, down!" cried Dale, clutching at his friend in sudden consternation.

"I'm all right, old man," replied Max, who, needless to say, had lost no time in bobbing down below the level of the wall. "But we can't get over here," he added as he lowered himself gently to the ground. Dale followed suit, and the three men stood at the foot of the wall and anxiously debated their next move.

"It is pretty clear," Max summed up, "that the Germans have put a cordon of soldiers all about the works, and clearer still"—a little ruefully this—"that their orders are to shoot first and make enquiries afterwards."

"We must chance it and try to get over somewhere," responded Dale.

"No—too risky. The moment we top the wall we show up plainly against the light of the fire behind us. We should be noticed at once. We must try another plan."

"What's that?"

"The river."

"Ah—swim across?"

"Yes—or, better still, float down until we get beyond the roads about the works."

"But what about Dubec? Can he swim?"

"I don't suppose so. Can you, Monsieur Dubec?"

The answer was a decided negative, and Max went on: "But it doesn't matter. Dubec doesn't need to leave in the unorthodox way that Schenk has forced upon us. He is a *bona fide* workman, and has been working in the shops for the last three days. He is safe enough."

It was so arranged, and soon the party had gained the shelter of the bushes at the spot where their stock of shells had been hidden. Max and Dale then waded waist-deep into the Meuse, and, with a whispered farewell to M. Dubec, allowed themselves to float down with the stream. For some yards out the edge of the river was in deep shadow from the bank, and beyond a gentle movement of the hands to keep them within its shelter, the two lads let themselves drift at will. The water was warm and they felt no discomfort, and in half an hour they were beyond what they considered the danger zone. Clambering out of the river, they wrung as much of the water as possible out of their clothes and made rapid tracks for their lodging.

As was to be expected, the destruction of the power-house and the burning of one of the largest workshops at the Durend works created a great sensation among both the Germans and the Liégeois. The former looked upon it, rightly enough, as a determined attempt to interfere with their exploitation of the manufacturing resources of the city for the benefit of the invading

armies; the latter, as a patriotic and successful demonstration of the hatred of the Belgians for their temporary masters and of their determination to hinder them by every means in their power. It gave the spirit of the people a fillip, and, despite the redoubled severity of the Germans, the Liégeois went about their businesses with a prouder air, as if conscious that, though temporarily overcome, they were very far from being beaten.

On attending for work on the following evening, at the usual hour, Max and Dale were curtly informed that they would not be required for another week at least. They had expected this, of course, and were only disappointed that the holiday was likely to be so short. They had hoped that the works would be out of action for at least three weeks. But the manager had set to work with his usual energy. Engines were being requisitioned from other factories in the town, not engaged in the manufacture of war supplies, and repairs to those less seriously damaged were going on with shifts of fresh workmen night and day.

It was nearly a fortnight, however, before the works were again in full swing, or would have been in full swing had not other events occurred to hinder the complete resumption of business. That fortnight Max considered as a specially favourable opportunity for paying further attention to M. Schenk and his many activities. It meant that the various workshops were empty, save for two or three watchmen, and that groups of workmen were necessarily hanging about the premises, idly watching the proceedings and waiting for the time when they could recommence work. The first meant opportunities that would not occur when the workshops were in full swing, and the second that the prowling of Max and his friends would be the less likely to attract notice.

One of the first things that caught the attention of Max and Dale was the rapid accumulation of great stocks of coal outside the yard, owing to the enforced idleness of the power-house. The Durend mines were, of course, unaffected by the stoppage of the workshops, and coal was sent up to the surface with the same regularity as before. In fact, the rate of production was accelerated, as numbers of the workmen thrown out of employment by the closing of the workshops applied for work at the collieries. Thus the stores of coal grew and grew, from stacks of the moderate dimensions (for the Durend Company) of 2000 or 3000 tons, to great piles of 10,000 and finally 24,000 tons. Then came a rumour that, as soon as trucks were available, the accumulation was to be transported into Germany and, worse still, to Krupp's.

This was enough to set Max and Dale discussing the matter with anxious care. To the former it was as intolerable that the Durend mines should produce coal for Krupp's as it was that the Durend workshops should cast shells for the German guns. And yet it was no easy matter to devise means of dealing with a great mass of coal. Obviously, it could not be carried off, and to blow it up was hardly practicable. However, after much discussion, it was decided that an attempt should be made to burn it. It certainly did not seem a very hopeful scheme, seeing the number of fire-engines that were close at hand in the city and the unlimited supply of water in the River Meuse. But to Max and Dale anything seemed better than to do nothing in such a matter, and they determined to make the attempt.

For materials all they needed was a good supply of firewood, a gallon or two of benzine, and some fuses.

The coal stacks were situated on a piece of waste land outside, but adjoining, the walled-in enclosure of the Durend works. They were accessible on all sides, but a watchman was always on guard to see that none of the coal was stolen. This man patrolled round and round the stacks, keeping a look-out for suspicious characters, especially, of course, any bearing sacks or baskets which might be used to contain coal.

It was in the middle of the night that Max and Dale, accompanied by the faithful Dubec, appeared on the scene. The last was carrying a bulky sack filled with firewood, Max bore a two-gallon tin of benzine, and Dale a dummy sack which appeared to be full, but which, as a matter of fact, contained only a light framework of wood designed to fill it out.

Dale's part of the performance began first. Waiting until the watchman had passed, he flitted across the road to the coal stack. Then he gave the stack a kick which sent a number of loose pieces of coal rattling to the ground. The watchman stopped instantly, and without more ado Dale turned and bolted down the road in full view.

As was expected, the watchman immediately gave chase, and in a couple of minutes both men had disappeared from the scene.

Max and Dubec now emerged, and lost no time in getting to work. They crossed the road to the end of the stack where, in the morning, work would be resumed. There they made four caches of wood close against the stack, covered them over with loose coal, and deluged the pile with benzine. From these caches fuses were laid upward to the top of the stack, and the whole covered over with more coal.

Long before the watchman had crawled back, grumbling and exhausted from his long chase after a thief who carried a great bag of coal with an ease that seemed extraordinary, the two other conspirators had disappeared from the scene. An hour later they rejoined Dale and spent half an hour in laughing over his recital of the way in which he had led the man farther and farther afield by pretending to be always on the point of dropping from fatigue.

The next day Dubec spent in watching the stacking of further supplies of coal. The caches of firewood, he reported, had not been noticed, and by the end of the day another 1200 tons of coal

had been dumped against the stack, completely enclosing them. For one day more Max held his hand, while he worked at another scheme that was slowly maturing. Then, immediately after nightfall, he crept to the stack, and, watching his opportunity, clambered carefully to the top and lit the three fuses.

The smell presently told him that the fires had caught, and he crept away, satisfied that on the morrow there would be something of a hubbub, even if no very considerable damage resulted.

It was with the idea of watching developments that Max and Dale applied for work at the depots next day. They hoped to witness amusing and exhilarating scenes, and to get as near to the spot as possible they gladly offered to shovel coal. Their offer was accepted and they were soon at work transporting coal and shovelling it on to the stacks.

They soon experienced a sense of disappointment. Instead of finding the stacks enveloped in smoke, and all work suspended for the day, as they expected, they discovered that work was going on as usual and nothing seemed amiss.

"Seems to have been a frost, Max," grumbled Dale discontentedly. "All our trouble and brain-fag gone for nothing."

"I thought so at first, Dale, but I'm not so sure now. See that light haze yonder? It may be the fires have caught all right but are burning out for lack of draught. Let's hope they've done a bit of damage anyhow!"

"H'm!" grunted Dale in a tone of discouragement.

"Besides," Max went on, "this is only a small affair. The next real attack will come in a day or two, and I hope there will be no failure there."

"No," replied Dale, brightening up, "if that comes off we shall have done something worth doing. Schenk will be ready to tear his hair, and we shall have to look out for ourselves."

"Well, so we will. We shall deserve a rest, and we will retire into obscurity for a season and recuperate. Another ramble in the Ardennes would suit us well."

"Especially with a little shooting thrown in—Uhlans, I mean," replied Dale facetiously.

"There will be plenty of scouting, if not shooting, if all the tales we hear of those gentlemen be true."

"Aye—but see, Max, how that smoky haze is getting thicker! The pile must be alight all right after all."

The light fleecy smoke which hovered over the great stack certainly seemed denser than it was, and a slight smell of burning was in the air. The other workmen had also noticed it, and hazarded conjectures as to whence it came, but none of them got very near the mark. All day the smoke increased, until, by the time the men ceased work, it lay like a thick fog all about the neighbourhood.

Max and Dale returned to their lodging in high glee, and their joy was not diminished when they noticed that the wind was beginning to freshen up.

"This ought to finish the business, Dale," remarked Max. "With a high wind all night, if the fire doesn't get into its stride it never will."

Soon after daybreak the shrill notes of a bugle in several quarters of the town and the ringing of fire-bells told our heroes that something unusual was afoot. They guessed, or rather hoped, that it might be on their account, and dressed and sallied out as quickly as they could. Sure enough, an enormous pall of smoke, that a volcano in full eruption need not have disowned, lay in the air in the direction of the Durend coal-yards. Fire engines were hurrying to the scene from all parts of the town, and the hoped-for hubbub seemed to have arrived.

"This is worth a little trouble," remarked Dale with intense relish as they drew near the burning stack and saw hundreds of soldiers and firemen hovering actively about the spot.

"Yes, but we may as well take a little more trouble and do the thing in style," responded Max coolly. "Let us follow these hoses to the river bank and see whether there is anything doing."

They did so, and, finding that the hoses entered the water at a point where a patch or two of short scrubby bushes gave cover against chance watchers, they passed on and struck the bank again a hundred yards farther on. Then they disappeared from view, and, crawling along under cover of the bushes, they reached the hoses, and with a dozen rapid slashes of their clasp-knives effectually put them out of action.

An extraordinary hubbub ensued. Soldiers and firemen rushed about in all directions, chasing away every unfortunate civilian who had had the temerity to approach the scene of the fire. In the confusion Max and Dale had no difficulty in escaping, and retired to the hills, there to gloat over the further efforts made to fight the fire, which seemed only to grow fiercer as hundreds of gallons of water were pumped upon it. It was two days before the fire was completely subdued, and the net result from a material point of view was that at least 10,000 tons of coal had been destroyed and the project of transporting coal to Krupp's effectually quashed. From the point of view of *moral*, the Germans were the laughing-stock of the town; they were deeply enraged and

the townsmen proportionately delighted.

CHAPTER XII

The Attack on the Munition-shops And Its Sequel

To Max Durend the successful raid on the coal-yards was only the prelude to the main performance. His mind was bent wholly towards one great object, and that was to prevent, by every means in his power, the exploitation of his father's great works by the enemies of his country. The coal-yard incident, as he termed it, was satisfactory so far as it went, but gave his mind no real relief such as had resulted from the recovery of part of the firm's monetary resources and the destruction of the power-house. The next affair, which, as has been hinted, was already well in hand, was more important and was an attempt to damage, if not destroy, some of the great machines installed for the production of rifles and machine-guns.

The largest workshop in the yard was devoted to this and a few other of the more delicate kinds of work, and it seemed to Max that the greatest amount of injury might be inflicted upon the Germans by an attempt on this shop. The works were still at a standstill, though it was fairly evident that they would not be so for much longer. The attempt ought, therefore, to be made within the few following days.

The plan was simplicity itself. It merely provided for Max and Dale to enter the workshop during the night and to work as much mischief among the machines as they could, consistently with the need for silence and the avoidance or silencing of the watchmen. For some days they had kept the place under close observation, and noted the hours and habits of the watchmen and the sentinels at either end of the building until they knew them as well as the men themselves.

Dubec they would not bring with them. He was eager to come, but the work required alertness and lightness of hand and foot rather than strength, and for this he would have been of no use. Besides, the two lads, keen as they were on their self-imposed tasks, were not unmindful of the fact that he had a wife and children to mourn him should the venture come to grief.

All, however, seemed to go well. Max and Dale succeeded in effecting an entrance into the ground floor of the workshop after they had seen the watchman, by the glint of his lamp, make his midnight round. The two soldiers—one at each end of the building—saw nothing and heard nothing, of that they were assured. Without delay, therefore, for in a little over an hour the watchman would be back from his rounds upon the upper floors, they proceeded to put out of action the more valuable and more complicated machines in the building. It was necessary, of course, that they should be almost silent; so their mode of procedure was to muffle up in an old blanket the most delicate and fragile parts of the machines before smashing them with a heavy hammer well swathed in flannel wrappings.

The machines dealt with first were those farthest from the route that would be taken by the watchman on his next round. Consequently, when he came, he passed along swinging his lantern in utter ignorance that anything was amiss, or that two men lay in ambush close at hand, ready to spring upon him should he suspect anything wrong and pause to investigate. As soon as he had passed out of ear-shot the two recommenced their work with redoubled energy, and some two and a half hours were thus consumed in work that utterly spoiled a large proportion of the valuable machines which filled the great workshop.

Skilful, vigilant, and almost silent as they had been, they were yet after all caught napping. How or by whom they never knew, until, some time after, Dubec told them of a tale that was going the round among the workmen to the effect that one of Schenk's hired ferrets had all the time been hidden on the upper floor. Strange to say, he had been there not so much to deal with disaffected workmen—the sentinels were expected to do that—as to spy upon the watchmen themselves. The story seemed to fit in well with what Max knew of Schenk's character, and he accepted it as in all probability true. At any rate, neither Max nor Dale dreamed that aught was amiss until the latter heard the sound of marching outside, and that upon an unusual scale. He slid quickly to the nearest window and peeped out.

"We're done, Max!" he cried soberly. "Scores of soldiers, and they look to be forming a cordon right round the building."

"Are you sure?" Max cried incredulously, hurrying to a window on the opposite side of the block. One glance was enough to show that a strong cordon of soldiers was being drawn—nay, to all appearances was already drawn—all round the workshop. The soldiers faced inwards, and stood with bayonets fixed, as though prepared for an attempt at escape from some body of men caught within their armed circle.

"We've been seen, Jack, old man!" cried Max, coming back to the side of his friend. "It's all up, I fear. They've made up their minds they've got us, and do not intend to let us slip. I'm so sorry, old man, you should have been mixed up in this. It's really not your quarrel, but mine."

There was a new note in Max's voice, one his friend had never heard before, and it was with something suspiciously like a break in his own that Dale replied as he seized and wrung his hand:

"Don't say another word, Max. It's my affair too, and I won't have you blame yourself on my account. We've simply fought for our country, and have now got to die for it—that's all."

For a moment or two the friends stood silent, grasping one another's hands. That moment they were indeed friends, and each would cheerfully have given up his own life to save the other. Then the ruling thought which still swayed Max's mind asserted itself once more.

"It seems so, Dale. Well, then, let us die to some good purpose. Here we have under our hands the most valuable of the workshops filched from us. It is only partly out of action. Let us complete the good work, and we shall at least have deserved well of our country."

"Aye; but how so?"

"Let us burn it down."

"With us in it?"

"Aye, if need be. But if we will we can always sally out and exchange that fate for the bayonet's point."

Dale gazed at his friend in undisguised admiration. "You are a terror, Max," he said slowly. "These old works are your very life-blood, and I believe you would go through fire and water to keep the Germans out of 'em."

"So I would," replied Max with conviction, as he coolly reached down a great can of lubricating-oil and poured it over the floor and upon a pile of wooden cases close by. "Well, if you are game—and I know you are—let us scatter all the oil and stuff we can find about the place and set fire to it. They'll never get it out."

"Right you are, Stroke. It's the final, and we must make a win of it. What would Hawkesley's think if they could see us—or Benson's?"

"Dale," cried Max, with sudden and deeper earnestness, "d'ye know, I believe this is what we were really training for during all those gruelling races. It was not for nothing we slogged away there day after day, learning to conquer disappointment and defeat. No; it was to know how to serve our country here."

"I believe you—and we will."

"Hark! I think I can hear soldiers on the floor below. Look out! I am going to set a light to this pile of cases. Get ready to run. I fancy it will spread like wildfire."

A match was applied, and flames leapt up and spread with a rapidity that would have terrified anyone less absorbed or less determined than our two heroes. The flames flew along the floor and benches, and Max and Dale retreated down the room, overturning all the cans of oil and grease they could find, and making it an easy matter for the fire to catch and hold. The smoke, driven along in front of the flames, quickly became so intolerable that they had to fly for relief to the staircase at the farther end of the building.

Outside the workshop the burst of flame was the signal for a loud yell of execration, mingled with cries of warning to the soldiers who had entered the building in search of the hostile workmen reported there. The soldiers trooped noisily out and joined the cordon still drawn about the burning building. Messengers were dispatched to the fire-stations, and in a few minutes a couple of engines arrived and set to work to fight the flames. But though they were expeditious in arriving, the firemen were not equally expeditious in getting their hoses effectually trained upon the building. For one thing, the river had been largely relied upon to furnish a water-supply, and no hydrants were close at hand. Consequently the hoses had to be carried a great distance, and as the yards were still in darkness, save for the lurid light shed by the burning building, the hoses were badly exposed to the attentions of any hostile workman who happened to be near the scene.

Dubec "happened" to be there, with two or three other men animated by out-and-out hostility to the Germans, and waged fierce war upon the hoses at every point at which they lay in shadow. By the time the officer commanding the troops had awakened to the situation, the hoses had been completely ruined, and the fighting of the flames delayed until fresh ones could be brought to the spot.

In the meantime Max and Dale had ceased their efforts to extend the fire, and had retreated to one of the stone staircases situated at each end of the building. There was, in fact, little more to be done, for the fire had got firm hold, and it seemed certain that the whole building was doomed. The end by the staircase was almost free from smoke, and Max and Dale lingered there while awaiting the moment when they should be compelled to choose between death by burning or by the bayonets of the German soldiers. They fell somewhat quiet during those moments, and when they talked it was of the good old glorious times they had spent together. Presently Max's ear caught the sound of someone ascending the stairs.

"Someone—a fireman, I suppose—is coming up the stairs, Dale."

"What shall we do with him? Give him his quietus? I still have my hammer."

"No—get in the corner here and watch what he's after. It won't help us to hurt him."

The man moved on up the stairs until he passed by the spot where Max and Dale were in ambush.

He was a fireman, and his object seemed to be to find out at close quarters the extent and power of the fire. As the man passed him, Max had a sudden idea.

"We must attack him after all, Dale," he whispered. "Come—help me so that no alarm is raised. I will tell you why in a moment."

Sheltered by the fitful light and occasional gusts of rolling smoke, it was an easy matter to creep upon the fireman unawares and to bring him to the ground stunned and helpless. That accomplished, Max immediately proceeded to remove the man's tunic and helmet. Dale then understood—it was to be the ruse of the sham sentry outside the power-house over again.

"Now put them on, Dale," cried Max rapidly. "You can then go boldly down and out to the cordon of soldiers. They will let you through without question."

"Not I," replied Dale sturdily. "I'm not going to leave you like that. What will become of you, I should like to know?"

"I shall be all right. When the next fireman comes along I shall do the same. Now, go ahead, and don't delay."

"No," replied Dale decidedly. "I'll not do it, Max. We will wait for the next fireman together if *you* will not don the suit."

"Dale—you will do as you are told!" cried Max, roused to sudden anger by his friend's unexpected obstinacy. "I am Stroke of this crew—not you."

"I know you are, but you are asking too much when you want me to leave the boat. Besides, I should never get through. I can't muster up nearly enough German. You put them on, old man—it's no use staying here when you might escape."

"You shall suffer for this, Dale, upon my word you shall," cried Max angrily, as he savagely thrust himself into the tunic, buckled on the belt and axe, and donned the great helmet. "But if you think I am going without you you are badly mistaken. Come downstairs, near the entrance, and I will tell you what I propose."

The two lads descended the stairs, bearing the unconscious fireman between them—for they could not bring themselves to leave him there to burn—until they reached the entrance to the building. There they deposited him just inside the door, in such a position that the first man entering would be sure to stumble over him.

Outside several engines were now in full swing pumping water into the first floor, which was burning furiously from end to end. The fire had spread to the upper floors, and the ground floor had begun to catch in several places. The whole workshop, indeed, seemed doomed to complete destruction, for the fire had obtained such firm hold that the engines seemed to make little impression upon it. From the shouts of the Germans it was clear that they were greatly enraged, and it was perfectly certain that the shrift of the authors of the fire, if they were caught, would be an exceedingly short one.

"Halt here for a moment, Dale, while I tell you what I propose. It is a desperate venture, but if you are still going to be obstinate it is all I can think of, and we might just as well try it as throw our lives away."

"I'm absolutely obdurate, Max. I'm not going to be saved at your expense, so go ahead with your venture."

"Well—it's this. I am going to sally out, wearing the fireman's uniform and carrying you in my arms. You are to feign unconsciousness. The idea is that you have been badly hurt, and I am carrying you out of reach of the fire. I have some hope that in my fireman's garb and with my blackened face they will let me pass."

"All right—it sounds good enough, Max. At any rate, we shall keep together—whether we sink or swim."

"Come along, then," replied Max briskly, stooping down and lifting Dale in his arms. "Let your head fall back and look as lifeless as you can. It's now or never—absolutely."

The cordon of soldiers with fixed bayonets, outside, suddenly saw the fireman—apparently the man who had entered the building a few minutes before—reappear, bearing in his arms the limp figure of a man rescued from the flames. The fireman strode straight out towards them, and as he reached them the men opened to right and left and let him pass through. A non-commissioned officer followed him.

"What have you there, fireman?" he asked, as he endeavoured to catch a glimpse of the blackened face that hung so limply down. "Is the man dead?"

"No—he still lives," replied Max, moving on without checking his pace. Other people were coming up, and his one thought was to get beyond the circle of light cast by the great fire before taking action.

"Set the man down here while I give him a drain from my flask. You must not take him away until my officer has seen him."

"One moment—here is a bank against which I can lean him," replied Max, still moving steadily away. He could see the non-commissioned officer was getting impatient, if not suspicious, and whispered to Dale: "I am going to set you down. Directly your feet touch ground, bolt for the river. I will follow and be there as soon as you; but don't wait for me. *Now!*"

As he spoke, Max slowly lowered Dale to the ground. The soldier was close by, but none else was within some yards. They were beyond the circle of bright light cast by the fire, and a few yards would take them into darkness, which was pitchy to anyone coming from the vicinity of the fire. The chance of escape was good, and Max, the time for resolute action at hand, felt his heart bound with fresh hope and energy.

The moment Dale's feet were on the ground Max gave him a push in the direction of the river and off he flew. Almost simultaneously Max seized his helmet and dashed it in the face of the soldier, who had raised a shout of alarm and was on the point of chasing Dale. The sudden blow disconcerted the man, and he hung in the wind for a moment. The supposed injured man might be an enemy, but it was certain this aggressive fireman was one, and, as Max darted off, the soldier turned, lifted his rifle, and aimed a shot at him.

Max had little fear of the man's rifle. It was too dark, and he was moving too rapidly and erratically, for anyone to take good aim. The bullet passed wide of the mark, and the soldier, realizing his mistake in not pursuing at once, instead of wasting precious moments in firing, put his rifle at the trail and rushed madly after, shouting to his comrades and all who might be within hearing that a spy was on the point of escaping.

Max knew the ground and the soldier did not, so Max had no difficulty in increasing his lead. He could see Dale a dozen yards ahead, and by the time he reached the bank had caught him up.

"In at once, and dive down-stream, Dale!" he cried, and without a moment's pause they both tumbled in, anyhow, and struck out with all their strength down-stream.

CHAPTER XIII

The German Counter-stroke

The fury of the German military governor and his staff at the destruction of the largest workshop in the Durend concern could hardly have been greater had the town under their charge successfully revolted. For the fifth time at least the Durend works—which the Germans had looked upon as peculiarly their own—had been the scene of successful blows against their authority. These exploits were too extensive and too public to be hidden, and the Walloon workmen of Liège—never a docile race—had been progressively encouraged to commit similar acts elsewhere, or to resist passively the pressure of their German taskmasters.

In the view of the German governor it was imperative that a blow, and a stunning one, should be struck at this tendency among the Liège workmen. Had the authors of this latest outrage been captured, an example would have been easy. Unfortunately, they had again escaped, and in a manner so impudent and daring that the exasperation of the Germans was greatly intensified. Rewards had been offered before and had proved fruitless. On this occasion the governor resolved to sweep aside what he termed trifles, and to use firmly and pitilessly a weapon of terror already in his hands.

The Durend yards had been entirely closed the moment intelligence had reached M. Schenk that suspicious persons had broken into one of the idle workshops. After the fire all workmen found within the yard had been closely examined, and those definitely known to have Belgian sympathies placed under arrest. These men numbered thirty-nine, and it was by using them as hostages that the German governor intended to strike terror into the hearts of the Walloons. They were hurried before a military court, briefly examined, and found guilty of conspiring against the German military occupation. Sentence of death followed as a matter of course.

Max and Dale had reached their lodging without any particular difficulty, after again taking refuge in the waters of the Meuse. They were tired out with their all-night exploit, and, removing their wet garments, tumbled heavily into bed. It was thus late in the afternoon before they heard from the landlord of their house the news that the German governor intended to execute all the Belgian workmen caught within the precincts of the Durend yards. Even then they could hardly bring themselves to believe it.

"It's too rascally even for the Germans, Max," declared Dale at last. "It's probably only a threat to force one of them to give away his fellows."

"Maybe, Dale, but I know enough of the Germans to believe that if they don't succeed they will not hesitate to carry out the sentence."

"The cold-blooded murderers!" cried Dale hotly.

"Yes," replied Max in a strained voice, as he began to pace slowly up and down the length of their room. "Yes, they are; but shall not we have really had a hand in their deaths?"

"Not one jot," cried Dale emphatically. "No particle of blame can be laid at our door if they are foully done to death."

"Had we not so harassed the Germans, these men would not be under sentence of death," Max went on, half to himself. "It seems hard that they must die for our success."

"Bah! They die for Belgium and to proclaim to the world that the Germans must be crushed," cried Dale contemptuously. "No, Max, we have nothing to reproach ourselves with in this business."

"No, but still——" Then, rousing himself with an effort, Max went on: "But we need not worry ourselves yet. Will you go into the streets and find out anything else you can? I am going to find Dubec, and we will then see if aught can be done."

The two parted, and in a few minutes Max was at the door of Dubec's house. Here a rude shock awaited him, for Madame Dubec, white-faced but tearless, told him, with a quietude and directness that somehow seemed to make the news more terrible still, that her husband was one of those lying under sentence of death.

The shock was a great one, although, in his heart, Max had half expected it. He knew Dubec had been in the yard, and what more likely than that he had been detained? Too upset to do more than mumble a few words of sorrow, Max turned on his heel and hurried from the house.

Taking the road to the open hills, Max strode on and on, his mind filled with serious and oftentimes conflicting thoughts. He had no doubts as to the fate of the thirty-nine men if the Germans were unable to lay their hands upon the real authors of the destruction of the workshop. They would surely die, and with them Dubec, towards whom Max felt specially drawn by his constant loyal aid and the memory of the day when he had answered his mute appeal for succour.

And to Max the responsibility seemed his. These men had no part nor lot in it. Why should they die? It did not help matters much to blame the Germans—the worst might always be expected of them—for that would not give back to Madame Dubec the husband for whom it seemed to Max she had unconsciously appealed.

Supposing he gave himself up in order that they might go free? Ah, what a triumph for Schenk! How he would rejoice! True, he did not know that Max was at the bottom of all the shrewd blows dealt him of late, but he probably had more than a suspicion of it. At any rate he was known to have traced much of the money and valuables, recovered from his room, to the bank at Maastricht which Madame Durend patronized. Knowing, then, the authorship of that most daring exploit, it would have been strange if he had not looked to the same quarter for an explanation of the similar blows dealt him so soon after.

Yes, it would be a great triumph for Schenk, and the end of that resolute opposition to the use of the Durend workshops for the benefit of the German army that had taken such a grip upon our hero's mind. That task he had made peculiarly his own. All the fixity of purpose he possessed, and it was not a little, was concentrated upon keeping his father's—his—works from aiding the projects of a brutal and unscrupulous enemy.

To give it all up would not only be a victory for Schenk but a bitter pill to himself—the uprooting of something that had taken deep root in the inmost recesses of his mind.

The struggle was a long one, but it came to an end at last, and Max returned to the town, scribbled a short note to Dale, which he left at their lodging, and then walked directly to the governor's house.

At the door the sentry's bayonet barred his entry, but the officer of the guard, on being informed that a man had applied to see the governor on urgent business, came out and spoke to him. A few words were sufficient, and Max was brought inside under a guard of two men while the officer sought the governor with the welcome news that the man who had destroyed the Durend workshops had given himself up. The governor directed that he should be searched to ensure that he was not in possession of firearms and then admitted to his presence.

The German governor of Liège was quite a typical Prussian officer, stiffly erect, with bullet-head covered with short bristling grey hair, well-twisted moustache, and fierce aggressive manner. He was the man who had called upon Schenk on the never-to-be-forgotten occasion when Max and Dale had been his uninvited guests underneath his office desk. To say the least of it, he was not a man who was afraid of being too severe.

"You are then this rascal who has burned the Durend machine-gun shop?" he cried in a rasping voice as soon as Max had been led before him.

"Yes," replied Max, "but I am no rascal. The shop is mine, and I have burned it."

"Yours, impudent?" cried the governor angrily, raising a cane which lay upon his desk as though about to slash his prisoner about the face. "Yours? And who are you?"

"I am Max Durend, the son of the owner of the workshops, and I would sooner see the place burned from end to end than of use to the Germans."

"Ah, that is good!" replied the governor in a voice of satisfaction, dropping his hand and turning towards the officer who had ushered Max into the room. "It will have a salutary effect if we

execute the son of Herr Durend. It will aid our cause tremendously."

"Yes, General."

"I have given myself up that the innocent men you have seized upon may be released," Max interposed. "They know nothing of it. I am solely responsible."

"Ja, so. I have now no quarrel with them," replied the governor indifferently. "They are pawns. Now I have the real miscreant I need them not."

"I am no miscreant. They are miscreants who would slaughter thirty-nine innocent men because the right one had slipped through their fingers."

The governor glared at Max with eyes that goggled with rage. He was clearly unaccustomed to such plain speaking. "I remember that Herr von Schenkendorf once told me that Monsieur Durend had married an Englishwoman. You are half a mad English dog, and your manners proclaim it."

"It is true," replied Max steadily.

"Ja, you and your countrymen are half barbarian. You know naught of Kultur."

"Thank God!" cried Max with an emphasis that caused the governor to spring to his feet, seize the cane anew, and slash the prisoner heavily across the cheek. Max flinched—he could not help it—but he moved neither hand nor foot.

This outburst seemed to calm the Prussian, for he dropped back into his chair and in a judicial manner, though with a very vindictive and unjudicial scowl upon his face, he passed judgment.

"The prisoner has pleaded guilty. You will take him to-morrow morning to Monsieur Durend's works, and at midday you will shoot him there."

"In public, sir?" enquired the officer.

"Yes, as an example to all his late workmen. A placard announcing the impending execution will be posted outside."

"Yes, sir."

Max was led away. Indignation at the brutality of the Prussian was strong within him, and he held his head erect, and answered look for look the hostile glances of those about him. The hot blood still coursed through his veins, and the sacrifice he had made did not loom over large in his imagination.

It was not until he had been conducted to a gloomy, ill-lit room in the basement of the building, and there left in solitude to think and think upon his impending fate, that things grew different, and his fortitude partially left him. The end seemed so merciless and hard, and, leaning heavily against the wall, he fell a prey to unhappy reflections. At times he went farther than this, and shed a few furtive tears at this end to all his hopes and secret boyish ambitions.

Shortly after Max had been led away to his cell, the thirty-nine workmen were released. No reason was vouchsafed for this sudden change of front, but the curt notice already affixed to the gates of the governor's palace soon supplied it. Max Durend had been taken, and found guilty of the deed for which they had been seized, and he was to pay the penalty.

M. Dubec was one of the men released, and at the news he hurried home. Naturally his wife was overjoyed at seeing him, but he was too preoccupied by doubt and concern at the fate of his master's son to stay with her more than a few minutes. From his home he hurried to the lodging of Max and Dale, and at the door met the latter coming slowly out. One glance at his face was enough to tell even M. Dubec that he knew of his friend's terrible position.

"You have seen the notice, sir?" he asked.

"No, I have seen no notice," replied Dale heavily. "I do not want to know of any notice, thank you, Dubec."

"But you know of Monsieur Max——?"

"Yes."

"Then you must have heard from him or seen him taken. I first knew by the notice on the gates of the palace."

Dale threw off a little of his lethargy. "What was this notice?" he said.

"That he is to be shot at noon to-morrow in the Durend yard."

"Ah! And I shall join him there!" cried Dale in so wild a voice that Dubec looked at him in wonderment. Then Dale told him what had happened. That Max had not been captured by the Germans, but had voluntarily surrendered himself to save the imprisoned workmen. The note which Max had left, and which had told him all, was read aloud to the wondering man, who,

somewhat slow-witted as he was, managed to grasp the one awe-inspiring fact that his master's son had offered up his own life to save his and his comrades' lives.

The note which Dale read to him was as follows:—

"DEAR JACK,

"I can't stand it. I cannot bear that those thirty-nine men should die for my affairs. I know that their blood would not lie at my door, but at the door of their unscrupulous judges; yet I cannot feel that this removes from me all responsibility. No; and I must yield myself up in their place. Do not grieve for me, old man. Return to England, and, if you will, take a more direct part in the war. Leave the Durend affairs alone; they must, for the war, die with me.

"Good-bye, old man, good-bye! Remember me to all at Hawkesley. Tell them I lost upon a foul, and not in fair fighting.

"Ever your old comrade,

"MAX."

Dale's voice shook as he read the letter. He was obviously much upset, and, seeing it, Dubec, in his uncouth but good-hearted way, persuaded him to return with him to his home for a little while. There Madame Dubec was called to their aid, and as soon as Dale had recovered himself a little the situation was anxiously discussed. In his desperation Dale was for interrupting the execution and compelling the Germans to execute him by the side of his friend. Such an idea as that was quite foreign to Madame and Monsieur Dubec, and they refused to entertain it. As the former said, if Monsieur Dale was determined to die, it would be better to do so in trying to liberate his friend rather than in attempting to share his fate.

The reasonableness of this struck even Dale, distraught as he was, and the three settled down to discuss the possibility of rescue, of reprieve, or whatever seemed likely to put off the evil hour, if only for a day.

CHAPTER XIV

Schenk at Work Again

Max did not long allow himself to give way to weak and bitter reflections. As soon as he properly realized how much he had fallen below himself, he exerted himself to throw off all weakening thoughts and to take a better and higher view of his unfortunate position. He was about to die for his friends and for his country. Well, had he not oftentimes thought that it would be a grand and good thing so to do? Was he now going to go back on those cherished ideals, and regret the heavy blows he had inflicted upon a brutal enemy and the succour he had given to his friends?

Indignant with himself, Max braced himself to a more wholesome frame of mind, and tried to prepare himself for the last scene of the drama of the Durend workshops—a drama in which he had been one of the principal actors since the war began. He would, he told himself, do his best to finish worthily the last and greatest task destiny had set him.

His self- uplifting efforts had met with a considerable measure of success, and he had almost completely regained his usual quiet, steady frame of mind, when his thoughts were interrupted by the sudden challenge of the sentry outside. The challenge was apparently answered satisfactorily, for the door was almost immediately unbolted, and a man entered. It was with very mixed feelings that Max recognized the manager, M. Schenk.

"You do not seem pleased to see me, Monsieur Max," observed the manager, smiling in an ingratiating manner that to Max was more objectionable at that moment than open triumph.

"Have I reason to?" queried Max shortly.

"I think so. But that depends as much upon you as upon me. You are aware that you die to-morrow?"

The almost casual manner in which the manager spoke struck Max as being doubly horrible. He seemed to think nothing at all of the execution of a fellow-creature, and one who had been closely associated with him for a good many years.

"I am aware of it," replied Max as quietly as he could.

"Well, it seems a pity. Such a young fellow, and one so energetic and keen in his business, and with a brilliant future before him," said the manager in a smooth, velvety voice that Max had known him use to influential business men when he was specially anxious to gain his point. "I have, in fact, Monsieur Max, been talking your unfortunate case over with the governor. I have told him that, serious as this offence of yours undoubtedly is, you are really the tool of others. He is, of course, much incensed against you for the destruction of so important a workshop, but is ready to be merciful—upon conditions."

"Ah! and what conditions?"

"Not hard ones," replied M. Schenk, obviously pleased by the eagerness with which Max spoke. "You stole some plans of mine a month or so ago—? Yes? I thought it must be you, and I am ready to go to some lengths to get them back."

"They have left my hands, Monsieur Schenk."

"Where are they?"

"In the hands of the English Government."

"You rascal!" shouted M. Schenk furiously, his smooth, easy manner utterly giving way. "You—you—but, after all, I thought as much; and they were really of no great value," he ended lamely, recovering himself with an obvious effort.

"I thought they were," replied Max coldly.

"No; but what I want to know is about the other papers. Did you hand over *all* you took to the English Government?"

Max thought a moment. Should he give Schenk the information he so evidently desired? So far as he knew, the papers had no particular value, though he had not really examined them with any care; but they might have. Still, they were safe enough, he thought, for he had seen them handed over into the possession of the bank.

"No—only the plans. The others seemed only business papers, and I had them put away in safety against the time when the Durend works should again be mine."

"It hardly looks as though they ever will be, does it, Monsieur Max? But I am going to make you an offer. Among those papers are letters that passed between the Imperial Government and myself in the days before the war. They are valueless, really, but I do not wish them to get into enemy hands, as they will damage me in the eyes of my Imperial master. You see, I am frank with you. Get me, then, all those papers and you shall go free—free, that is, on condition you join with me in running the Durend works to its fullest capacity during the war. I will not ask you to work on war material—you shall manage the shops manufacturing railway material and farming machinery. I need you and your influence with these obstinate Belgian workmen, and am ready to pay a heavy price to get you."

"A heavy price?" muttered Max. His head was beginning to whirl, and he caught confusedly at the last words.

"Ja. Think you it has cost me nothing to beg your life from the governor? He is madly enraged with you, I can tell you. These, then, are the terms: those papers and your active assistance, or your life."

Max sat slowly down in the chair and put his face between his hands. Life was sweet, and he could not disguise from himself that he was ready to do the utmost he honourably could to save his life. But here, it seemed clear, dishonour was too surely involved. To give up the papers, if they were really private, might not be so hard, but to join Schenk in running the works, even on non-war material, was a thing he shrank from instinctively. Would the workmen understand the distinction? Would they not conclude he had turned traitor, and some revile him, and others—worse still—follow his dubious example?

Max was not very long in doubt. After all, he reasoned finally, anything proposed by Schenk must needs be bad, however plausible his tale. The only really safe line to take with a man of that kind was to have naught to do with him in anything.

"No, Monsieur Schenk, I cannot accept your offer," said Max in a steady voice, getting up rather suddenly from his chair and facing the manager resolutely.

"What? You—But why not, Monsieur Max?" he cried eagerly. "It is all nothing. But there, if you do not like to join with me in running the works I will not press that point. Get me the papers. Write for them to your mother, and as soon as they come you are free."

"No," replied Max at once. "No, Monsieur Schenk, I am going to have nothing to do with all this. I have fought and worked hard for Belgium since the outbreak of war, and I am not going to do aught to betray her now."

"Then die to-morrow—I shall at least have done with you!" cried M. Schenk, with a bitter hate that told Max how much his blows had shaken him. "Your temerity in stealing my papers and in burning the machine-gun shop will be amply avenged."

"Have you then forgotten the power-house and the coal-yard?" asked Max with a secret satisfaction that made him forget, for the moment, even his approaching fate.

"Those too—were those your handiwork?" gasped the manager. "You villain—you nearly destroyed my power and reputation with them. 'Tis well you die. My only risk of further disaster will perish with you."

"Maybe. But I have the consolation of knowing that your treachery is known to many, and that when the war is over, and the Germans are driven out of Belgium, you will go with them."

"Bah! Belgium is German territory for all time. I tell you, Max Durend, that, were it not so, I would see to it that before our armies left not one stone of the Durend factories remained upon another. Take this with you to the grave: in memory of what you have done, the trouble and worry you have caused me, these works shall never more pass to your family. If Germany win, they will remain mine. If the impossible happen, and we lose, then I will blow the whole up to the sky and leave to your family naught but the smoking ruins."

The vindictive earnestness with which the manager spoke left no doubt upon Max's mind that he meant every word he said. The Durend works, then, were as good as lost to his mother and sister, and it was with additional thankfulness that he recollected that the large sum of money and valuables he had managed to rescue from Schenk's clutches would be ample, and more than ample, for their needs.

"You will not be able to remove the memory of duty done for our country," replied Max quietly. "And it may be that if Germany lose—as all in Belgium believe she will do—she may have to build up all that she has destroyed. It may be that there are great factories across the border in which *you* have an interest, and it may chance that they will be called upon to replace the machines and buildings you destroy here."

Too enraged to speak, the manager made a gesture expressive of his complete rejection of such an idea, and turned abruptly away. Max also turned his back, and, in a silence expressive of bitter hate on the one hand and chilling contempt on the other, the two parted.

The discussion of the possibilities of rescuing Max by Dale, Dubec, and the latter's wife, soon took a certain shape. There was no chance of rescuing him while imprisoned in the governor's palace; that was clear at once, as they knew nothing of the whereabouts of his cell, and there was too little time to find out. There remained the opportunities presented while he was being conveyed from the palace to the gates of the Durend works, and during the execution within the yard. The latter seemed hopeless. The yards were bounded by high walls, or by the river, which was by this time well guarded, and the whole place was full of workmen, the majority of whom were well disposed towards German rule.

It was during the march from the governor's palace to the gates that the only hope seemed to offer, and upon this they concentrated their attention. The whole thing looked desperate in the extreme, but Dale was in such a state that either he must do something desperate or recklessly place himself by his friend's side. Eventually, mainly through the quick-wittedness of Madame Dubec, a plan that seemed to offer a chance presently began to take shape. This plan was to create so strong a diversion at some point of the route that Max might be enabled to make a dart away to safety, and to aid his further progress once the first part of the plan had been achieved. A diversion—strong, sudden, and terrifying—was what was needed, and to furnish this their united brains planned and planned until there emerged an idea that satisfied them all.

CHAPTER XV

The Dash

A curt command, and Max sprang to his feet. The last lap in the final of his life's race had been begun, and it was now for him to score a glorious win. For a win it was, even with his life sacrificed at the end of the race. Max well understood this, and it was with a proud, though steady, thoughtful air that he followed the non-commissioned officer who summoned him from his cell.

Through a fine marble hall, that had so short a time before echoed with the footsteps of Belgians, and was now thronged with Prussian officers and their servants, Max was led. Out at the wide portico and into the open square, full in view of a large crowd assembled to do silent honour to a patriot; but only for a moment, for a sharp word of command rang out and a score of men closed round him, and with short military steps marched him rapidly through the crowd.

Max was dressed exactly as he was when he gave himself up. He had had no opportunity to wash or to make himself presentable for that last hour; unkempt, bareheaded, but erect and outwardly serene, he strode along, conscious that he was not only an example from the German point of view, but an example, and a greater one, to the Belgians. He tried to tell himself that the unscrupulousness of the Germans should not have the effect they desired, that his execution should be a rallying-point for all true hearts in Liège and a turning-point so far as their little locality was concerned.

But though Max was outwardly calm and serene, inwardly he was deeply anguished. It was not a small thing to him to lay down, so to speak, his tools and to leave to others the continuance of the good work. His mother and sister, too—he could not think of them without many and bitter pangs. However, he strove hard to hold at bay such thoughts and to go down strongly to the parting of the ways.

With monotonous tramp his escort marched unmoved along. Max marched in the middle, unbound like a prisoner of war rather than the miscreant he had been called. Once away from the governor's palace the people were sparse—ones and twos and a few groups here and there—until the gates of the Durend works came in sight.

Here there was a larger crowd. There always was a small crowd about the gates, for the number of Belgians who still refused to work was considerable, and these men passed much of their time outside, gloomily scanning the many evidences of abounding work, and discussing in low tones the progress of the war.

It wanted only twenty minutes to noon, and at that hour Max knew he would take his last look upon the things of this world. It was hard, he could not help thinking, but—

"*Get ready!*"

Those words, spoken in English, sounded in his ears. They seemed uttered in the sing-song tones he knew so well, in which the starter of a rowing contest prepared to send off the crews waiting in eager readiness before him. Max looked curiously about him. He knew he must be dreaming, and yet he had not been conscious at that moment of dreaming of the old days at Hawkesley. How far away they seemed—and how jolly—he would never know such glorious times again. A fresh wave of new regrets passed through his mind. It was—

"*Are you ready?*"

This time Max looked more sharply about him. He was not dreaming, he was sure now. The words had certainly been uttered, and again in the sing-song of the Hawkesley starter. No one but Dale could have uttered them, and Dale it must be. Where was he?

A man carrying a big packing-case was at the side of the road on his right a dozen yards or so ahead. The packing-case hid his face, but his gait seemed somewhat familiar even while moving under his burden. He was slanting towards the prisoner's escort, the foremost of whom had now reached the outer edge of the big crowd assembled outside the gates.

What did the words mean? What but that he was to act as though the greatest contest of his life was before him—aye, one with his very life for the prize! The zest for life, the deep-rooted objection to give up his task half done, the old sporting instinct to battle to the very finish, all combined to brace Max's nerve to a point at which nothing was impossible. Ready?—aye, he was ready and more than ready—all he waited for was the signal he knew was close at hand.

Suddenly something dark flew through the air. Ere it touched the ground another and another followed. Three tremendous explosions took place at the very feet of the men of his escort in front of him. The officer and four of the men fell to the ground, and escort and crowd surged back and away in all directions.

"*Go!*"

Like a shot from a gun, Max dived into the crowd on his right. Not a man of his escort put out a hand to stop him. The surprise was complete, and in an instant Max was in the midst of the crowd of men already on the move, flying in terror from the scene of the fearful explosions which had killed five of the soldiers and injured others as well as some of the nearest of the crowd. Four more explosions followed hard on his heels, just behind him, and he guessed they had occurred in the middle of the rearmost of his escort.

The crowd scattered in all directions. Max followed those who fled towards the open country, and in a few minutes he was on the outskirts of the town. Hardly turning to right or left, he sped on at top speed. It was his own safety he had now to look to, his own race to win, and he put out all the energy he possessed.

Out of the town and up the heights into the open country he ran, and it was not until he was practically beyond pursuit that he slackened and looked about him. Only one solitary figure was in sight, a quarter of a mile behind, and he was clearly not a soldier. In fact, as Max slowed down and looked back, the man waved a hand. It was Dale, and with a feeling of tremendous joy and gratitude Max dashed back to meet him.

"By George, Max—you are no end of a sprinter!" Dale gasped as they met. "I had no idea—you were such a hot man on the track."

"Ah! Wait until you are under sentence of death and see what speed you can work up to. I am glad—I can't tell you how glad—to get away from there. And you are a brick, Dale, a real brick."

"Nonsense, old man, the boot is on the other leg altogether. I am still fathoms deep in your debt."

"Come out of the road into the wood here where we shall be safer. What about Dubec—he was in it, of course?"

"Yes; and *he* has been a brick, if you like. It was he that got us the hand-grenades—Schenk has just started making them—and he was one of those who pitched them into the middle of the Germans. Ha! Ha! Schenk will know that they were his own grenades when he hears about it. I guess it will not improve his temper."

"Is Dubec following?"

"No, he is safe at home, I expect, by now. He will be all right. They have nothing against him, and he is not going to the Durend yard again. He is going to apply for work at the mines instead."

"Good! then we can be off?"

"Aye—though we haven't fixed up where we are to go. We were too busy over the rescue to think about anything else."

"Well, we ought to give Liège a rest. Let us go for another trip into the Ardennes until this affair has blown over and we can return to the attack once more. We have earned a rest, and I for one feel I need it."

"Hear! hear! I've got my wind again, so let us make tracks before the Germans send out patrols to hunt about the countryside. It would be too bad to be captured after hoodwinking them so thoroughly."

"Not to mention killing and wounding an officer and several men."

Chatting gaily together, but nevertheless keeping a sharp look-out, the two friends strode along out into the open lands southward of the town, and then on towards the wide stretch of broken highlands known as the Ardennes. They had no clear idea of what they would do when they got there, the one thought in their minds being to find some quiet rural spot where they could remain in safety and quietude for a little while.

It was certainly as well for them to do so, for the daring and successful rescue of the prisoner under sentence of death stirred the city of Liège to its very depths. To the people it was an example of courage and self-sacrifice joined to determined and skilful leadership; to the Germans it was most exasperating evidence of their inability to crush this people notwithstanding their many and varied methods of repression. The affair was hushed up by the governor so far as he was able to do so, but it eventually became known that it had been the cause of a violent altercation between him and the manager of the Durend works, Herr von Schenkendorf, who was said to have made a strong complaint to the Imperial Government at the bungling of the military.

Be that as it may, it was certain that no stone was left unturned to recapture the prisoner and to find out who were the workmen participating in the rescue. Nothing was ever discovered, but the manager of the Durend works from that time forward refused to employ any Walloon workmen anywhere save in the Durend collieries, where they were supposed to be incapable of doing any serious damage.

CHAPTER XVI

In the Ardennes

After two days' steady tramping Max and Dale arrived at La Roche, a little town on the Ourthe, well in the broken country of the Ardennes. They had had no such easy and uneventful journey as they anticipated. The whole country was in a very unsettled state, the people ready to be startled and alarmed by every rumour—and they were not few—and viewing strangers with the utmost suspicion as probably German spies on the look-out for more victims.

Half the population of the villages passed on the way had gone. Houses stood unoccupied, with doors wide open, although the furniture of those who had so lately tenanted them was still within. The whole countryside bore evidences of a great panic, and some places the more sinister signs of rough and brutal treatment. Many houses had been burned down and others had been plundered in a most barbarous manner, property that could not be carried off having been wantonly destroyed. The fields and farmlands seemed deserted, as though no one dared to work at a harvest that was likely to be reaped by the enemies of their country.

The authors of all this mischief were said to be the Uhlans. It appeared that these formidable horsemen, after the fall of Liège, had spread in small parties all over the Ardennes and had carried terror and destruction wherever they went. Their principal motive was, no doubt, to gather information of the enemy's whereabouts, but, while doing so, they seemed to throw themselves heart and soul into another task—that of making their name known and dreaded throughout the length and breadth of Belgium.

La Roche had so far suffered little. Parties of Uhlans had passed through from time to time, but they had usually been in a hurry, and had had no time to do more than seize supplies for themselves and their horses. This was the kind of place Max and Dale were looking for, and, finding no troops there at the moment, and none expected, they sought out (avoiding the hotels) a café in the most out-of-the-way spot they could find, and settled down for a long stay.

At least they hoped it might be a long stay. They had had so busy a time of late that neither felt any inclination to go out of his way to meet trouble. If only the enemy would leave them alone, they were prepared to welcome a long period of peace and tranquillity.

But somehow peace and tranquillity seemed to have turned their backs upon Max and Dale. Only the second night after their arrival they were awakened in the middle of the night by the clatter

of horses' hoofs upon the cobbled pavements, loud shouting, and the insistent hammering of doors.

"Ask the proprietor what's the row, Max," growled Dale sleepily, as he heard Max get up and look out of the little window of their bedroom.

Max did so, and learned that a strong body of Uhlans had just ridden in and demanded shelter and supplies.

"Are we in any danger?" he asked.

"I do not think so," the innkeeper replied. "But you must not leave the town, for they have posted men to intercept all who try to go."

"And what is that for?" cried Max, more perturbed by this than if he had been told that a house-to-house search for suspected persons was already being made.

"Why, you must know that the Uhlans are rounding up escaped English and French soldiers. Everyone knows that. They have been doing so for weeks past."

"Ah! Of course. And they will not let anyone leave the town to give the soldiers information of their coming?"

"No, Monsieur. They are making a special effort this time. They have caught one or two, but the rest seem to grow in numbers, and are getting more audacious owing to hunger. I have heard that they stopped and plundered two army wagons full of provisions only a week ago. It is this that has made the commandant at Marche determined to kill them all this time."

"Well, I think we will dress, in case they come here and want to search the house."

"You must not hide here, Monsieur, if that is what you want," replied the innkeeper quickly. "I could not have that, for if they found anyone in hiding they would burn the house down."

"What for?" asked Max in some astonishment.

"I know not, but they have done so. No doubt it is to make us all afraid of harbouring fugitives. But you are a Belgian, Monsieur? You speak like a Walloon."

"Aye; but I do not want to have aught to do with Uhlans if I can help it. They so often make mistakes, and then it is too late to explain. I think we will leave your house, Monsieur, and then you will run no risks."

Max called Dale, and they put together their very slender belongings and sallied out into the night. The innkeeper was certainly pleased to see them go, and gave them as much help in the shape of information as it was in his power to bestow. He told them, with a warning to them to be careful to avoid the locality, the general position of the fugitive soldiers and the villages in which cavalry patrols had lately taken up their positions.

"It seems to me, Dale," remarked Max, as they left the inn and crept along in the shadow of the houses towards the little bridge which spanned the Ourthe, "that in leaving Liège we have jumped out of the frying-pan into the fire. There we could hide in the lower quarters of the town and pass as Walloon workmen easily enough, but here we are strangers, and strangers are always objects of suspicion."

"Yes; we did not bargain for all this chasing around by German cavalry. However, it will be good fun while it lasts, old man."

"Yes, but how long will it last? Here's the bridge. We can't cross it in this moonlight; we should be sure to be seen and challenged. We must get into the river and cross in the shadow of the bridge."

"What's the game, Max? Why cross at all? Why not cut straight away into the open country?"

"Wrong direction. The innkeeper was so careful that we should get away from the district on which the Uhlans were closing in that he told me exactly where it was. And that's where we are going, of course. We can't let these Germans make a grand sweep of English and French fugitive soldiers without at least giving them warning, can we, old man?"

"You beggar!" cried Dale, with a note of admiration in his voice. "No, of course not. Won't it be jolly if we find some English soldiers, and manage to pilot them away to a safe place?"

"Not bad. Now here we are; climb over this wall, and lower yourself into the bed of the river. Then creep along in the shadow of the wall until you reach the shadow of the bridge. Then we can cross, and shall stand a good chance of getting away. Most of the Germans are quartered on this side of the town."

Max and Dale were by this time experts in eluding observation, and had no great difficulty in getting out of the town without raising an alarm. Once well away, they strode at a good pace straight across country towards the wooded region south-west of the town, where the fugitives were popularly supposed to be. They knew that by their action they would be placing themselves inside the zone about to be swept by converging bodies of Uhlans, and that all persons found there, who could not give a good account of themselves, would almost certainly be shot or speared out of hand. But they took no heed of that, for the thought that some members of the

gallant little English army which had, they knew, from the gossip of the countryside, fought so splendidly against overwhelming odds might be caught unsuspecting, and probably killed, made them ready to face even greater risks than that. Besides, they had, in their many successful encounters with the Germans in Liége, gained a self-reliance and confidence in themselves that made them look upon the affair as one by no means certain to go against them.

An hour or two after daybreak Max and Dale had reached the woods in which the fugitives were said to be, and were slowly traversing them, keeping a sharp look-out on all sides. The trouble, they now realized, was how to get in touch with them. It was highly probable that they would keep out of sight, and avoid contact with everybody they were not forced to have dealings with in the way of purchasing or begging food. Fortunately the difficulty was solved very suddenly and unexpectedly.

"Alt!" came a hoarse command just as they were about to enter a somewhat thick belt of timber well supplied with undergrowth. Simultaneously a rifle protruded from the bushes right in front of them, and a wild, famished-looking face followed it.

Max and Dale stopped dead.

"What d'ye want poking about 'ere?" the man demanded in Cockney English in a surly tone. "I don't understand your lingo, but say something, or I'll let go."

The man had a fierce and reckless look, and fingered his rifle as though ready enough to keep his word. Hastily Max replied:

"It's all right; we're friends. Put down your gun, there's a good fellow."



"IT'S ALL RIGHT; WE'RE FRIENDS"

"Huh! Friends—eh? Fust I've seen for many a long day. 'Ere, boys, 'ere's a Johnny wot speaks English says he's a friend—in this outlandish place."

In response to this summons, five other men pushed through the undergrowth and confronted Max and Dale. Four of them were English soldiers and one was a Scot—that much could be seen at a glance, although their uniforms were in such a state of muddiness and rags that little of the original colour or cut remained. Nine other soldiers, who were equally clearly Frenchmen, joined them, attracted by the sense that something was going on, although they did not understand the language. These fifteen men apparently formed the whole of the band, so far as Max could see, and seemed on very good terms with one another. All the men wore side-arms, although only five or six rifles were to be seen among the lot.

A man wearing corporal's stripes pressed forward, shoved the Cockney soldier aside, and planted himself straight in front of Max with his hands on his hips.

"Who are you?" he demanded at once. "And what do you here?"

"We are two Englishmen—at least I'm half English—and we have come to warn you that the Uhlans are after you."

"That's nothing new, lad. The Uhlans have been after us these three weeks past, but they haven't caught us yet."

"Aye, but it's a special beat this time," replied Max, and Dale emphasized his words. "They've brought in a lot more men, and are determined to make an end of you. There is a tale going about that you have looted two wagons full of stores, and it is that, they say, that has so upset the Germans."

There was a burst of laughter from the English soldiers at the mention of the wagons, and the Frenchmen joined in as soon as one of the others demonstrated by signs eked out by one or two words what the laughter was about.

"I dare say," remarked the Corporal, grinning. "I dare say it did upset them a bit. We got enough food to last us a week, four German rifles, two hundred rounds of ammunition, and had the best bonfire since Guy Fawkes Day. And I fancy we shall upset them worse than that before we've done, lad, if only we can get hold of some more food. We're starving, and that's the long and short of it."

His comrades murmured assent, and certainly they all, including the Frenchmen, looked wolfish enough. Max and Dale had a little food with them, and this they promptly brought out and handed round. It provided about two mouthfuls for each of the band, but was accepted and disposed of with eager alacrity.

"Can't you purchase food from the peasants?" asked Max in some surprise.

"We did while our money lasted, though it was risky enough. Now we have to beg it of the people, and what with that and the fear they are in from the Germans if they give us any help, we fare badly. If you can get us a good square meal apiece we shall be more grateful to you than we are for warning us against the Uhlans. We don't fear them half as much as we do starvation."

"We have money and will get you food, but not here. You must get ready for a forced march of a dozen miles across the railway between Reçogne and Bastogne. The Uhlans are assembling all round the loop made by the railway and the Ourthe."

The corporal—his name was Shaw—consulted with his comrades for a moment or two, and then replied:

"All right, lad. You seem straight enough, and we will make tracks as you suggest. If you speak French, tell these Frenchies here what's afoot, and ask them if they're game for another spree. We are not going to cross a railway without leaving a memento or two of our visit, I can tell you."

Max in a few words explained the situation to the Frenchmen. Though they hailed from all parts of France, he had no difficulty in making himself understood, and they eagerly fell in with the plan already agreed upon by their English comrades. This accomplished, Max and Dale put themselves at the head of the band, more in virtue of their knowledge of the language of the country than of their powers as guides, and in single file and very cautiously they set out.

Max was agreeably surprised at the way the men moved, taking advantage of every bit of cover afforded by the trees and undergrowth, and, when in the open, of every fold in the ground. They had clearly made good use of the weeks they had spent in eluding pursuit, and had become in their way very fair backwoodsmen. This accomplishment was worth any amount of fighting power at that moment, and increased threefold their chances of escape from the armed circle closing in upon them.

During the march, Max and Dale, at every opportunity, increased their knowledge of the men with whom they had now practically thrown in their lot. The British soldiers had been stragglers from the army which had been pushed up to Mons, and had subsequently retreated before the overwhelming odds hurled against it at the express command of the German Emperor. The object had been annihilation rather than defeat, in order, no doubt, to fill the people of Britain with discouragement and make them reluctant to venture another force on the Continent. Everyone knows how the Emperor's legions failed in their intention, and at what a heavy cost, and there is no need to dilate upon it here. Corporal Shaw had been wounded and left behind during the retreat. He had managed to drag himself to the house of a Belgian peasant woman, who had nursed him quickly back to health. Then he had said farewell and made for the Belgian coast at Ostend. He had been constantly headed off, and at last found himself in the Ardennes with several comrades picked up here and there on the way.

Their stories were much like his. Some had been wounded, and others had dropped behind in the retreat totally exhausted, or so sore of foot that they were unable to move another step. The Frenchmen had been picked up for the most part in one body. They had been engaged in a running fight with some German infantry, and the British soldiers, drawn irresistibly to the spot by the sound of firing, had joined in the little battle with good effect, enabling their French comrades to get away with only the loss of two of their number. These had fallen wounded, and it was asserted in the most positive manner that the German soldiers had been seen to smash them to death with the butt-ends of their rifles the moment they came upon them. Such an episode as this did not improve the feelings of either the British or French soldiers towards their German foes, and went far to explain to Max and Dale the keenness and zest of the men for yet other encounters, notwithstanding that their foes now had all the points of the play so strongly in their favour.

In their turn Max and Dale told the story of their fight against the Germans; how they had waged an industrial, but equally open, war upon them, and had inflicted damage that had had a high moral as well as material effect. The story was not without its effect even upon men who understood most the warfare of bullet and bayonet, and Max and his friend were viewed with an increased respect as men of action as well as interpreters and guides.

One thing struck Max forcibly in the little band of which he had to all intents and purposes now become a member, and that was the fine spirit of discipline and camaraderie among them. Corporal Shaw was the only non-commissioned officer present, and the French soldiers accepted his lead as unhesitatingly as their British comrades. All food obtained was rationed out equally, and turns were taken with the carrying of the half-dozen rifles.

In spite of the careful and rapid way in which the retreat from the dangerous neighbourhood of the former haunts of the band was carried out, it seemed that they were not to escape unscathed. In crossing a road, little more than a track, about four miles from the railway, they must have been seen by a German soldier, himself unseen, on the look-out, for they heard a loud shout of warning, and almost immediately after the tramping of horses' hoofs as though a body of cavalymen were hastily mounting.

"Guns to the rear!" ordered Corporal Shaw curtly, and the six men carrying rifles, three British and three French, dropped to the rear of the little party and spread out in open order on either side of the line of retreat.

"If they're cavalry hadn't we better retreat through the most broken country we can find?" enquired Max suggestively.

Corporal Shaw nodded and led the way in the direction indicated. The noise of the pursuing cavalry drew nearer, and the Corporal turned suddenly to Max: "Do you lead the retreat, lad. You know where we're bound better than I do. Keep only just in front of the men with the guns—we're going to give them a fight for their money."

The retreat was being made along a narrow track through rough and broken country overgrown with short, thick undergrowth. Looking back, Max saw that the six men with guns had disappeared, and the only men in sight were the bunch he was himself leading, and three or four a few yards in his rear. But the six men were not far off, and now and again he caught a glimpse of one or other of them in the woods on either side of the line of retreat of the main body.

Suddenly the Uhlans crashed through the thickets and came into sight only a hundred yards away. There were about a score of them, and they caught sight of the fugitives at the same moment as the latter caught sight of them. They gave a fierce yell of delight, and, at a harsh order, put spurs to their horses, grasped their lances, and rode helter-skelter over the bushes towards the straggling body of unarmed men in front of them. The nearest men, conspicuous among whom was the Scot in full war paint, quickened their pace to catch up to Max and the party in front.

"They love to spear a Scot," remarked Shaw in an undertone to Max, coolly indicating the main decoy and the wild eagerness with which the Uhlans charged down upon their unarmed foe.

Sixty yards, fifty yards, then forty, and still the enemy closed down upon their quarry. Then Shaw raised his voice and shouted:

"Now, boys, give it them!"

Although he had been expecting it, the answering blaze of fire from the bushes on both flanks of the charging horsemen took even Max somewhat by surprise. Three horses fell in a bunch, and two turned tail and dashed back riderless the way they had come. Again, in a second or two, a scattering discharge came from the bushes; more men fell, and the remainder, their nerves obviously shaken by the unexpected attack, turned their horses' heads and rode madly away.

Five men, apparently dead, were left behind, among them the young officer in command, and three more lay wounded.

"Get their rifles and ammunition," ordered Corporal Shaw, and the unarmed men darted back and secured rifles and ammunition with an eagerness which showed how irksome they felt their inability to join in any fight that might be going. Seven rifles, six lances, and a revolver were secured, but all the lances except two were thrown away almost immediately as useless. The two retained were broken off half-way down the hafts, and their captors, two of the French soldiers, grinning with delight, sloped arms with them and fell in with their comrades fully satisfied with their share of the spoils.

"Not a bad business that," remarked Shaw coolly. "We have nearly enough rifles now, and ammunition for a regular battle. And it can come as soon as it likes. I'm fair sick of dodging these Germans."

"Ear, 'ear!" chimed in the Londoner, whose name was Peck. "Give me a bit of cover, a packet of cigarettes, and a hundred rounds, and I'll die happy—eh, Corp?"

"Shut up, Peck, and get a move on," growled Shaw testily. "Did you find any grub?" he added. "I saw you going through their haversacks."

"Aye, enough to give us all a snack at our next 'alt," replied Peck, giving a knowing wink and

pointing to his own bulging haversack and those of two pleased-looking Frenchmen close at his heels. "And no need, I presume, to mention a matter of a few cigarettes the officer had to dispose of—cheap?" And he displayed the end of a large packet of cigarettes which he had been careful to take charge of himself.

"Forward—single file," commanded Shaw, and the band resumed its interrupted march towards the Bastogne railway.

"What d'ye think of 'em, Dale?" asked Max presently, indicating with a gesture the rest of the miscellaneous band of which they themselves now formed a part.

"A game lot; we shall see some fun presently," replied Dale in tones of deepest satisfaction. "They're just about ready for anything, from a Uhlan patrol to an army corps."

"Ye—es," replied Max with much less assurance. "We shall certainly see things. What I'm afraid of is that it won't last long. We came to the Ardennes for a rest—not to commit suicide, you remember."

"I don't feel as though I want any more rest, Max," replied Dale, still eyeing his new comrades with delighted satisfaction. "Be a sport and join in the fun, there's a good fellow."

"I'm ready enough to join in," replied Max, smiling. "What I don't approve of is the reckless way they go about things. This fight with the Uhlans will bring all the rest of them buzzing about our ears, and then it will be one last struggle and all over."

Dale shrugged his shoulders. "What could we have done?" he said. "The Uhlans caught us up, and we had to fight."

"We could have dispersed, and rejoined one another later at a rendezvous agreed upon. But never mind, we're in with them for the moment, only I can't forget that we have still some work left to us at Liège, and work more important than livening up the Uhlans in the Ardennes." Dale made no reply. Possibly he thought it useless to argue with Max on the subject of Liège, and for some time they marched along in silence. Presently the band arrived within about half a mile of the railway line, and Max and Corporal Shaw went on ahead to reconnoitre.

CHAPTER XVII

Cutting the Line

The line was well guarded. A company of infantry was allotted to every four or five miles of line, and furnished the sentries who were posted every hundred yards or so. These men were within easy reach of one another, sometimes stationed on the line itself and at other times at the top of any adjacent knoll or rising ground. The nucleus of the company, the men resting from their turn of sentry-go, was stationed at a point of vantage within easy touch of the whole of the line under its care. An alarm at any point would not only attract the sentries from both sides to the spot, but would also quickly bring the remainder of the company hurrying to the scene.

Corporal Shaw's dispositions were soon made. His men were brought within reach of the railway at a point where it ran through country well wooded on either side. A sentry was then marked down as the point of contact, and six men, three on either side, were detached to act as flank guards. These were posted within easy reach of the sentries, next on either side, with instructions to shoot them down should they make any move to interfere, and to hinder, by all means in their power, the approach of further reinforcements.

The unfortunate sentry marked down as the point of contact would not require much attention. He would obviously be helpless against ten men.

A whistle apprised the flank guards that the attack was about to begin. Then the main body emerged from cover and half a dozen rifles were levelled at the sentry in front of them. For a moment the man was too astonished to move; then he gave a shout of alarm and fled down the line towards the sentinel on the right.

Two rifles cracked almost simultaneously and the man fell in his tracks and lay motionless.

"Get his rifle, someone, and then come and lend a hand here," cried Corporal Shaw, springing out on to the line and getting to work with an entrenching tool upon the permanent way. Other men followed his example, the gravel was rapidly scraped away from the sleepers, and several long iron bars, taken from some derelict agricultural machine passed on the way, inserted beneath the rails. But the united efforts of several men made no impression upon the well-bolted rails and the attempt was promptly abandoned.

The bolts and nuts which held the rails together were attacked instead, and, although no spanners were available, the men managed, by dint of much persuasion from the iron bars and their bayonets, to get the nuts to turn. Two rails were in time entirely removed and carried across the line and laid endwise in a ditch, where they promptly sank out of sight in the muddy ooze.

In the meantime the flank guards had not been idle. The shout of the sentry first attacked had given the alarm to his comrades on either side, and one had started immediately to his aid. The other remained where he was, but levelled his rifle at Shaw and his men as they sprang on to the line. Both were promptly shot down and their rifles and cartridges as promptly secured.

By this time the alarm was fairly general. Several shots had been fired, and the line guards up and down the track had come to the conclusion that a serious attack on the line was in progress. Instead of rushing in ones and twos to the point of attack, they now waited until some half-dozen men had collected before advancing. Even these bodies were easily disposed of by the flank guards posted by Shaw. They were well concealed, and, as the Germans came up, opened a heavy fire upon them at close range. Most of the latter dropped at once, and the survivors fled, only too glad to get away in safety with their lives.

Max and Dale had assisted in the removal of the rails and their deposit in the muddy ditch. This accomplished, Max, who viewed the whole affair with some misgiving, stood aside and took no part in the further attacks already in progress on the rails.

"You look glum, Max," remarked Dale in a rallying tone, as he straightened his back. He himself looked far from glum. His face was flushed, his eyes sparkled, and he bore himself as though at the height of enjoyment. "Don't you like raiding the railway?"

"Not this way," replied Max with decision. "What's the good of it? It won't take half an hour to repair, and, coming after that other affair, will mean half the cavalry in the Ardennes stirring on our tracks."

"Who cares?" retorted Dale recklessly. "I——What's the matter?"

"Hark! A train I think. Let's get to the top of this bit of rising ground and see what happens. The driver can't come steaming through with all that firing going on yonder."

The two friends climbed upon the little hill and up into the lower branches of a large tree. The view thus obtained was a wide one, and showed them much. In the distance a train was approaching. It was slowing up as they watched, and presently came to a standstill. Instantly crowds of soldiers poured out from both sides and formed up on the permanent way. Apparently in response to an order, the troops split into two bodies, one passing to the north side of the line and one to the south, both almost immediately disappearing from view in the woods.

Max and Dale next turned their gaze towards the flank guards. Here desultory fighting was going on with numbers of the sentries attracted to the spot. But beyond them, and in the direction of the head-quarters of the company guarding that section of the line, a strong body of men was on the march; and, in yet another direction, Max and Dale could see the lances of cavalry occasionally coming into view as their line of advance led them past bunches of low bush or gaps in the trees.

"Time we were off, Max," remarked Dale in a much sobered voice. "You see what those troops from the train are after?"

"Yes, they want to strike across our rear, whichever side of the railway we go, before the other bodies begin to attack us in front. Had we not chanced to climb up here, that last fight of ours would have been very near indeed. As it is, I shouldn't wonder if we have a job to get Corporal Shaw and his fire-eaters away in time."

"We shall. They all reckon they're getting a bit of their own back, and they'll be in no hurry to move."

As quickly as possible, Max and Dale dropped from the tree and ran back to the railway, where Shaw and the bulk of his men were still working like bees, tearing up rails and transporting them to the swampy stream. The gist of what they had seen was soon told to Corporal Shaw, and that worthy, while not inclined to take too much notice of "a few Germans", now that all his men were fully armed, was duly impressed with the necessity of moving from the neighbourhood without loss of time. He promptly called in the flank guards, and curtly told the whole of the band that it was time to march.

"Now, lad," he said, addressing Max, "you seem to know your way about. Lead on out of this fix, and we will live to fight again another day. Forward!"

Max and Dale strode quickly away, straight into the woods, and in single file the band followed them. The men were in high glee at the success of their enterprise, and seemed neither to know nor care about their critical situation. Max, however, felt very anxious, and presently managed to get Corporal Shaw so far to agree with him as to order complete silence and every care, as they threaded their way through the thickest-wooded country to be found in the quarter not yet reached by the soldiers from the train.

For over three miles the band moved in silence, at top speed, away from the scene of their daring exploit. Max judged that by that time they were outside the sweep of the encircling bodies of Germans, and could take a breather for a few minutes. The work on the railway had been hard and exhausting, and the men had for some time been too ill-nourished to be able to sustain long-continued exertion. At the order to halt and rest the men flung themselves on the ground, and for five minutes lay prone upon the grass. Then they went on again.

"D'ye see that smoke yonder, lad?" remarked Corporal Shaw, soon after they had restarted, pointing to a thick column of smoke rising above the trees a couple of miles in their rear. "Is it a signal, or what?"

"No—it's not that," replied Max, after a long look at the smoke, which was rising more thickly at every moment. "There is a little village just there, and I can guess what has happened. The Germans have fired the nearest village in revenge for the attack upon the line. I have often heard of it being done. It is one of their methods of terrorizing the people, so that they dare do nothing themselves and try to prevent others doing any thing in the vicinity of their villages. I had forgotten it until this moment."

"What a black shame!" cried Corporal Shaw with fierce indignation. "What had those poor folk to do with it? The Germans knew that well enough—the cowards!"

The other men in the band soon knew what had happened, and their rage and indignation were extreme. Some wanted to vent their rage by returning to the scene of the burning village and attacking those responsible for the outrage. It was as much as Max and Shaw could do to keep them from turning back and flinging away their lives in a desperate endeavour to exact reparation for the foul deed.

The retreat of the band was continued, but the rage and indignation of all concerned was not lessened when, later in the day, after a long halt, they were overtaken by two families fleeing from the burning village. It needed no question to tell them what they were. There were old men and women, heavy-eyed and outwardly uncomplaining, trudging beside creaking bullock-carts loaded with all the little bits of property they had been able to save from their burning homes. There were white-faced, frightened children, too, tucked in the corners of the carts or perched upon the piled-up goods, and their faces seemed to express mute wonder that such things could be.

It was indeed a sight to make any beholder furious with indignation, but on the unwitting causes of the trouble it acted with fourfold force. An instant reprisal was demanded by all the band, and Corporal Shaw, as angry as any of them, promised that they should have it, and that without any more loss of time than he could avoid.

CHAPTER XVIII

Reprisals

Dale was at one with the soldiers in desire for reprisals, but Max was dead against the whole idea. It was not that he was less indignant at the cruel wrong just inflicted upon innocent peasants, but he feared that any more such acts would react upon the country people in precisely the same manner. A reprisal which brought fresh trouble upon yet another set of innocent folk would, he felt, be worse than useless, and he spoke his mind freely to Corporal Shaw on the subject.

"You've done no good," he ended, "by attacking the line and tearing up a few rails. Your methods were too wild to bring about any real damage. All you have done is to make it additionally hard for me to get you safely out of the country."

"Humph!" grunted the Corporal rather sourly. "I know you've done some neat little things in Liège, but could you manage a better affair out here? I give you leave to try. As for getting us out, I don't see much prospect of that coming off, my lad."

"I'll get you out if you'll drop all these wild-cat exploits," replied Max firmly. "Is it a bargain?"

The Corporal consulted with his men for a few minutes. "No," he said, shaking his head emphatically, "the men refuse to sneak out of the country before they have what they call redressed the wrong done those poor villagers. They want one more good cut at the Germans to make that good, and then they are ready to make tracks for home, if you think you can get us there."

"Will you let me plan the reprisal attack as well as arrange to get you out?" asked Max quickly.

The Corporal opened his eyes a little.

"So *you* do think you can do better? Well, I don't mind; you shall plan the reprisal and then get us out of the mess. Done!"

"Done!" replied Max firmly, and it was thus settled that he should, from that time forward, practically take command of the little band, subject only to the stipulation that the escape should not be arranged until the Germans had been made to pay, and pay handsomely, for their recent exhibition of brutality.

As soon as that was decided, Max changed the direction of the retreat to due east, and in that direction they continued all day. When night fell, the men looked about them for a comfortable spot to sleep, but Max would not allow them to stop, and, with frequent halts for rest, they

continued on their way all through the night. There was some grumbling, but it was soon silenced; and, when all was said and done, the men recognized that Max managed to feed them fairly well. This part of the business he saw to himself. At nearly every farm-house he passed he managed to purchase some food. None of the soldiers were allowed to come within sight of the people, and, with this precaution, and his knowledge of the language, he hoped that no suspicions of the destination of the food would be aroused.

During the following day the band hid themselves in a copse and slept. It was nearly dark when Max aroused them and told them they must go on.

"We've been travelling a good many miles, lad," remarked Shaw carelessly. "Where are we now?"

"In Germany," replied Max.

"Germany!" cried the Corporal, his carelessness vanishing. "Why—what d'ye mean? D'ye think we want to find a good safe prison?"

"No. Your men insist on one more attack on the Germans, as a reprisal for the burning of the village. Well, we cannot do anything in Belgium, for it would only mean another village burned. If we make the attack in Germany it will be different. They can hardly burn down their own villages."

Corporal Shaw held out his hand. "Well done, lad!" he cried heartily, and the other men within ear-shot echoed his words. "That's a stroke of genius, and we are with you to a man. What are you going to attack—nothing less than Metz, of course?"

Max smiled and shook his head. "Something a little less ambitious will have to do, I think. After another night march we shall be on the spot, and can get to work."

"What are you going to do, lad?"

Max hesitated a moment. Should he keep the men ignorant of the nature of the enterprise until the hour for it had struck? It was hardly worth while—in forty-eight hours or so it would be all over.

"To block the main line between Aix and Liège," he answered simply.

"Phew! I think you mentioned wild-cat exploits the other day. What sort of cat exploit is this?"

"It must be carefully planned beforehand."

"Humph! Trains filled with troops passing every five minutes; the lines thick with guards. It'll want careful planning—and a trifle more. In fact, it'll need the devil's own luck. What say you, boys?"

"No matter, Corp," cried Peck testily. "Give the lad his head. We ain't particular, so long as it's a fust-class scrap."

"It'll be all that," grunted Shaw.

"Did we expect to git out of this show alive?" retorted Peck. "What's the odds? Let the lad 'ave his way—he's grubbed us well anyhow."

The other men murmured an assent, and it was clear that most of the band were quite ready to follow Max in an attempt, however desperate, on the Germans' main line of communication. The Frenchmen were quite ready to agree to anything that would lead to another encounter with the enemy in company with their British comrades, and so Max was left in possession of the field and charged with full responsibility for the tremendous task before them.

Two days later the whole of the band arrived safely within a mile or so of the great main line which runs between Aix-la-Chapelle and Liège, and then on through Namur to Paris. A stoppage to their communications on this line would disconcert the Germans in a way that hardly anything else could do, and Max, from the knowledge he had gained, while at Liège, of the great trains loaded with troops and munitions that constantly passed through at all hours of the day and night, was very well aware of it. Next to his darling scheme for the frustration of the Germans' plans as regards the Durend works, the breaking of the great railway through the town had seemed the most serious blow that could be aimed at the Germans by a few men working independently of the great military forces of the Allies. It was a difficult matter, but not impossible. That was enough.

Max and Dale, accompanied by Shaw, reconnoitred the railway after hiding their men well away out of sight. The first point reached Max did not consider suitable, and it was not until they had approached the line at several different places that he found a spot that satisfied him. This spot was one where the line passed along a fairly deep cutting, the sides of which were thickly overgrown with bushes with here and there a young tree. It was a spot at which it would be easy to approach the line unseen. And yet this was not Max's chief reason for selecting it. His design had been to find a spot where the line at night-time would have dark patches of shadow cast upon it here and there.

Dale and Corporal Shaw now returned to the spot where the band had been left in hiding, while Max set out for Aix-la-Chapelle alone. He still wore the workman's clothes in which he had masqueraded for so long, and, with his excellent knowledge of the German tongue, he had little to fear so long as he took care not to blunder into a military patrol. Without misadventure he reached Aix, and purchased a dozen spanners similar to those used by plate-layers, except that the handles were short and lacked the great leverage necessary for their work. This difficulty would, however, be easily got over by cutting stout rods from the woods and lashing them to the short spanners. The tools thus obtained would, he knew, be fully suited to the end in view.

The reconnoitring of the railway had disclosed the fact that the guards were stationed only about eighty yards apart. Also that they were changed every four hours, at four o'clock, eight o'clock, midnight, and noon.

An hour before midnight Max led the band towards the line at the point fixed upon. He had already, at some pains, explained exactly what he desired each man to do, and from their intelligent eagerness felt pretty well assured that they would not fail from want of zeal or knowledge of the part they had to play. To the Frenchmen he, of course, explained matters in their own tongue, and found them equally as ready as their Island brethren.

The moon, what there was of it, was fairly low in the heavens, and the long shadows Max counted upon so largely in his plans were much in evidence. Silence was another factor of importance, and the feet of all the men were swathed in long strips of cloth—their puttees in the case of the British soldiers, and strips from their clothing in the case of the Frenchmen.

The band was divided into three groups, and the orders were that on arriving at the edge of the cutting all were to remain motionless in hiding until the guards were changed at midnight. Then three men from each band were to creep up close to one of the three sentries marked down for attack, and wait for an opportunity to seize and kill or capture him without raising an alarm.

The latter point Max insisted upon as of the utmost importance. The groups of three might spend two hours, even three hours, he told them, so long as they performed their task without making a noise that would attract the attention of the sentries on either side. The darkness of the line, from the shadows of the trees and bushes and the deepness of the cutting itself, Max felt he could rely upon to prevent the other sentries from seeing if aught were amiss. The important thing, therefore, was that they should perform their task without noise.

Promptly at midnight the sentries were changed. The momentary bustle was, as arranged carefully beforehand by Max, taken advantage of by the groups of three to creep close up to their objectives. Then things settled down again in quietude. All was peaceful and silent between the thunder of the trains, and time was allowed the sentries to grow accustomed to their surroundings and to develop any individual habits of carelessness that might be theirs. At first the men marched to and fro rather frequently. Later, they contented themselves with leaning on their rifles and making themselves as comfortable as such a position would allow. There had been no attacks on any part of the line in Germany so far as had become known, and there was no reason in the world why these line guards should expect one now.

One of the sentries presently came to a halt in the shadow cast by a tree. He was thus out of sight of his comrades on either side, and the three men in deadly attendance upon him were satisfied that their chance had come. Noiselessly emerging from the shadows, they stole upon him from behind. One seized him by the throat in a grip of iron, stifling all utterance, another pinioned his arms to his sides, while the third caught the rifle which fell from his startled hand. Between the three the struggles of the unfortunate sentry were quickly mastered. He was securely pinioned, gagged, and dragged out of harm's way into the shelter of the bushes.

The capture of one made the capture of the two others comparatively easy. It was only necessary to await a moment when the farther sentinel was facing away from the next man marked down for attack, before springing upon him. One after the other the three guards were successfully placed out of action, and the stern work of reprisal was at hand.

As a precautionary measure, two men, wearing the tunics and helmets of the captured Germans, were stationed as sentries one at each end of the break, to satisfy their German neighbours in case they should miss the sight of the comrades who had gone.

Then rapidly Max selected two pairs of rails, one pair on the up-line and one on the down-line, and the dozen great spanners were quickly at work. Certain of the nuts of the rails and of some of the chairs were carefully loosened a little, and everything was made ready to shift one end of each rail as soon as the signal should be given. Then the men withdrew once more to the obscurity of the bushes.

Having satisfied himself that everything was in readiness, Max settled himself to watch the trains as they passed, and to seize upon the essential moment. Trains were now running less frequently than at every hour in the twenty-four, and in the comparative silence he could tell when a train was approaching while it was yet some miles away. It was his intention to await the almost simultaneous approach of two trains from opposite directions, and in steady patience he waited.

His men did not know the full extent of his plans and were impatient to see the result of their—to them—successful labours. They could not understand this halt, and grumbled under their breath at the strange hesitancy of their young leader. But everything had gone so well under his guidance that none of them dared to express his discontent aloud, and Max was left to put the

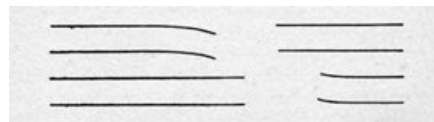
finishing touch upon his plans in peace.

Suddenly his ear caught the sounds he had been awaiting.

"Forward!" he commanded in an undertone in two languages.

The men sprang quickly on to the lines and wrestled with the nuts and bolts with all their might. In a very short space of time the rails were loose at one end and the chairs removed. Then Max gave the word for all four rails to be levered inwards, towards the centre of the track, until the loose ends were a foot out of line with the other rails.

The chairs were then roughly refixed at the extreme ends of the sleepers, and the bent rails bolted as firmly as possible in their new positions. While this was being done the four rails next the gaps were unbolted and entirely removed. When all was done there was a break 40 feet long in each track, and the pair of rails on the side from which the trains were approaching had been bent inwards, and now pointed towards the corresponding pair on the other track, thus:—



For the first time the men now understood the whole significance of the work they were doing. They had known enough of their young leader's plans to expect much, but now they expected a great deal more and moved off the track full of suppressed excitement and jubilation. Like a pistol-shot it had come to them that the brutal destruction of the poor village beyond Bastogne was about to be very amply revenged indeed.

The rumble of the two trains approaching from opposite directions was now drawing very close, and the men hung about in the bushes, a few yards up the side of the cutting, watching eagerly for any sign that the drivers had seen the short breaks in the line and were bringing their trains to a standstill. But there was no sign of this. The trains approached at a steady speed, and the drivers, if on the look-out, noticed nothing amiss in the patches of deeper shadow in the half darkness of the gloomy cutting.

The two trains reached the fatal spot almost at the same moment. Both followed the direction of the tampered rails and left the track with a bumping grind that made those who heard it shudder. Then they collided with a crash that could be heard for miles. The engines reared up almost on end—as though in a desperate attempt to leap over one another—and rolled over on their sides. Behind them the great wagons still drove on and piled themselves up on high in a welter of hideous confusion.

The noise, the confusion, the sense of dire destruction, were almost paralysing; but, almost without being conscious of it, Max found himself eagerly scanning the wrecked wagons to see what they contained. The "bag" was one sufficient to satisfy the most ardent patriot. The trucks, or some of them, of the train bound outwards to Liège clearly contained the guns of several heavy batteries. Those of the inward train were filled with machinery and other stores filched from the great Belgian workshops and being transferred to Germany to set up fresh works there. A few of the trucks of the inward train appeared to contain shells, and these Max marked down as the point for the final attack.

The noise of the collision, of course, brought all the men guarding the line, within hearing, hurrying to the scene. None of them, or of the survivors of those on the trains, had any thought that the catastrophe was anything but an accident, and no attempt was made to search for possible enemies. Most of the German soldiers, indeed, flung down their weapons and busied themselves in the task of extricating men and horses from the piles of overturned wagons.

Thus when again, at Max's signal, the band of British and French soldiers left their hiding-places they were able, in the darkness, to mingle with the Germans and go about their final work almost unchallenged. In only two instances were German officers or non-commissioned officers inconveniently inquisitive, and those difficulties were solved by an instant attack with the bayonet. Even these conflicts were insufficient to attract special attention amid the general turmoil. Any who noticed the actions might readily enough have concluded that they were the result of a quarrel or of some demented victim of the accident attacking an imaginary foe.

The work which still kept Max and his auxiliaries on the dangerous scene of their successful exploit was that of bringing down great bundles of straw and dead wood, prepared some time beforehand, from the top of the railway cutting where they had been hidden in readiness. The wagons, which Max had ascertained to be indeed full of shells, were what they were after, and against these the bundles were piled. Almost unmolested the exulting men made all ready for the final blow which should set the seal upon their terrible reprisal.

And yet, when it came to the point, Max hesitated to give the order to fire the pyre. There might yet be some unfortunate men pinned alive beneath the wreckage, and he was unwilling to add to their miseries the dreadful fate of being burned alive. For ten, fifteen, and almost twenty minutes he waited, until he could feel satisfied that none were likely still to remain alive beneath the pile. His own men indeed, well knowing what was coming, had busied themselves in dragging out their fallen foes from the certain fate which would otherwise have befallen them, forgetting their desire for reprisals in their pity for wounded and helpless men.

At last the moment arrived. Max gave the word, the straw was fired, and the band beat a hasty retreat to the shelter of the bushes on the north side of the cutting.

A loud cry of warning and alarm arose from the German soldiers as the flames shot up into the air, illuminating the track for many yards around. A harsh command rang out, and a number of men dashed forward to beat or stamp out the flare.

"Those men must be kept away, Corporal," cried Max quickly. "We must not leave until the fire has got firm hold."

"Bayonets, men," cried Corporal Shaw sharply. "Get ready to charge home."

"No, no, Corporal," cried Max, seizing him by the arm; "no bayonet fighting this round. Keep them away by rifle-fire from the bushes. They know nothing of us now; let them remain as ignorant as possible."

"Right. Ten rounds, rapid, boys! Ready! present! fire!"

The Germans had barely reached the fire and begun to pull away the burning faggots, when a sudden and withering hail of bullets swept down upon them. Half of them fell at once, and the remainder recoiled in confusion and doubt. Fire seemed to spit from the darkness all about them, and none knew for the moment whether they were in the presence of a foe, or whether a detachment of their own men, but just arrived, had taken them for enemy wreckers. Long before the officer in command could rally his men, push out scouts to ascertain the cause of the rifle-fire, and set the main body to resume their task, the fire had caught such firm hold that it was obvious to all that at any moment the shells might explode.

A general stampede away from the vicinity of the burning wagons ensued, and at a respectful distance the discomfited Germans gazed at the fire or occupied themselves in firing in the direction apparently taken by their unseen foes.

Suddenly, with an ear-splitting roar, the shells exploded. The concussion was tremendous, and huge showers of shells, broken bits of wagons, gravel, and flaming wood fell heavily in all directions. Many of those looking on were killed outright by the avalanche of falling material, and the remainder fled in mad panic from the deadly scene.

Max had already withdrawn his men beyond the edge of the cutting and marched them a couple of hundred yards farther down the line. The explosion caused them no casualties beyond a few minor cuts and bruises, and, with one last look at the track beneath them, they turned their backs upon the place and marched silently away towards the Dutch frontier.

The work of reprisal for a foul deed was done. Where the explosion had taken place an enormous crater had been torn in the permanent way. Beyond that the line was blocked by great piles of tangled wreckage which must have weighed hundreds of tons—Krupp guns and gun mountings, twisted almost out of all recognition, masses of machinery ruined beyond redemption, and engines, wagons, rails, and sleepers piled high in inextricable confusion. Many hours, if not days, of unremitting toil would be needed before the line could be reopened for traffic. Thus the main lines of communication of the Germans were severed and a heavy blow struck for the cause of the Allies.

On the trunk of a tree, at the top of the cutting close by, a notice was fixed: "In reprisal for the burning of an innocent village above Bastogne."

CHAPTER XIX

A Further Blow

The point at which the line to Aix had been broken was not far from the Dutch frontier, and for an hour or so Max and the band he led made good progress. Then their difficulties began. The alarm had clearly been given, and a serious alarm it seemed to be. Bodies of troops, and especially cavalry, were on the march in all directions, and it became a matter of the utmost difficulty to avoid contact with them. Finally, Max, as the day dawned, led his men right away into a wide expanse of farm-land, and took them towards a solitary farm-house.

"What's the game now, laddie?" asked Corporal Shaw, as Max led them boldly towards the farm-house, much to the surprise of the farmer and his family, who came out to see what this strange visit of a body of armed men might mean. "Doesn't this give us away to the enemy?"

"We must have rest and food, Corporal," replied Max seriously. "If we surround the farm and keep prisoners all who are there, and detain all who call, we shall be safe if no parties of German soldiers happen to light upon us. If we can get through the day, I think we shall get safely across the frontier. We are only seven miles away, and a few hours of darkness will see us there."

"Good! You know your business, lad, I can see," replied Shaw briskly, and he gave a quick order to his men to spread out at the double and surround the farm. Max interpreted the order to the French soldiers, who promptly followed suit. In a moment or two the farm had been surrounded,

and the men began to close in upon it.

The surprise and curiosity of the German farmer and his family quickly turned to fear as the object of the move became apparent. They could now see, too, the faces and equipment of the men converging upon them, and knew that, whatever they might be, they were certainly not soldiers of the Fatherland.

"You're a prisoner, mein Herr," cried Corporal Shaw cheerfully, as he strode up to the burly farmer and slapped him familiarly on the shoulder. "Be good, or it will be the worse for you."

Max interpreted his words, and added the information that neither he nor any of his household were to stir outside the house, or even to look out of the windows. They were to consider themselves close prisoners, and on their good behaviour their own treatment would absolutely depend. The farmer, as soon as he could recover from his astonishment, passed the order on to his family and domestics with a peremptoriness no doubt considerably enhanced by his own lively fears. The Germans filed into the farm-house, followed by all the band except two. These were set on the watch on the roofs of two barns a little distance away on opposite sides of the building.

Max then called upon the farmer to provide a meal for them all, promising him in return fair payment. Soon the whole band, in high good humour, were deep in enjoyment of the best meal they had had since the retreat from Mons and Charleroi began.

During the day there were occasional alarms as bodies of German soldiers were observed scouring the country in the distance, but none approached the farm-house. Several labourers, evidently missing the presence of the farmer, called, and these were promptly made prisoners. At nightfall everything was made ready for the last march.

The women were sent to their rooms and locked securely in. Then the men, seven in number, were marshalled in line and informed that any attempt to give warning to German troops or the authorities would result in instant death. The order to march was given, and, in single file, Max and the farmer leading, with the remainder of the prisoners in the centre, the band moved across country towards the Dutch frontier.

With the aid of the farmer, Max led the band to a point opposite Maastricht, where the frontier ran through a little wood. He hoped that here there would be no difficulty in getting unmolested through the barbed-wire fences everywhere erected along the frontier by the Germans. A road ran across the frontier close by the wood and a post had been established there by the enemy, but Max believed that, favoured by night and the darkness of the wood, there would be no difficulty in eluding observation.

They entered the wood unobserved, and Max halted the band and went forward with Dale and one of the English soldiers to silence the sentry and cut the wire. The sentry was an oldish man, of the Landwehr, and entirely unsuspecting. He was seized by the throat from behind, his rifle snatched from his hand, and his arms and legs securely pinioned. Then his throat was released and his mouth securely gagged. It was all over in ten minutes, and, leaving the soldier and Dale at work upon the wire, Max went back to bring along the rest of the men.

To his consternation he found them on the move, the last files disappearing from the wood in the direction of the German frontier post, two men only being left behind in charge of the prisoners. Running after them, Max caught up the rearmost men, and was told that they were about to attack the Germans and root them out. Much hurt and angered at this sudden reckless move, Max ran forward to the front of the column and accosted Corporal Shaw.

"What is this, Corporal?" he cried. "It was to be my business to get you over the frontier. I don't agree with your attacking the Germans here."

"That's all right, sir," replied Shaw, still pressing on. "We know what we're about. We've reconnoitred the place, and can clear out the whole lot without turning a hair. Come along, lad, and lend a hand."

"No, Shaw, I'm not going to have this. I've breached the wire a few yards away yonder and put the sentry out of action. All we have to do is to walk through and we are safe. This mad attack right on the frontier will——"

"No, no; our fellows will be disappointed if they don't get one more fling at the Germans!" cried Shaw, pressing on as though anxious to get away from Max's protests. "It'll all be over in——"

At this moment the German sentry in front of the building which housed the frontier guard caught sight of dark shadows approaching. He challenged, and almost simultaneously brought his rifle up to his shoulder.

There was a flash and a report, and one of the men just behind Max gave a gasp and staggered. He recovered himself, however, and with the rest of the band charged madly down upon the sentry and the guard, who were now rapidly tumbling out of the entrance of the building, rifle in hand.

The fight that ensued was to Max the most desperate he had ever seen. The French and British soldiers, after all their discomforts and privations and the terrible sights they had witnessed, were burning with the desire to get to close quarters with the Germans and to try conclusions with them. Like a whirlwind they flung themselves upon the hated foe, and, scarcely firing a shot,

stabbed and bayoneted with wild and desperate energy.

The Germans who had poured outside the building were cut down in a remarkably short space of time, and, without a pause, the men dashed into the passage and up the stairs, every man striving to be the first to close with the enemy. Against such reckless valour as this the German Landwehr, although they outnumbered their assailants at least two to one, could do nothing, and it could not have been more than eight minutes from the first onrush before the last German had been cut down.

"Set a light to it, boys," commanded Shaw, highly excited with the success of the combat. "Let's have a blaze to light our way across the frontier, and to tell the Germans we bid them farewell."

"Now, boys, three good cheers for the Allies and down with the Germans!"

The huzzas were heartily given as the fire promptly kindled within blazed up. Round the burning house the soldiers danced, flinging into the fire the arms and equipment of their foes. Across the frontier, only a few yards away, the soldiers of the Dutch guard had turned out, and they watched the strange scene with an interest that to one at least of the band of British and French was far from pleasing.

"Fall in!" commanded Shaw, and the men obeyed. "Form fours—right! Now, boys, we've seen our last of Germany for a time, and are going to march into Holland. Soon we shall be back in the armies of the Allies, ready to take part in another march through Germany. Now, then, by the right, quick——"

"One moment, Shaw," cried Max quickly. "You are making a big mistake if you think you can march thus into Holland and also be free to join the armies of the Allies."

"Why so?" cried Corporal Shaw impatiently. "Why can't we? Who's to stop us?"

"The Dutch soldiers will stop you quick enough," replied Max. "Do you think they will treat us as they do escaped prisoners or fugitives after a battle at their very frontier?"

"Well, what will they treat us as?" cried Shaw sharply.

"As belligerents, of course. We shall be disarmed and interned, and our fighting days will be over."

"Yes, Shaw," interposed Peck. "The lad's right, and we have played the fool in lashing out at the Germans right agin the frontier. You're too headstrong, Shaw. The lad was running this show. Why didn't you leave him alone?"

"Pooh! If we drop our tools, and march across, the Dutchmen will let us go," replied the discomfited Shaw apologetically. "Let's try it on anyway."

"Nay, nay, Shaw," cried the Scot in a deep voice. "Ye've spoiled this business, and ye'd better let be. The lad has the best heid, and let him have his way over it. Come, lad, what say ye—what's oor next move?"

It was certainly time for a move of some sort. On both flanks of the party desultory firing had commenced. The sentries posted along the frontier had doubtless been attracted by the sound of the fighting at their head-quarters and were straggling inwards, exchanging dropping shots with the men on the outskirts of the band. As their numbers increased, a regular battle would ensue, finally compelling the band to surrender, or to cross the frontier and be interned.

Max had no mind to be interned, whatever Shaw felt on the subject. His great task of guarding the Durend workshops was still waiting for him to complete, and were he put out of action it was certain that no one else would carry it on. Shaw had made a great mistake, but it was possibly not irretrievable. At any rate, Max believed it could be set right by prompt and resolute action.

"Come, then," he said firmly. "If you still wish to fight again for your country, follow me, and I will do my best to keep you from losing the chance. You must be silent and watchful and make the best speed possible. Exert yourselves to the utmost for three or four hours, and then I hope we may be safe again. Come—fall in in single file, with the prisoners in the centre, and follow me. Exchange no shots unless I give the word. If you are attacked, use the bayonet, and the bayonet only."

There was a murmur of general assent and a quick bustle as the men fell in. Several were slightly wounded, but only two sufficiently so to need any assistance. Two men took their stand by each of these, and as Max led the way inland from the frontier, through the open country, these assisted them to keep up with the others.

Max kept the German farmer close by his side. The man knew the country well, and Max gave him to understand that his comrades would be very glad indeed of an excuse to strafe him. The man certainly had no reason to disbelieve him. The wild, fierce looks of the men, the assured way in which they marched through an enemy's country, and the pitched battle, ending in the burning of a German post, just fought were enough to convince him that he had to deal with men who were nothing if not determined. At any rate, Max had no trouble with him, and found him a ready and reliable guide all through the night.

For nearly two hours the band moved obliquely inland. Then Max turned and aimed once more at the frontier at a point at least ten miles away from the place where the previous attempt had

been made.

The German patrols were fewer here, and with only one mishap they reached the frontier. This mishap took place while the party was crossing a high road. Scouts had reported all clear, and all had crossed except the men at the rear, who were helping the wounded along. These were in the middle of the road, when a motorcar, moving at high speed, turned a corner a short distance away and ran rapidly down upon them.

The powerful headlights of the motor of course revealed the little group of men in the roadway. Brakes were applied, and the machine came to a standstill a yard or two away.

"Who are you? What do you here?" came in the deep peremptory tones of a man who was evidently a German officer.

For the moment the party in the road, half-blinded by the powerful lights, stopped stupidly where they were. None of them understood what was said, and none made a move either to fly or to resist capture.

Max, the instant he saw the headlights approaching, ran back to the roadway and was just in time to hear the officer's demand. It was too late for flight—too late for anything but attack—and, calling to the men nearest him, he sprang towards the car.

Two revolvers flashed in the darkness. One of the bullets cut through the side of his jacket and grazed his side. The other missed altogether. In another moment he was alongside the car and using the rifle and bayonet he carried with hearty goodwill.

The car contained four German officers and a soldier chauffeur. For a fraction of a second Max attacked them single-handed. Then other men sprang to his assistance, and from both sides of the car the Germans were assaulted with an energy they doubtless had never experienced before. It was quickly over. All the men were bayoneted, and left for dead, and, without waiting to do more than dash out the headlights and overturn the car in a ditch, Max again led the band forward to the frontier.

Day was breaking as the band neared the frontier, at a point where it was crossed by a railway. In a little copse at the side of the track Max halted his men and allowed them a short rest while he went with Shaw to reconnoitre and determine the best means of making the actual crossing. They found, of course, the line well guarded, and with a strong post at the frontier to watch the gap necessarily left in the great barbed-wire fence. The post consisted of about thirty men of the Landwehr, and the band of British and French fugitives could have rushed and destroyed it with the greatest ease. But, should they do this, Max feared that they could not cross into Holland and retain their freedom. They would, he felt sure, be treated as soldiers and be interned for the duration of the war. None of them had any desire for that; all wished to be free to strike again at the foe.

From the frontier back to a busy little station, two miles inland, Max and Shaw continued their search. Then they returned to the place where they had left the rest of the band in hiding.

"Well, Max, what do you think of it?" asked Dale. "D'ye think we can get through anywhere about here without too much of a rumpus?"

"I hope so. I've thought of something that seems to promise."

"What is it, old man?"

"Take forcible possession of yon station in the middle of the night and collar the first train that arrives *en route* to the frontier. We ought then to be able to run her successfully through the Dutch frontier guards."

"Phew!" cried Dale in amazement.

Shaw gave a prolonged chuckle of intense delight. "Train-snatching—eh?" he cried at last. "That'll suit the boys, I give you my word."

"It's not so easy as it sounds," responded Max soberly. "It needs careful planning, for it must be done like clockwork if we are not to make a mess of it."

"Well, we can do that, I suppose?" replied Shaw confidently. "You found the clockwork all right in that raid on the railway? You plan it out and you'll find we shan't fail you."

"No, I don't think you will, Shaw. Well, it must be done about an hour after nightfall, so we must lose no time. This is how I think it ought to be done," and Max unfolded the plan as it had so far framed itself in his mind.

For an hour or two the three discussed the affair earnestly together. Then they broached the scheme to their waiting comrades. As they anticipated, it met with rapturous approval, and it was in a fever of impatience—for the hour of their deliverance or their defeat was close at hand—that the whole of the band awaited the closing in of night.

CHAPTER XX

Across the Frontier

A train steamed slowly into Storbach station. The stationmaster and a host of officials crossed the platform and prepared to search and interrogate the passengers with that thoroughness and also with that lack of courtesy and consideration which seem peculiarly Prussian.

The engine-driver and his fireman, momentarily released from toil, crossed to the near side of their engine, leaned over the rail, and prepared to enjoy the proceedings. The platform was well lighted, but beyond was a wall of darkness into which the eye could not penetrate more than a yard or two. Suddenly, out of this obscurity, three men appeared. Swiftly they crossed the platform, and, without a moment's hesitation, sprang upon the engine.

"See this?" growled one of them—it was Peck—levelling his bayonet at the engine-driver who had shrunk back into the cab. "You do? Well, then, keep quiet or you'll feel it—sharp. We're desp'rit men, we are, and that's all about it."

The engine-driver understood well enough, and the fireman, who had been similarly cornered by another of the trio, seemed to understand equally well that the first doubtful movement on his part would be his last. Full possession having thus been obtained, the three new-comers gave an eye to what was happening on the platform.

Events there were sufficiently exciting. From all sides armed men of a particularly wild-looking variety had suddenly invaded the platform. One group had promptly seized the telegraph office and seen to it that no messages appealing for help should be sent along the wires in either direction. In fact they went a step further, and put the instrument out of action so thoroughly that all risk from this source was at an end for a long time to come.

The main body as promptly attacked the guard of soldiers in charge of the station and overwhelmed them utterly at the first onrush. German Landsturm and Landwehr troops were as children in the hands of these veteran British and French soldiers, and complete victory was won at the cost of two men slightly wounded only. Then came the turn of the astonished officials, railway porters, and the few passengers waiting to enter the train. These surrendered with commendable promptitude, and, dumbfounded with amazement, were shepherded into one of the waiting-rooms and locked securely in.

The passengers on the train were ordered out on to the platform, ushered into another waiting-room, and there similarly secured. All was now ready, and Max gave the signal for the men who had been stationed outside, guarding all exits, to close in and for the whole of the band to entrain.

Running forward to the engine, Max sprang up and gave the signal to start.

"Full speed ahead, Peck. Let her go."

That worthy, by the aid of very expressive pantomime, assisted by a sentence or two in German from Max, quickly induced the engine-driver and fireman to perform their offices, and the train moved out from the platform to the tune of suppressed cheers from its delighted occupants. The two miles to the frontier were covered in a few minutes, and with a cheer, no longer suppressed but full of heart-felt gladness, the fugitives saw the last outpost of their enemies flash by. They were now in a friendly country and had only to play their cards with care and moderation to find themselves once more on the way to their native lands.

Presently Max ordered the train to be brought to a standstill. They were now well into Holland and there were no line guards, and, at that hour, none to mark their doings. All rifles and bayonets were handed out and dropped into a muddy ditch. Then the journey was resumed until they reached a siding into which the train could be run.

The driver and firemen were gagged, bound hand and foot, and left in charge of their empty train while their captors marched on foot across country *en route* for Rotterdam. They were stopped and questioned many times, but on each occasion they were eventually allowed to proceed.

At the great Dutch port Max and Dale took leave of their soldier friends. Max, now that he had brought the band to safety, wished to seek out his mother and sister, and Dale, of course, must go with him.

On the deck of a ship bound for England the two friends said good-bye to Shaw and his stanch command, and when they trod the gangway back to the shore of Holland the cheer that went up brought all the Dutchmen and German spies about the dock hurrying to the scene. Huzza after huzza rent the air, and, when the ship drew away out into the stream on its way to the ocean, the strains of the Marseillaise and Rule Britannia could be heard high above the throb of engines and the clank and rattle of the busy port.

"Fine fellows, those," remarked Dale with more than a suggestion of regret in his voice.

"None better," replied Max emphatically. "And how well the men of the two races worked together. I think it must be an earnest of the way France and Britain will work together in the great alliance."

"Aye. And what part are *we* going to play, old man?" asked Dale eagerly. "'Pon my word I feel all on fire to get to work and strike a few good blows for England."

"So we will, but we have earned a rest, so let us go to Maastricht and stay quietly with my mother and sister for a little while. Then we will go to England and offer ourselves for service in any capacity in which we can be of most use. Then 'hard all' right up the course."

"Hurrah! I'm with you. Forward all! Paddle!"

"But I should like a job that will give me a chance to give an eye occasionally to the Durend works," presently remarked Max meditatively.

"There you go again," groaned Dale. "Those works of yours are the bane of my life. There's no getting away from them for a moment."

"They're my special job, and Schenk is my special enemy," replied Max in the steady resolute tone Dale knew so well. "There is no one who can take my place there in thwarting the enemy's plans, and while I live I can never forget it."

"I don't believe you can," agreed Dale comically, "so it's no use my trying. I suppose that will be the end of your fine talk about our offering our services to the British authorities?"

"Not at all, old man. What about the Secret Service? With our knowledge of Belgium and its languages I should think they might find us employment that will be every whit as useful to the Allies as fighting in the ranks. And it will give me a chance, occasionally, to see what Schenk is up to, and, perhaps, to try another fall with him."

"Well, *that* doesn't sound so bad. Anyway it is good enough to think about a little more before we make up our minds. Now for Maastricht and that rest we've been chasing ever since we left Liège for the Ardennes. At last there seems a chance of our getting it."

At Maastricht Max had a joyful reception. His mother had never lost hope of his safe return, but the suspense had been trying, and the news from Liège had not been of a kind to reassure her. However, here he was back again, safe and sound, and in that fact all fears and anxieties were forgotten. Dale shared in the welcome, and for a week or two the friends stayed happily at home. Then the leaven began to work again, and one day Dale found Max going carefully through the miscellaneous lot of papers which he had taken from his father's safe along with the money and securities on which his mother had since been living.

"Business, eh?" he enquired jocularly.

"Something of the sort," admitted Max. "Looking through those old papers we raided out of Schenk's clutches. Some of them are his and not my father's, and I can see why he was so anxious to get them back again. Why, here is correspondence—between the rascal and someone who, I expect, is an agent of the German Government—dating back years before the war, in which Schenk is instructed to prepare the Durend works for the eventuality of a German occupation of Liège. It's all here, even to the laying down of concrete gun-platforms, one of which the impudent beggar disguised as our tennis-court."

"Good! Anything else?"

"Nothing quite so good as that. Plans of the Durend mines and works and such-like. They may be useful some day."

"When we get rid of Schenk, eh? That will be some time yet, so you need not bother your head about plans of the works. In fact, to put it mildly—I don't want to hurt your feelings—I expect the place will be so altered when you get it back that you won't recognize it, and those plans will be of mighty little use to you or anyone else."

"Yes," replied Max thoughtfully. "You're referring to Schenk's threat that, if ever the Germans had to leave Liège, he would smash up the works so thoroughly that not one brick would be left upon another?"

"Aye."

"He's just the man to do it."

"He is that. And the less reason for you to bother about the place. It's no use worrying; it can't be helped."

"I'm not so sure. Anyway I'm going to do what I can to save the place. As for these papers of Schenk's, I'm going to hand them over to the British consul. They'll be useful, I don't doubt, as one more proof of Germany's deep-laid plans for war."

Max did as he proposed, and the papers were accepted with alacrity and forwarded to the British Foreign Office. At the same time Max made application on his own and Dale's behalf for employment in Belgium as members of the British Secret Service. After a week or two's delay, during which time enquiries no doubt were being made into their credentials, an official arrived with the necessary documents, and after a long conversation, detailing exactly what was required of them, Max and Dale were accepted and enrolled.

A few days later they had said good-bye to their home in quiet Maastricht and were away across the frontier, in the great whirlpool of the war once more.

They resumed the disguises of Walloon workmen, which had already served them in such good

stead, and applied for work in Liège and all the big towns of Belgium. For two years and more they worked steadily, in different workshops up and down the country, gathering news and transmitting it faithfully to the agents of the British Government. They were cool and reliable observers, and their information was found to be so uniformly accurate that it was relied upon more and more as the months went by.

CHAPTER XXI

The Great Coup

At the commencement of their work in the Secret Service, Max and Dale visited Liège, and, while collecting information there, thought out and put into operation a far-reaching plan that they hoped might checkmate Schenk's schemes for the destruction of the Durend works when the Germans should be forced to evacuate the city. It was a plan formulated after they had again got into touch with M. Dubec and the small band of men who still loyally refused to work in the interests of the invaders. M. Dubec had imparted to them the information—not unexpected—that Schenk had placed mines under all the workshops, and put everything in readiness for blowing them into the air whenever he should wish to do so.

"I have it from one of the men who actually helped to dig and fill them, Monsieur. He was not allowed to help in the wiring, and he believes this was done secretly at night, by Germans whom Schenk knew he could trust."

"So you know that the shops are mined, but do not know where the wires run?"

"That is true, Monsieur."

"Could you not find out?"

"I do not think so, Monsieur. Since that last affair of ours there have been too many sentries in the yards, especially at night. It would be impossible to dig anywhere."

"We ought to do something, Dubec."

"Yes, Monsieur?"

"But the job is to know what," Dale struck in. "We can't tunnel underground, I suppose, and get at them that way, so we must find out by spying where the wires are run to—eh, Max?"

"Tunnel?" ejaculated Max. "That's an idea, Dale. Those old mines we were tracing in the plans the other day! Why not?"

"Why not what?" asked Dale a little testily.

"Why, you know we noticed that one of them ran right up to the outskirts of the city? Well, why shouldn't we continue it secretly, until we get beneath the yards, and then burrow upwards to the workshops? Then we can remove the mine-charges from below, and sit still and hold tight until the great day arrives."

"Hurrah!" cried Dale enthusiastically. "The very thing. Phew! what a coup it will be!"

"We shall, of course, have to get Dubec here and one or two others to arrange it for us. They must go to work in the Durend mines, and take it in turns to spend a night down there. Each man, as his turn comes, must go into the old workings, and continue the gallery fixed upon in the direction of the Durend works. Narrow seams of coal, not worth working, did run in that direction according to the plans, and they will have no difficulty in getting rid of the coal of course. The rock they hew out must be taken away and dumped in remote, abandoned workings, where it is not likely to be found or understood."

"Pon my word, it sounds like the real thing," cried Dale with fresh enthusiasm. "But it'll take a long time I should think, so we must make a start at once. What do you think, Dubec?"

"Yes, Monsieur, it will take much time. But we will work hard, knowing that we are working for our country. It will make our hearts light again to feel that we are once more of use, and some who might give way will keep on and on, refusing to bend the knee to the German tyrants and to work their will."

"Yes, it may well do that," said Max thoughtfully. "And if any object that they will be helping the Germans by sending coal up to the surface, tell them that I say that the other work they are doing far outweighs that. If we can secure the Durend works intact, ready to make shells and guns for the Allies when the Germans are driven out, we shall have struck a strong blow—aye, one of the strongest—for our side."

"I will tell them, Monsieur, though I do not think it will be necessary."

"Any money and tools that will be required I will supply. And I will occasionally come down into the mine and correct the direction in which you are driving the gallery. We must be exact, or all our work will be wasted."

After a few days' more planning, and another consultation with Dubec, the details of the scheme were settled to everyone's satisfaction, and the work commenced. The direction of affairs on the spot was left to Dubec, and to him was also left the responsibility of deciding to what men the secret should be imparted. Then Max and Dale left the district and went on with their own special work, satisfied that the last and final stratagem for defeating Schenk was in good hands, and likely, in the course of time, to be brought to a successful issue.

It is not here that we can describe the many adventures that befell Max and Dale while in the British Secret Service. They were numerous and exciting enough, but this tale deals primarily with the fortunes of the great Durend workshops and their influence in the war. A long, tedious period of trench fighting now began on the Western Front. There were no big territorial changes, although there were many attacks on a grand scale at Ypres, at Verdun, on the Somme, and in the plain of Flanders. But this period, tedious though it was, came to an end at last in the great German retreat. Then came for Max and Dale the crucial period of all their long and patient scheming to outwit their own special enemy, Otto von Schenkendorf, the manager of the Durend works.

When the great retreat began, Max and Dale were at Liège, on the spot. At the gates of the works they watched the serried ranks of workmen and workwomen as they trudged out in response to the manager's orders that the works must be closed and that all workers of German nationality or sympathies must retire across the frontier. The anger and consternation in their faces were a treat to see, after the long years of their arrogance towards men and women of Belgian nationality. The war was virtually over—so said their faces—and many of them were doubtless dreading lest infamies, similar to those wreaked on the helpless Belgians, might be perpetrated in *their* towns and villages.

As the crowd thinned, Max and Dale caught sight of the manager, accompanied by a German officer, seated in a great grey motor just inside the gates, apparently waiting for the last workman to file out and away. The guard of soldiers was still there, standing stiffly to attention, and it seemed to Max that there was an air of tension about them all, as though something was about to happen. He could well guess what. Suddenly, in the distance, there came the sound of dropping rifle-shots.

"They've cut it pretty fine, if those shots mean the advance guard of the Allies," remarked Max in a voice tense with excitement. "The works are clear of the workmen; now for the last great act. Then the curtain!"

Herr Schenk—as we shall continue to call him—stood up in his car and shouted to the officer of the guard:

"You have your instructions, Lieutenant. Act upon them now without delay."

The officer saluted, turned about with military precision, and strode into the guard-room.

Herr Schenk resumed his seat, nodded to the chauffeur, and the car moved slowly through the gates into the road. Max thought he was about to leave the works for good and all, but the car stopped at the side of the road a hundred yards or so from the gates, and all in her stood up and gazed back in the direction of the works. In the distance, but nearer now, could be heard a brisk fusillade of rifle-shots, with now and again the brief chatter of a machine-gun.

"Strong cavalry patrols approaching," commented Max. "They are driving in scattered bodies of stragglers or outposts, I should say. Look now at Schenk! He is waiting for the works to go up sky-high."

The moments passed, and nothing happened. A minute, two minutes, three minutes. Still there was no change, and the tense attitude of the men waiting in the car relaxed, and they began talking together in low tones. Suddenly the figure of the officer of the guard appeared at the gates, gesticulating excitedly.

Schenk gave a quick order to the chauffeur. The car was turned and moved quickly back to the gates, and there stopped. The officer of the guard ran to it, leaned over the side, and explained volubly. Max and Dale, from where they stood, could hear nothing of what was said, but they knew, almost as well as if they had heard, that the officer was explaining that he had tried to fire the mines, but somehow without success.

With a gesture of rage or impatience Schenk sprang out of the car, and, followed by both officers, ran quickly to the guard-room and disappeared from view.

The dropping shots had approached quite near, and Max believed that the skirmishers could not be more than half a mile away, and were advancing with a speed that indicated that they consisted either of cavalry or armed motors.

"I'd give something to see their faces now—wouldn't you, Max?" queried Dale, who could hardly contain himself in his delight.

Max was busy scribbling on a sheet of paper torn from his notebook, and did not for a moment reply. When he had finished, he folded it up carefully and addressed it on the outside. "Let us walk past the gates, Dale, as though just passing. I am going to administer the *coup de grâce* to our friend Schenk."

They crossed the road and slouched along past the gates. As they passed the great grey motorcar, Max lightly dropped the note he was carrying on to the seat which Schenk had just been occupying. The chauffeur was looking eagerly in the direction of the guard-room, and did not observe the act or the missive. They slouched on until they turned a corner, and then Max cried eagerly:

"Now back again and in that garden among the bushes. We shall see it all, and see Schenk's face when he reads my note."

"What did you say, old man?"

"Let us get out of sight there, and I will tell you."

In a few moments the two friends were snugly ensconced in a clump of bushes in a garden very near the entrance to the works. The grey car was still occupied only by the chauffeur, but they could tell, by his listening attitude and the expectant looks of the guards, that an altercation of some sort was going on inside the guard-room.

"This is what I said, old man," Max went on in a voice which betrayed his excitement:—

"To HERR VON SCHENKENDORF, *alias* OTTO SCHENK,

"I observe that you have at last accepted your dismissal from your post as manager of the Durend works. You are going—hated and despised—back to the land which gave you birth. And at last, in this moment, you must know yourself defeated by those at whom you scoffed as boys. The works you swore to destroy still stand intact, and will, in a short time, be throwing all their weight and power into the cause of the Allies. Adieu.

"MAX DUREND,
"JACK DALE."

"Good, old man! That'll make the beggar sit up if anything will. Hark! cavalry. Ours or theirs, I wonder?"

In a measure they were answered by a sudden move of the soldiers guarding the gates. The lieutenant had shouted an order, and they fell into marching order and strode swiftly away in the direction of the frontier. The officer remained where he was, and was almost immediately joined by Herr Schenk and the other officer. All three walked quickly to the motor and got in.

The manager, as he did so, picked up a letter lying on his seat and glanced at the writing. He gave a start that was visible even to the watchers at the other side of the road, then plucked it open with nervous, jerky movements. He glanced quickly through it and sprang uncontrollably to his feet, his face aflame with passion.

The officer at his side shouted to him in alarm and endeavoured to pull him back into his seat.

Suddenly there was a loud clatter of horses' hoofs at the end of the street, and a body of Belgian cavalry debouched into view. The chauffeur of the grey car instantly started and turned his machine, and it moved away with ever-increasing speed, Schenk still standing and gesticulating wildly, with Max's letter clenched in his right hand, and the officer endeavouring ineffectually to drag him back into his seat. As the car passed the two watchers, they could not repress their exultation, but jumped to their feet and gave a loud, full-throated British cheer.



THE TWO WATCHERS GAVE A LOUD, FULL-THROATED BRITISH CHEER

The officer whose hands were free drew his revolver and fired viciously at them. The shots went wide, and in a moment or two the car had turned a corner and vanished out of sight.

A squadron of Belgian cavalry clattered by, and Max shouted to the officer in command that a car containing German officers had just driven off and that a detachment of infantry was only a matter of a few minutes ahead. The officer nodded and pressed on, while Max and Dale cheered the men as they rode eagerly by.

"I think we have seen the last we shall see of Schenk, Dale," Max remarked as they crossed the road and entered the Durend yards.

"Yes, and I don't suppose you, or anyone else in Belgium, will be sorry."

"No; least of all our Walloon workmen. They hated him to a man for his overbearing, tyrannical ways. We are all well rid of him."

The works seemed strangely deserted. The doors of the workshops stood wide open, but inside all was still. The great lathes were just as they had been left, some with shells half turned, indicating the haste with which the attendants had obeyed the call to go. Other hands would doubtless finish the turning, and the shells would be fired at the Germans and not against the armies of the Allies.

"I suppose Schenk will have taken all the firm's cash?" suggested Dale presently.

"Yes, of course. But that will be more than covered by the additions he has made to the buildings and plant since the Germans came. I should think the concern is worth twice as much as when he took it in hand for the Fatherland."

"That's great! No wonder he nearly went out of his mind when he found he must leave it all intact and in first-rate working order for you to enter into. If he lives until he is as old as Methuselah he will never forget it."

"I don't think his German friends will let him forget it. They will find it hard to forgive a bungle that leaves a first-class munition factory absolutely undamaged in the hands of their enemies. I don't envy Schenk his job of persuading them that he couldn't help it."

"Not after the other explanations he has had to make on our account—those siege-gun drawings, the wrecking of the power-house, workshops, etcetera."

"No, he is a back number now, and he will be lucky if it is no worse."

(Long afterwards they learned that the exasperation of the Germans at Herr Schenk's failure to destroy his workshops before the evacuation, was so great that he was tried by court-martial, and, notwithstanding his considerable influence, promptly shot.)

A burst of cheering from the town in the direction of the market-place drew the attention of the two young fellows away from the works to the events that were taking place in the town. They left the works, closing the great gates after them, and joined the townspeople in their great welcome to the soldiers of Belgium and the Allies as they passed through in triumph in pursuit of their enemies. It was all very exhilarating, and even the discovery that Max's house had been burned to the ground was insufficient to damp their patriotic ardour, for they had expected no

less. It had not been possible to arrange to save this, and, as Max said, so long as the works were saved it mattered little about the house. Another could soon be found, or built for that matter. But the works—to get those into full swing in quick time was the equivalent of a victory for the Allies.

And in almost full swing they were in a couple of days. All that day and the next the loyal workmen dribbled back—some from the town, some from remote villages, and many from across the Dutch border. With hearty goodwill they threw themselves into their work, and soon the roar of the lathes and engines announced that the Durend works were themselves once more.

The tale of how Max Durend had fought the long battle of the works, of how vigilantly he had watched over them, and of how, at last, he had won the greatest fight of all in saving them from destruction, passed from mouth to mouth among the workmen. If anything had been needed to cement the strong bond between them and their employer, this would have supplied it. But their relations were already of the best, and this great story served but to set a seal upon it and to render the link between the two unbreakable.

And from strength to strength the great workshops went on. Ever in the van of progress—for Max had learned his work from the bottom upwards and was ever ready to learn more—secure in the possession of skilled workmen filled with zeal and goodwill, well-directed, and trusted far and wide, the Durend works expanded until they were twice the size of any similar concern in Belgium.

Jack Dale stuck to Max to the end. He followed his friend's example and went through all the shops, learning the work thoroughly, and later on became the manager of an important branch of the firm. Eventually he married Max's sister, and drew closer yet the ties which held him to his friend.

Max became, in the fulness of time, something of a figure in Belgium, and did much to aid its recovery from the ravages of the enemy. He never forgot his English blood, and was a foremost supporter of all movements which might draw the two countries closer to one another in friendship and esteem.

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