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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE DESTROYER: A TALE OF INTERNATIONAL INTRIGUE ***

THE DESTROYER

A TALE OF INTERNATIONAL INTRIGUE



BY

BURTON E. STEVENSON

**Author of "The Holladay Case," "The Marathon Mystery,"
"The Mystery of the Boule Cabinet," etc.**

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THE DESTROYER

CONTENTS

| CHAPTER | | PAGE |
|---------|-------------------------------|------|
| I | THE TWENTY-FIFTH OF SEPTEMBER | 1 |
| II | FRANCE IN MOURNING | 14 |
| III | TWO GREAT MEN MEET | 31 |
| IV | THE ALLIES AT WORK | 47 |
| V | AT THE CAFÉ DES VOYAGEURS | 60 |
| VI | THE MYSTERIOUS SIGNALS | 77 |
| VII | THE HUT IN THE GROVE | 88 |
| VIII | THE SECOND INSTALLATION | 108 |
| IX | CHECKMATE | 124 |
| X | THE LAND OF FREEDOM | 137 |
| XI | SHIPMATES | 147 |
| XII | UNDER RUSSIAN RULE | 158 |
| XIII | IN THE WIRELESS HOUSE | 170 |
| XIV | THE MESSAGE | 182 |
| XV | A WORD OF WARNING | 196 |
| XVI | A CHARGE TO KEEP | 208 |
| XVII | THE FIRST CONFERENCE | 221 |
| XVIII | THE SUBSTITUTE SENTRY | 239 |
| XIX | THE SECOND CONFERENCE | 256 |
| XX | THE PRINCE SEEKS DIVERSION | 269 |
| XXI | ON THE EDUCATION OF PRINCES | 283 |
| XXII | THE EVENTS OF MONDAY | 296 |
| XXIII | THE LANDING | 310 |
| XXIV | PACHMANN SCORES | 321 |
| XXV | THE TRAP | 334 |
| XXVI | THE TURN OF THE SCREW | 346 |
| XXVII | THE VOICE AT THE DOOR | 357 |
| XXVIII | CROCHARD, THE INVINCIBLE! | 370 |
| XXIX | THE ESCAPE | 382 |
| XXX | COUNCIL OF WAR | 397 |
| XXXI | THE ALLIANCE ENDS | 407 |
| XXXII | STRASBOURG | 420 |

THE DESTROYER

[Pg 1]

CHAPTER I

THE TWENTY-FIFTH OF SEPTEMBER

Monsieur Aristide Brisson, the fat little proprietor of the Hotel du Nord—a modest house facing the Place Puget at Toulon—turned uneasily in his sleep, as though fretted by a disturbing dream; then he awoke with a start and rubbed his eyes. A glance at the dark windows showed that the dawn was yet far distant, and he was about to turn over and go thankfully to sleep again when a sudden remembrance leaped into his brain. In an instant, he had bounded from the bed, struck a match, and, after a look at his watch, lighted a candle. Then he returned to the bed, and, without compunction, grasped the plump arm of Madame Brisson, who was sleeping peacefully, and shook her roughly.

"Wake, Gabrielle, wake!" he cried—in French, of course.

Madame Brisson, who was also little and fat with a white skin that was her pride, opened her eyes, stared an instant, and then sat up in bed.

"Heavens, Brisson!" she cried, her hand to her throat. "What is it? What has happened? Have you illness?"

"No, no!" said her husband, who was struggling with his trousers. "But rise, quickly!"

[Pg 2]

Madame Brisson glanced at the dark windows.

"I do not understand," she said.

"Ah, Gabrielle," said her husband reproachfully, "I should never have believed you could have forgotten! It is to-day, at sunrise, that our guests depart!"

"Heavens!" cried Madame Brisson again, and she, too, bounded from the bed and began to don her clothes with trembling fingers. "That I should have forgotten! Forgive me, Aristide! What hour is it?"

"It is almost four and a half. At five, the coffee must be ready."

"It shall be!" Madame promised, and hurried from the room, to complete her toilet in the kitchen.

"Fortunately," M. Brisson muttered to himself, "the fire is laid!"

Then, having held his collar to the light and decided that it was clean enough, he buttoned it about his neck, attached his shiny ready-made tie, donned his little white coat, picked up the candle and left the room. Passing along the corridor to the front of the house, he tapped at a door.

"Who is there?" called a rough voice.

"Your coffee will be ready in twenty minutes, sir," said Brisson.

"Very well; and thank you," answered the voice, and Brisson descended to the dining-room, opened the shutters, lighted the lamp, and spread the cloth.

[Pg 3]

He was contemplating his handiwork, his head to one side, when heavy steps sounded on the stair, and a moment later two men entered. They were both of middle-age, somewhat stocky and heavily-built, their hair close-cropped, their faces smooth-shaven and deeply tanned. They had, indeed, that indurated look which only years of exposure to wind and rain can give, except that their upper lips were some shades lighter than the remainder of the face, betraying the fact that they had, until recently, been protected by a moustache. They were dressed in somewhat shabby tweed walking-suits, and wore heavy well-worn shoes. At this moment, each carried in his hand a little knapsack.

M. Brisson greeted them bent double, hoped that they had slept well, foretold a fine day, and assured them that coffee would be ready in a moment.

"Our bags are in our room, properly labelled," said one of them, finding his words with apparent difficulty and accenting them most queerly. "They are to go to Nice, where we will claim them."

"I will attend to it. And you, sirs?" asked Brisson.

"It is our intention to walk."

"By way of the Cornice?"

"Yes."

"You will find it a most beautiful road; even in your own America you will find nothing more beautiful. And how fortunate that you will have so fine a day! Where will you rest to-night?"

"At Frejus, probably."

"A beautiful town, well worth a visit. Permit me to recommend you, sirs, that you stop at the Hotel du Midi. The proprietor is a relative of mine—a nephew, in fact; he will treat you well."

"Thank you," responded the stranger, and at that moment Madame Brisson entered, flushed but triumphant, bearing a tray on which was a small pitcher of very black coffee, a large pitcher of very hot milk, a plate of rolls and "crescents," some pats of butter and a jar of honey. She placed the tray upon the table, greeted the travellers with the brightest of smiles, and then, as she flitted about attending to their wants, M. Brisson retired to his bureau to put the finishing touches to the bill.

This was a weighty business. It was not often that the little Hotel du Nord had the privilege of entertaining guests from America, and M. Brisson was thriftily determined to make the most of it. The price of the room, unfortunately, had been agreed upon in advance; but there were the meals and, above all, the extras—baggage, lights, attendance, one special breakfast at five o'clock—one must be paid for rising in the middle of the night!—confitures, bath—had there been a bath? No matter! Wine, cigars—M. Brisson licked his lips as he put them all in. Then he made a mistake of five francs in the addition, and the thing was done. He contemplated it for a moment with satisfaction, then folded it, slipped it into his pocket, and returned to the breakfast-room.

His guests were just rising from the table, and a glance told him that they had done but scant justice to the meal—fully half the rolls remained uneaten! They were in haste, then; so much the better! He assisted them to adjust their knapsacks.

"And now the bill," said one of them, taking out his purse.

M. Brisson presented it with a bow. The other took it, glanced at the total, and his face flushed. He opened his lips to speak, closed them again, and his eyes ran up the column of figures. The flush deepened, and again he opened his lips; but when he met Brisson's ferret-like gaze, he again closed them. Without a word, he extracted from his purse a note for a hundred francs and placed it in Brisson's hand.

"You may keep the change," he said.

"Oh, thanks, sir!" Brisson cried, and he bowed again to hide the triumphant smile upon his lips. "Many thanks! A pleasant journey! And when you come again to Toulon, remember the Hotel du Nord!"

The other nodded glumly, and started for the door, followed by his companion. Brisson and his wife accompanied them, again bade them adieu, and stood for a moment watching them, as they went down the street in the direction of the quays.

"A hundred francs!" said Madame Brisson, and gazed with veneration at her lord and master. "But what was your bill, then, Aristide?"

"Ninety-six francs," said Brisson, sourly, "and, for a moment, I thought the swine was going to protest it!"

"If they had not been Americans," began Madame.

"Americans!" burst in Brisson. "Bah! They are not Americans! Germans, perhaps, or Austrians; but Americans, no! Those men, Gabrielle, have something to conceal!" and Brisson, frowning darkly, went back into the house.

Meanwhile the two pedestrians made their way rapidly along the dark and silent street without exchanging a word. There was in their faces a strange excitement, and they stared straight ahead, as though they dared not meet each other's eyes. At the end of a few moments, they came out upon the quays. Here the darkness of the narrow street gave place to the grey of the approaching dawn, and one of them took his watch from his pocket and looked at it.

"Nine minutes!" he said in guttural English, and in a voice strangely thick, as with some deep and barely repressed emotion.

The other nodded, and with common accord they turned to the right toward the great basin, where three or four men-of-war lay at anchor. The light increased from minute to minute, the horizon turned from grey to pearly white, and over the hills to the east a golden halo marked the spot where the sun would rise. They stopped to look at it, and then, stepping back into the recess of a doorway, directed their gaze toward a great battleship, anchored perhaps three hundred

yards away. As the minutes passed, they seemed scarcely to breathe, and their lips were twitching with nervous excitement.

Suddenly over the trees shot a long ray of yellow light, gilding the house-tops, gilding the mast-heads of the vessels in the harbour; and then, as though in answer to a signal, came a muffled roar from the anchored battleship. There was an instant's silence, then the shrill voices of sentries sounding the alarm, the whirring of a gong....

A second roar drowned all lesser sounds, and then the high, thin notes of a bugle echoed across the water. The deck of the ship was alive with men; from her open ports wisps of angry smoke swirled upward into the morning air....

[Pg 8]

Above the babble of excited voices, rose a shout of command, the bugle shrilled "Sauve qui peut! Sauve qui peut! Sauve qui peut!" and the crew began leaping over the side; and then, straight in front of where stood the breathless watchers, a mighty column of black smoke leaped high into the air, mushroomed and drifted slowly away before the breeze. At the same instant came a frightful, rending crash, which seemed to shake the earth, and a foam-capped wave swept across the harbour and dashed angrily against the quay. For one tense instant, all nature held her breath, and then came the splash and clatter of débris falling into the water and on the docks, the rattle of broken glass from the houses along the quay; and finally, quivering through the air, rose the shrill, inhuman cry of men in mortal anguish.

The smoke, drifting lazily away, disclosed a mass of twisted wreckage where, a moment before, *La Liberté*, the pride of the French navy, had swung at anchor.

"Ach Gott! Es ist doch wahr!" breathed one of the men, and stared rigid, fascinated; but the other laid a trembling hand upon his arm.

"We must hasten!" he whispered. "We must not stay here!"

"True!" agreed the other, and with a last glance at the wreck, strode away along the quay.

[Pg 9]

Already the city was awake; already frightened faces were peering from shattered windows, half-clothed men were bursting into the streets, and voices shrill with fear were demanding to know what had occurred. But our travellers heeded them not. At the first corner they separated, and one of them made his way rapidly up into the town, while the other hastened along a dark and narrow lane parallel with the quay, and stopped at last before a tall, decrepit house, whose plaster, black with age, was flaking from its walls. On the door-step sat a girl of eighteen or twenty, a dark shawl about her head, from whose shadow her face peered, strangely white.

"Is it by this way one gains the Frejus road?" he asked in English.

"Straight on to the end of the street, then to the left," answered the girl in the same tongue, speaking it readily and without accent.

"Thank you. This for your father," and thrusting his hand quickly into his pocket, he drew out a fat envelope, sealed with many seals, placed it in the girl's hand, and hurried on.

An hour later, the two travellers, reunited, Toulon well behind them, strode along a beautiful road skirting the Mediterranean, which stretched, a sheet of greenish-blue, away to the south. But, strangely enough, they did not even glance at this panorama. Instead, they walked with heads down, as though still fearing to meet each other's eyes.

[Pg 10]

Back in the narrow Rue du Plasson, the girl, her face still very white, re-entered the house, closed and bolted the crazy door, and slowly mounted the dark staircase. From the street outside came excited cries, hoarse shouting, the clatter of running feet; but she did not stop to listen. Indeed, she did not seem to hear, but dragged herself up from step to step as though a weight was on her feet.

The house was of four stories, and she did not pause until she reached the top one. A stream of yellow light poured through an open door, and she entered and closed the door behind her. A lighted candle stood on a table in the centre of the narrow room, but already the rays of the sun were beating against the single window. Besides the table, the room contained two chairs, a rusty stove, and a cupboard in which were a few dishes. Against one wall stood a cot, and the back of the room was curtained off, no doubt for the girl's sleeping-chamber.

She stood for a moment staring listlessly before her, as though trying to remember what she should do next; then she laid the envelope on the table, blew out the candle, started a fire in the stove, and placed a kettle upon it. Finally she drew a chair to the window, sat down, and looked out across the harbour.

[Pg 11]

Opposite the house was a long, low building, the wine-market, so that her view of the harbour was unobstructed. It was alive with boats, circling around or speeding towards a black and shapeless mass, above which some shreds of smoke still lingered. Her lips were moving as she stared at it, and her face was bloodless; and she pressed her hands to her breast, as though in pain.

At last the singing of the kettle roused her. She seemed to pull herself together; then she rose, made the coffee and placed some rolls upon the table. Finally she picked up a knife and with the handle smote sharply against the wall. A moment later, the door opened and a man came in.

At first glance, one thought him very old, for his hair was white as snow, his body shrivelled and bent, his face lined and sallow. But at the second glance, one perceived that these were not the marks of age but of the ravages of the fiery spirit which dwelt within the body and which

peered from the burning eyes. At this moment, they gleamed with a lustre almost demoniacal.

"Breakfast is ready, father," said the girl. "And—and the man came past, as you expected, and gave me that for you," she added, with a little gesture toward the sealed envelope.

The man advanced to the table, picked up the envelope, and walked on to the window. For a moment he stood staring out across the harbour; then there was the sound of ripping paper, a moment's silence, and he thrust the envelope into his pocket and turned back to the table. [Pg 12]

"It is well!" he said, and sat down. "It is well, Kasia!"

"I am glad of that, father," she answered, in a low voice, and poured his coffee.

He ate rapidly and as though very hungry; but the girl made only a pretence of eating. At last the man looked at her.

"We leave at once," he said. "We are to take the first boat for America. Are you not glad?"

"Very glad, father."

"Why is it you so love America, Kasia?" he asked.

"You also love it, father. It is the land of freedom—even for us poor Poles, it is the land of freedom!"

"The land of freedom!" he echoed. "And I love it, as you say. It is because of that I hasten back; I have in store for her a great honour, which will make her more than ever the land of freedom! For she is not free yet, Kasia—not for poor Poles, nor for poor Jews, nor for the poor of any nation. The poor cannot know freedom—not anywhere in the whole world. They must labour, they must sweat, they may not rest if they would live, for the greater part of what they earn is stolen from them. But I will change all that! Oh, you know my dream—no more poverty, no more suffering, no more cruelty and tyranny and injustice—but all men, all the nations of the world, joined in brotherhood and love! This day at dawn I struck the first blow for freedom! Do you know what it was, my daughter? Did you hear the roar of the waters as they opened? See!" [Pg 13]

He caught her by the wrist and dragged her to the window.

"See!" he cried again, and pointed a shaking finger toward the black hulk in the harbour.

But she did not look. Instead she shrank away from him and pressed her hands before her eyes, and shook with a long shudder.

And after a moment, the light faded from her father's face, and left it old and worn; his eyes grew dull and moody; his lips trembled.

"Every cause must have its martyrs," he said, as though answering her thought, and his voice was shaking with emotion; "even the cause of freedom; yea, that more than any other, for the battle against tyranny is the most desperate of all!"

And dropping her wrist, he went slowly from the room.

[Pg 14]

CHAPTER II

FRANCE IN MOURNING

To M. Théophile Delcassé, Minister of Marine, and first statesman of the Republic, slumbering peacefully in his bed at Paris that morning, came the sound of urgent knocking. He sat up in bed and rubbed the sleep from his eyes, for he knew that not without good cause would any one dare disturb him at that hour. Then he stepped to the floor, thrust his feet into a pair of slippers, his arms into the sleeves of a dressing-robe, and opened the door.

"A telegram, sir, marked 'Most Important,'" said his valet, and passed it in to him.

It was from Vice-Admiral Bellue, commander at Toulon, and a moment later M. Delcassé had learned of the terrible disaster.

He ordered his carriage and dressed rapidly with trembling hands. He was shocked and distressed as he had rarely been before. Would these disasters never cease? First the *Jena*, now the *Liberté*—both ships the pride of their country, the last formidable word in marine architecture! He gulped down the cup of coffee which his valet brought him, seized hat and gloves, hastened to his carriage, and drove straight to the Elysée Palace. [Pg 15]

The President was already up, and his broad face, usually so placid and good-humoured, was convulsed with grief as he greeted his Minister. He held in his hand a telegram, which he had just opened.

"See," he said, after the first moment, "the sad news is already abroad," and he held out the message.

Delcassé took it and read it with astonished eyes. It was from the German Emperor, and expressed his grief at the catastrophe, and his sympathy with France, which he had directed his ambassador to call at once in person to convey more fully.

"The Kaiser is certainly well-served!" muttered Delcassé, reading the message again, his lips twitching with emotion. "There is something ironical in this promptness. He must have had the news before we did!"

The President nodded gloomily. Then the other members of the cabinet came whirling up, and were convened at once by their chief in secret session.

Not many hours later, as a result of that session, a special train rolled out of the Gare de Lyon, and headed away for the south, with a clear track and right-of-way over everything. Aboard it were the President himself, the Minister of Marine, the Minister of War, and a score of minor officials. There was also a thin little man with white hair and yellowish-white beard—M. Louis Jean Baptiste Lépine, Prefect of Police, and the most famous hunter of criminals in the world; and in the last car were a dozen of the best men of his staff, under command of his most trusted lieutenant, Inspector Pigot. [Pg 16]

At each station, as the train rolled on, great crowds gathered to meet it—crowds strangely silent, inarticulate with grief, furious, suspicious of they knew not what. Terrible rumours were abroad—rumours of treachery, of treason striking at the very heart of France. No one dared repeat these rumours, but nevertheless they ran up and down the land. The *Jena* and now the *Liberté!* True, the Board of Inquiry, which had investigated the destruction of the *Jena*, had decided that that catastrophe was due to the spontaneous combustion of the powder in her magazines. France had accepted the verdict; but now a second battleship was gone. It would be too much to ask any one to believe that this was spontaneous combustion, also! Such things do not happen twice.

And at every station telegrams were handed in giving fresh details of the disaster—horrible details. The ship was a total loss; of that splendid mechanism, built by years of toil, by the expenditure of many millions, there remained only a twisted and useless mass of wreckage; and in that wreckage lay three hundred of France's sailors. Small wonder that the President sat, chin in hand, staring straight before him, and that the others spoke in whispers, or not at all. [Pg 17]

At Dijon, which was reached about the middle of the afternoon, there was a tremendous crowd, thronging the long platforms and pressing against the barriers, which threatened at every moment to be swept away. The President went out to say a few words to them, but at the first sentence his voice failed him, and he could only stand and look down upon them, convulsive sobs rising in his throat. Suddenly a little red-legged Turco, weeping too, snatched off his fez and shouted "Vive la France!" and the cheer was taken up and repeated and repeated, until it swelled to a vast roar. As the train rolled out of the station, the crowd, bareheaded, was singing the Marseillaise.

M. Delcassé's eyes, behind his heavy glasses, were wet with tears.

"It is the same people still!" he said, pressing the President's hand. "They are as ready to spring to arms as they were a hundred years ago. Now, as then, they need only to know that their country is in danger!"

His voice had grown vibrant with emotion, for the passion of his life was and always had been revenge upon Germany. He made no effort to conceal it or to dissimulate. Alsace and Lorraine were always in his thoughts. To placate Germany, indeed, France had once been compelled to drive him from the Quai d'Orsay, where, for so many years, he had been to his contemporaries a sort of Olympian in the conduct of her foreign affairs. But even in retirement he remained the most powerful man in France; and now he was back in the cabinet again, a giant among Lilliputians, building up the navy, building up the army, strengthening the forts along the frontier, increasing the efficiency of the artillery, experimenting with air-ships, devoting his days and nights to the study of strategy, the discussion of possibilities, always with the same idea, the same hope! And now, this catastrophe! [Pg 18]

As he sat gnawing his nails, the President glanced at him, read his thoughts, and shook his head.

"No, my friend," he said, sadly, "the country is not in danger; or, if it is, the danger is from within, not from without. This is an accident, like all the others."

"You believe so? But it seems to me that we have had more than our share of accidents!"

"So we have," the President agreed. "Let us hope that this will be the last—that it will teach us to guard ourselves, in future, from our own carelessness."

"England, America, Germany," Delcassé went on, speaking half to himself, "these nations, with navies greater than ours, never have such accidents. Small explosions, sometimes, it is true, wrecking a gun or damaging a turret—but never destroying a whole ship! Is it merely because they are never careless?" [Pg 19]

"There was the *Maine*," the President reminded him.

Delcassé's hand went to his moustache to hide the ironic smile upon his lips. In that close-cropped head of his, along with many other such secrets, was that of the cause of the catastrophe

in Havana harbour. In all the chancelleries of Europe, it was agreed that the *Maine* had been destroyed by the spontaneous explosion of her own magazines. Four men knew the truth, and Delcassé was one of them. There had been a fifth, but an assassin's bullet killed him.

In an instant Delcassé's face was composed, and his eyes, behind their immense glasses, as inscrutable as ever. The President, so ingenuous and child-like, must never suspect the truth!

"True!" Delcassé agreed. "There was the *Maine*! I had forgotten that," and he relapsed into thoughtful silence.

Evening came, and still the train rolled southward, past Macon, past Lyons, past Vienne, everywhere greeted by surging crowds. At the latter place, Delcassé arose and, with an almost imperceptible nod to Lépine, entered the last car. The Prefect followed him, and a few minutes later, they were closeted together in a compartment, where, at a word from his superior, Inspector Pigot had joined them.

[Pg 20]

"And now," began Delcassé, when the door was closed and the train had started again, "tell me what you think of this affair, Lépine."

The little grey man spread his hands wide with a gesture of helplessness.

"At this moment I know no more than you, sir," he answered; "probably not so much. By morning, I shall have a report ready for you."

"We shall not arrive until after midnight," the Minister pointed out.

"Nevertheless, my report will be ready, sir," said Lépine, quietly. "Between midnight and dawn there are six hours."

Delcassé looked at him. He knew that this little man never made an empty promise.

"Did you go through the papers at the time of the *Jena* disaster?" he asked.

"I did, sir. I assisted the investigating board."

"You are, then, familiar with the theories in that case?"

"There were four theories," answered Lépine. "The first was that the ship had been blown up by treachery; that is always the first thought! But in the case of the *Jena*, it was quickly discovered that treachery was impossible, unless it was that of the highest officers, for only they had access to her magazines. That was unthinkable, for all of them had served France for many years. More than half of them were killed. I myself investigated the life of every one of these men, for it was necessary to be absolutely certain—but not a breath could be raised against them."

[Pg 21]

"And the second theory?"

"That there had been carelessness of some sort. That, too, was disproved, for no one had entered the magazines for many hours previous to the explosion. It is a rule of the service that, except when in use, the keys of all magazines shall be in keeping of the commander, who is responsible for them. At the inquiry, the commander of the *Jena* testified that the keys had not left his possession during the two days preceding the accident. There had been no occasion to enter the magazines during that time. The *Jena*, you will remember, was at anchor in Toulon harbour, just as the *Liberté* was."

Delcassé glanced at his companion keenly.

"Does that fact suggest nothing to you, Lépine?" he asked.

"Nothing, sir," said Lépine firmly. "I have thought of it all day, and I can see in it nothing except coincidence."

"Coincidence! Coincidence! I detest the word—I do not believe in coincidence!" muttered the Minister.

[Pg 22]

"Nor I," agreed Lépine; "but even less do I believe in vague theories and vague suspicions. We must have a firm foundation before we begin to build."

"Well, and the third theory?" said Delcassé, at last.

"The third theory was most interesting. It was that the explosion had been caused by waves from the wireless telegraph. It was asserted that these waves had upset the unstable equilibrium, either chemical or electrical, which sometimes exists in the components of modern powder, and that the explosion had resulted."

"And this theory also was disproved?"

"The most exhaustive tests failed to confirm it."

"Ah," said Delcassé; "but to fail to confirm a thing is not to disprove it."

"Our wireless experts agreed in pronouncing the theory absurd."

"Wireless waves penetrate metal, do they not?"

"Every metal except lead."

Delcassé turned this over for some moments in his mind.

"If that had been the cause," went on Lépine, at last, "there would have been other explosions, many of them—and our navy would not have been the only one to suffer. The whole atmosphere is charged with such waves, of every length and every degree of intensity."

[Pg 23]

"Perhaps you are right," agreed the Minister. "What was the fourth theory?"

"The fourth theory was that finally adopted by the board. It was that a certain kind of powder, known as 'B' powder, degenerates under heat, and becomes, in time, extremely combustible, so that it will sometimes explode apparently without any exciting cause."

"In what manner was the truth of this theory demonstrated?" demanded Delcassé.

"In a most convincing manner. A certain amount of this powder, which the board was examining, did explode in this way, under their very hands. Had the amount been larger, not a member of the board would have escaped. But, sir, you know all this as well as I."

"I wish to refresh my memory," Delcassé explained. "I wish to see if your memory, which I admire so much, agrees with mine. Now tell me this: what was done to prevent a recurrence of such an accident?"

"The powder in all French magazines was overhauled, and that which there was any reason to suspect was destroyed. To prevent future deterioration, the magazines of all our battleships were equipped with a special cooling apparatus. In this, we were soon followed by all other nations."

[Pg 24]

"And yet," said Delcassé, in a low voice, "the latest and best of our battleships blew up this morning!"

"I have brought my best men with me, as you suggested, sir," said Lépine. "If there were any suspicious circumstances attending this explosion, depend upon it, they will be laid before you when you awake!"

"Do not wait for me to awake!" cried the Minister. "If any such circumstance comes to light, wake me—wake me on the instant!"

Lépine bowed.

"I will do so, sir," he promised.

It was some time past midnight when the train reached Toulon; but apparently no one of her hundred thousand inhabitants had thought of sleep. The streets before the station were crowded from house-front to house-front. The carriage containing the President and his Ministers had the greatest difficulty in proceeding. Everywhere there were cries for vengeance, shouts of treason, threats, wild imprecations. Men stood with arms extended cursing the heavens. The Place de la Liberté was massed with people, facing the fountain in honour of the Revolution, bareheaded, singing the Ça Ira. It seemed as though the wheels of time had rolled back a century, and that at any moment the Sea-green Incorruptible himself might arise to thunder denunciation. But at last the President and his staff reached their hotel.

[Pg 25]

M. Lépine, after final instructions to Pigot, joined them there, and listened to the reports made by the surviving officers of *La Liberté*. They were in despair, these men, ready to kill themselves at a word; their faces were blackened, their uniforms in tatters, their hands torn and bleeding, for they had laboured all day at the work of rescue. They spoke between sobs, but it was little they had to tell.

Commander Jaurès, it seemed, had been absent on leave, the second in command was ashore, so that Senior Lieutenant Garnier was in charge of the ship. Just before dawn, the watch had discovered a small fire in one of the store-rooms, but it was so insignificant that no one thought of danger; the fire was not near the magazines; in any event, the magazines were all securely closed—the officer in charge had seen to that. Suddenly, apparently without cause, there had been three explosions, about a minute apart, first of the forward magazine, then of the after magazine, then of the main magazine—it seemed almost as though they had been fired at spaced intervals, like a heavy gun. There had been time to get the crew on deck, but the final explosion had come before the boats could be lowered. It had broken the ship in two; the forward part had turned over and sunk with all on board; the after part was a mere mass of twisted wreckage. The explosion had been so violent, that the neighbouring ships also suffered—*La République* so seriously that it was only by hurrying her to a dry-dock she was kept from sinking. No one had any theory, any explanation; there had been no warning, no premonition. An instant, and it was over. But all agreed that the fire could have had nothing to do with it.

[Pg 26]

Pigot, meanwhile, had spread his men out along the docks, where they listened to every one, asked questions of every one. Not a rumour escaped them, but, alas, for no rumour could they find foundation. The wreck in the harbour was illuminated by the searchlights of the other battleships, and Pigot caused himself to be rowed out to it, introduced himself to Admiral Marin-Dabel, Maritime Prefect of Toulon, who had taken personal charge of the rescue work, and spent half an hour inspecting the melancholy scene. Then he landed again, and listened for a time to the reports of his lieutenants. There was among them not a single ray of light—not the slightest evidence to show that the disaster had been anything but an accident. The fire in the store-room had, it was whispered, been much more serious than the officers would admit.

Pigot made his way slowly toward the hotel to report to his chief, but as he crossed the Place d'Armes, a hand was laid upon his sleeve. He turned, expecting to see one of his men. Instead, he found himself looking into a face he did not know.

[Pg 27]

"Pardon, sir," he said. "You are, perhaps, mistaken."

"Oh, no, Pigot," said the stranger, with a little smile, "I am not mistaken. It is you whom I wish to see."

"I do not remember you, sir," said Pigot, looking at him more closely. "Have we met before?"

"Many times."

"Many times!" echoed Pigot, incredulously. "Surely not!" and he looked again to make certain that the stranger was not intoxicated. "Where have we met?"

"We met last," said the stranger, smiling again, "on *La Savoie*, in the harbour of New York City. To be sure, I was not in this incarnation, but I am sure you will recall the incident."^[1]

Pigot drew a deep breath, and his face flushed.

"Ah," he said quietly, after a moment. "I remember. I wish you good evening, M. Crochard."

"One moment," Crochard commanded, his grasp tightening on Pigot's arm. "Forgive my recalling that meeting to your memory. It was indelicate of me. Nevertheless you would do well to listen to what I have to say."

[Pg 28]

Pigot stopped and turned.

"Well," he said, after gazing for a moment into Crochard's eyes, "speak quickly. What is it you have to say?"

"I wish to say to you, Pigot, that I have come to offer you my help."

"Your help?"

"In solving the mystery of this disaster."

Pigot looked at him coldly.

"We do not require your help," he said, at last.

"Perhaps not; and yet you would be mistaken to refuse it. I was at Nice; I have been on the ground since morning; I have discovered...."

"Well, what have you discovered?" asked Pigot, as Crochard hesitated.

"I have discovered," Crochard continued slowly, "what I can reveal only to M. Delcassé himself. I demand that you cause me to be introduced to him at once."

Pigot shrugged his shoulders impatiently.

"Impossible!" he said, and started on.

"Wait!" said Crochard sternly. "Consider whether you are willing to take the responsibility of this refusal!"

"Responsibility!" Pigot burst out, his anger getting the upper hand at last. "Responsibility! Yes, I take it! Who are you? A notorious character—a thief...."

[Pg 29]

Crochard's eyes were blazing, and his hand grasped Pigot's arm with a vise-like grip.

"And with it all," he sneered, "a better man than you, Pigot! Is it not so? A better man than you! How often have I proved it!"

Pigot's hand turned and closed like a flash upon the other's wrist.

"You will come with me," he said.

The anger faded from Crochard's face, and an ironic amusement took its place.

"Where would you conduct me?" he asked.

"To the Prefecture!"

"You are mistaken. You will conduct me to M. Delcassé. You cannot conduct me to the Prefecture, Pigot; I will not allow it!"

"Allow it!" sneered Pigot, and pressed forward.

"Fool!" hissed Crochard in his ear. "Thick-headed fool! Have you learned no wisdom yet? I would smite you, Pigot, but that I have need of you. Listen! I and only I can save France! I demand that you take me to M. Delcassé."

Pigot felt himself waver; a vague uneasiness stirred within him as he met his companion's flaming gaze.

"On what pretext can I introduce you to M. Delcassé?" he asked at last.

"You will leave me outside the door," said Crochard rapidly, almost in a whisper. "You will go in to M. Delcassé alone; you will say to him, 'Sir, I have outside a man who asserts that *La Liberté* was blown up by the Germans, and that he can prove it!' Then let M. Delcassé decide whether or not he will receive me!"

[Pg 30]

Pigot was staring at the speaker with distended eyes.

"By the Germans!" he repeated, hoarsely. "By the Germans!"

Crochard answered with an impatient pressure of the arm.

"You are wasting time," he said.

"You are right," Pigot agreed. "Come with me," and he led the way across the square.

FOOTNOTES:

CHAPTER III

TWO GREAT MEN MEET

M. Delcassé and M. Lépine were still in conference when Pigot was announced. He was admitted without delay, and made his report briefly and clearly. It could have been summed up in a sentence: neither by him nor by his agents had anything been discovered to indicate, even remotely, that the catastrophe had been the result of intention; every rumour to that effect had been sifted and disproved; *La Liberté* had been destroyed from within and not from without.

"Another 'accident,' then," grunted Delcassé gloomily. "But I do not believe it! Something—something here"—and he smote his forehead—"tells me that it was not an accident!"

Pigot, as a practical detective, had no faith in intuition; but whatever his thoughts may have been, he managed to mask them behind an impenetrable countenance.

"Our investigations have but just begun," Lépine pointed out. "They will be continued without pause. I will conduct them in person. No circumstance, however trivial, will be overlooked."

"I know you are a good man, Lépine," said the Minister wearily; "I know there is none more clever. But something more than cleverness is needed here—we need genius, inspiration." He stopped abruptly and rose from his chair. "I am sure you will do your best. Remember, if there is any discovery, I am to be told at once."

[Pg 32]

Pigot, who had been standing with lips compressed, undergoing a violent inward struggle, at last managed to open them.

"I have a man outside," he said, as though repeating a lesson, "who requests an audience with M. Delcassé. He asserts that *La Liberté* was blown up by the Germans, and that he can prove it."

Delcassé whirled as on a pivot and stared at the speaker.

"But, name of God!" he stammered, barely able to speak for excitement, "why have you not introduced this man at once? Why have you wasted our time...."

He stopped and took a rapid turn up and down the room. When he spoke again, his voice was quite composed.

"Introduce the man at once," he commanded.

"I think it would be well," said Pigot tonelessly, "that M. Delcassé should first be informed as to the name and character of this man."

Again Delcassé stared.

"Explain yourself!" he cried. "Who is the man?"

"His name is Crochard, sir," Pigot replied.

Delcassé evidently did not recognise the name, but Lépine's face was suddenly illumined.

"Crochard," he explained, "is the most adroit, the most daring, the most accomplished scoundrel with whom I have ever had to deal. Surely Monsieur remembers the affair of the Michaelovitch diamonds?"

"Ah, yes!" cried Delcassé, his face, too, lighting. "So that was Crochard!"

"Crochard the Invincible, he calls himself," growled Pigot. "He is a great braggart."

"And with some reason," added Lépine. "We have never yet been able to convict him."

"He restored the Mazarin diamond to the Louvre, did he not?" queried the Minister. "And also the Mona Lisa?"

"The Mazarin certainly," assented Lépine. "As for the Mona Lisa, I have never been quite certain. There is a rumour that the original is now owned by an American millionaire, and that the picture returned to the Louvre is only a copy—a wonderful one, it is true. Where did you meet him, Pigot?"

Pigot related the story of the meeting, while Delcassé listened thoughtfully.

"Is he to be trusted?" he asked, when Pigot had finished.

"In this affair I believe so," answered Lépine quietly. "He may be as good a patriot as you or I. If he is really in earnest, he can be of immense assistance. He has absolute command of the

[Pg 34]

underworld, and a thousand sources of information which are closed to the police. At least, it can do no harm to hear what he has to say."

Delcassé agreed with a nod, and sat down again.

"Bring him in," he said, and a moment later Crochard entered.

If M. Delcassé had expected to perceive anything of the criminal in the man who bowed to him respectfully from the threshold, he was most thoroughly disappointed. What he *did* see was a well-built man in the very prime of life, with clear and fearless eyes of greenish-grey flecked with yellow, a face singularly open and engaging, and a manner as easy and self-possessed as Delcassé's own. The only sign of approaching age was the sprinkle of grey in the crisp, brown hair, but this served rather to accentuate the youthfulness of the face, covered now by a coat of tan which bespoke a summer spent in the open. In any company, this man would have been notable.

"M. Crochard, I believe," said Delcassé, and involuntarily the great Minister arose and returned his visitor's bow. "Be seated, sir."

"Thank you," said Crochard, and sat down. "I see that we are going to appreciate each other," he added, and looked at Delcassé with a friendly smile. [Pg 35]

That gentleman's eyes were twinkling behind his glasses, and his lips twitched under his heavy moustache.

"It always pleases me to meet a distinguished man," he said, "in whatever field of endeavour. M. Lépine tells me that you are most distinguished."

"M. Lépine has every reason to know," agreed Crochard, and glanced smilingly toward the Prefect.

"Though, since I have eyes, I can see that for myself," added the Minister. "Why did you wish to see me?"

"I wished to see you, sir," answered Crochard, suddenly serious, "because I have long recognised in you the only man whom France possesses who sees clearly the struggle which is ahead of her, who prepares ceaselessly for that struggle, and who is strong enough to guide her through it triumphantly."

"To what struggle do you refer?" inquired the Minister, but his shining eyes belied his careless tone.

"The struggle to regain possession of Alsace-Lorraine and to avenge ourselves upon the nation which once humiliated us."

A slow flush crept into Delcassé's cheeks, and his lips tightened.

"You foresee such a struggle?" he asked.

"As clearly as you do yourself, sir." [Pg 36]

"Well, yes!" cried Delcassé, and smote the arm of his chair a heavy blow. "I *do* foresee such a struggle—I have never denied it; and for twenty years I have laboured to prepare for it. You can understand, then, what a blow it is to me—how terrible, how disheartening—to have all my calculations blasted by such accidents as that of to-day!"

"Pardon me, sir," said Crochard, in a low tone, "but the destruction of *La Liberté* was not an accident!"

"You assert that?"

"I do. And furthermore I assert that it was the work of Germany!"

Delcassé sprang from his chair, his face livid.

"The proof!" he cried. "The proof!"

"The proof, sir, is this: at five minutes before dawn, this morning, two strangers, attired as pedestrians, with knapsacks on their backs, stopped in the recess of the doorway of Number Ten, Quai de Cronstadt. They stepped well within the shadow, as though not wishing to be seen, and stood gazing out on the harbour. Directly before them, at a distance of not more than three hundred yards, *La Liberté* was moored. It was at her they stared, with eyes expectant and uneasy. At dawn, *La Liberté* blew up, and one of these men cried out some words of German."

"What were they?" [Pg 37]

"Unfortunately the person who overheard them does not know German. He understood only the first two words, 'Ach Gott!'"

"And the men?" cried Delcassé. "What became of them?"

"They strode rapidly away along the quay, and were lost to sight."

Delcassé dropped into his chair, his face dark with passion.

"What do you infer from this circumstance?" he demanded.

"There is only one possible inference," answered Crochard. "At five minutes before dawn this morning, there were, in this city of Toulon, two Germans who knew that *La Liberté* was to be destroyed."

A moment's silence followed. Those words, terrible as they were, astounding as they were,

carried conviction with them.

"Tell me," said Delcassé, at last, "how you discovered all this."

"I have been spending the month at Nice," Crochard explained. "I learned of the disaster as soon as I was up this morning, and I came at once to Toulon. Monsieur will understand that, in the many years during which I have been at variance with society, I have made many friends and gained a certain power in quarters of which Monsieur knows little. One of these friends is the proprietor of the café which occupies the ground floor of the house on the Quai de Cronstadt. I stopped to see him, because his house is close to the scene of the disaster—so close, indeed, that all of its windows were shattered. It was he who gave me the first clue."

[Pg 38]

"Go on," said Delcassé, who had been listening intently. "I need not say how deeply all this interests me."

"My friend had arranged to go to Marseilles this morning," Crochard continued, "to make a purchase of wine. The train, he tells me, leaves at six o'clock. It was about fifteen minutes before that hour when, as he started to open his door, two men stepped into the little vestibule, as though to screen themselves from observation. He peered through the curtain, thinking they might be friends, and found that he did not know them. Gazing from the darkness of the interior, he could see them very well. They were staring at *La Liberté*, as I have said, their faces rigid with emotion; and then came the explosion, which, without question, they anticipated."

"You have a description of them?" broke in Delcassé.

"An excellent description. They were men of middle age, heavily built and clean-shaven. Their faces were deeply tanned, as with long exposure, and had that fulness about the lips which bespeaks the German. They wore caps and walking-suits with knee trousers. Each had strapped upon his back a small knapsack."

[Pg 39]

Lépine, who had been taking rapid notes, looked up with gleaming eyes.

"We shall find these men," he said. "It will not be difficult."

"More difficult than you suppose, M. Lépine," said Crochard dryly.

Lépine looked at him.

"What do you mean?" he asked.

Crochard turned to Delcassé with a little deprecating gesture.

"Before I proceed," he said, "I must be certain of my position here. With you, sir, no explanations are necessary; we understand each other and we have no past to prejudice us. But M. le Prefect and I are old enemies. We respect each other, but we always welcome an opportunity to try conclusions. Until this affair is ended, I propose a truce."

"I will go further than that," retorted Lépine, "and call it an alliance. I shall welcome your help. I have already told M. Delcassé that you are probably as good a patriot as he or I."

"I shall try to prove that you are right," said Crochard, his eyes shining. "There is one more condition. In this affair, it may be necessary for me to call to my assistance certain persons for whom the police are looking. Should they be recognised while so engaged, no effort must be made to arrest them."

[Pg 40]

"I agree," said Lépine, instantly.

Crochard leaned back in his chair with a sigh of satisfaction.

"I am ready to proceed," he said. "Let us, for the time, forget our differences."

"I have already forgotten them," said Lépine.

Delcassé had listened to this interchange with smiling lips.

"Magnificent!" he cried. "I shall remember this scene all my life. And now to work!"

"First," said Lépine, "permit me to inquire of Inspector Pigot how it happened that neither he nor his men heard anything of these two strangers?"

Pigot flushed darkly and opened his lips to defend himself, but Crochard silenced him with a little gesture.

"I can explain that," he said. "Pigot is not a genius, it is true, but neither is he quite a fool, and I should grieve to see him blamed for something not his fault. I was careful to warn my friend to repeat his story to no one. That, I think, was the wisest course. Those men must not know that we suspect them."

Delcassé nodded.

"You are right," he agreed. "Are you possessed of any further information?"

"I had only a few hours," Crochard apologised; "but I did what I could. I learned that two men resembling these, and undoubtedly the same, had been staying since Friday at the Hotel du Nord. The proprietor of that house informed me that they left before daybreak this morning to walk to Frejus."

[Pg 41]

"Ah, then," began Delcassé.

"But they did not go to Frejus," Crochard added. "They stopped at Salins, which they reached about ten o'clock, boarded a small steam-yacht which was waiting there, and at once put out to

sea. I fear they are beyond our reach."

Delcassé stamped his foot.

"What, then, is to be done?" he demanded.

"It seems to me most important that we identify these men," said Crochard; "then we shall know where to look for them."

"Yes," agreed Delcassé; "but how are they to be identified?"

"There are, no doubt, in the files of your department, photographs of the most prominent German officers, both of army and navy. I believe these men to be officers—one, at least—the other may belong to the secret service. I would suggest that these photographs be brought to Toulon, and that it also be ascertained which officers are on leave of absence, or not with their commands. Probably it will be necessary to search only among the general officers. An affair so important would not be entrusted to a subordinate."

[Pg 42]

Delcassé made a quick note.

"The photographs will be here to-morrow," he promised.

"I would further suggest that the innkeeper be strictly interrogated," Crochard went on. "I ventured to ask him only a careless question or two; he does not know me, and I did not wish to arouse his suspicions."

Lépine arose.

"I will see him at once," he said.

Crochard rose also.

"And I will accompany you. That is all the information I have at present, sir," he added to Delcassé.

"It is a great deal," said the Minister quickly. "Just before you came, I was remarking to Lépine that what we needed in this affair was a man of genius. Well, I think that we have found him!"

Crochard flushed with pleasure.

"I thank you, sir," he said.

"And I thank you for coming to me," said Delcassé. "You are doing France a great service. I shall not forget it. Until morning, then."

Crochard bowed and left the room with the two detectives.

Delcassé sat for a moment deep in thought; then he summoned his secretary, gave the necessary order about the photographs and dictated a cipher telegram to the chief of his secret service at Berlin. That done, he bade his secretary good night, dismissed him and went to bed.

[Pg 43]

But not to sleep. Turning at full length upon his back, his arms above his head, he stared steadily up into the darkness until his brain, freed of all lesser problems, all vagrant thoughts, was concentrated upon the great problem which now confronted it:

How had the destruction of *La Liberté* been accomplished?

It was, of course, the work of Germany. Those two strangers, who spoke German in a moment of great excitement, who had arrived five minutes before the disaster, who had hastened away immediately afterwards, who had lied about their destination, and for whom a steam-yacht had been waiting—all this, as Crochard said, could have but one meaning.

And then Delcassé fairly bounded in the bed. Fool that he had been not to think of it! There was another proof! The telegram from the Emperor!

He lay a moment trembling, then calmed himself by a mighty effort. How was it the Emperor had learned so promptly of the disaster? There was only one possible answer: an emissary had hastened to flash the news to him—an emissary dressed, prepared, who needed to delay for no investigation, since the roar of the explosion told him everything—one of the men, perhaps, who had waited on the quay. And Delcassé, biting his nails, his face wet with perspiration, pictured to himself the Emperor also waiting, pacing restlessly back and forth, until the word should come! He gnashed his teeth with rage, this good Frenchman, and shook trembling fists up into the darkness. Ah, Germany should pay! Germany should pay!

[Pg 44]

But again he calmed himself, wiped his forehead, and composed himself for thought.

How had *La Liberté* been destroyed? There was the question which must be answered, and at once.

By a mine, set to explode at a certain hour? Delcassé shook his head. It was absurd to suppose that a mine could be planted in a harbour as strictly guarded and policed as that of Toulon. By a torpedo, then, which could be launched some distance away? But that was even more absurd. The launching of a torpedo required a complex mechanism; as well suppose that an enemy would be able to install a cannon on the docks unobserved. By a submarine? But *La Liberté* had lain at anchor in an enclosed basin; besides there were the outer basins, patrol boats, sentries, the constant coming and going of sailors and marines, of launches, of boats of all kinds. How could an enemy creep unobserved past all these?

[Pg 45]

True, the accident had occurred at dawn, when every one but the sentries was asleep. But even at that hour the harbour was strictly guarded. An enemy, to enter unseen, would have to be

impalpable, invisible....

Besides, how could a mine or a torpedo or a submarine have caused the explosion of the magazines, one after the other, at regular intervals—"spaced," one of the officers had said, "like the reports of a heavy gun." First one had been fired, and then a second, and then a third; Delcassé, closing his eyes, had a vision of a ghostly figure stealing from one to another, torch in hand....

His mind roved back again over his talk with Lépine. Could it have been done by wireless? Not the ordinary wireless, but some subtle variant of ether waves, some new form of radio-activity, which in some way caused combustion? There was an enemy which could flit unseen from magazine to magazine, which no locks nor bars could guard against....

His heart faltered at the thought. The possessor of such a secret would have the world at his mercy. No ship would be safe, no fort, no artillery-caisson. Armies and navies alike would melt before him, destroyed by the explosion of their own ammunition. Ah, if France possessed that secret....

He shook his head impatiently and turned on his side.

[Pg 46]

"I am dreaming foolish dreams," he told himself. "It is time to sleep."

[Pg 47]

CHAPTER IV

THE ALLIES AT WORK

It was nearly four o'clock when Crochard, Lépine and Pigot took their leave of M. Delcassé and made their way through the dark and silent streets in the direction of the Hotel du Nord. The people who had leaped from their beds at sunrise, wearied at last by the emotions of the day and dampened by the fine rain which had begun to fall, had gone to bed again. Only about the harbour were there any signs of life. There the searchlights of the battleships still played about the wreck, where squads of marines were searching for the bodies of their comrades.

The three men, their coats buttoned about them, their hats pulled down, hurried on in silence, each busy with his own thoughts. Crochard and Lépine were planning the campaign; Pigot had not yet recovered from his confusion at the sight of these two working hand in hand.

Five minutes brought them to the door of the Hotel du Nord, and Lépine applied to it a vigorous fist. There was no response, and he pounded again. At last there came the sound of a window being raised, and a night-capped head was thrust out from the upper story.

"Who is there?" asked a voice.

[Pg 48]

"Are you the proprietor?" demanded Lépine.

"Yes, sir."

"Then come down at once."

"But what is wrong, sir?" stammered Brisson, to whose frightened eyes those three dark figures huddled in his doorway appeared most sinister. "What is it you require?"

"No matter," said Lépine, sternly. "Come down at once and open the door."

The window was lowered and some minutes passed. Had the three men at the door been able to see inside the house, they would have been amused at what occurred there, could anything have amused them at that moment. As it was, they merely stamped with impatience and crowded closer to the door, for the rain was falling more heavily.

Brisson retreated from the window, his fat countenance fallen into creases of dismay, and plunged back into his bedroom, where his wife, who had also been awakened by the knocking, was sitting up in bed.

"What is it, Brisson?" she asked.

"There are three men below," gasped Aristide, fumbling for his trousers. "They command that I descend at once and admit them. There is something which tells me it is the police—the police at this hour!"

"The police?" and Madame Gabrielle cast a rapid mental glance over their affairs. "Well, admit them; we have no reason to fear the police."

[Pg 49]

"There is that little matter of the wine from your nephew which did not pay the octroi," Brisson reminded her.

"Bah!" retorted Madame, who was by far the stronger spirit; "it cannot be that! No one could suspect that; besides, even if they did, they would not come hammering here in the middle of the night. Descend at once and admit them. Assume a bold front, Brisson! Do not let them suspect that you have fear! Go at once! Hasten! I will come as soon as I have found a petticoat."

Thus encouraged, Brisson descended and opened the door, holding a lighted candle above his head and presenting as bold a front as his not-too-courageous spirit could muster. The three men crowded past him, without waiting for an invitation or saying a word, and one of them took the door from his hand and closed and bolted it. The horrible thought flashed through Brisson's head that they were robbers, bandits, and he had opened his mouth to cry for help, when one of them, the little, lean, grey-bearded one, with the fierce eyes, spoke.

"We belong to the police," he said. "We desire a few moments' conversation with you."

"Certainly, sir," stammered Brisson, thinking, as he met those eyes, that perhaps he would have preferred the bandits. "Come this way, if you please, sirs," and he led the way into his bureau. [Pg 50]

He placed the candle on the table and dropped into a chair. His visitors remained standing, facing him. Brisson realised that for him to sit while they stood was anything but courteous, and he struggled to arise, but the strength seemed departed from his legs, and he sank helplessly back again.

"What is your name?" asked the little man, looking at him with those gimlet eyes.

"Aristide Brisson, sir."

"You have been long in this house?"

"For twenty years, sir. My record is of the best."

"We will investigate it," said Lépine curtly.

"Do so!" cried a voice behind them. "Nothing would please us better!" They turned to find Madame Brisson on the threshold, her eyes flashing, her bosom heaving, one plump hand holding together at the throat the garment which threatened every moment to disclose her still plumper shoulders. "We are honest people—our neighbours will speak a good word for us—all of them!"

"I do not doubt it, Madame," said Lépine, courteously, realising that here he had to do with the head of the house. "Meanwhile we wish to make certain inquiries of you, which you need not hesitate to answer. But I wish first to warn you that of these inquiries you must not breathe so much as a word to any one. Do you understand?" [Pg 51]

"We understand, sir; you may rely upon us," said Madame Brisson, and sat down beside her husband.

"Our inquiry," pursued Lépine, "concerns the two gentlemen who departed so early yesterday morning."

At the words, Brisson bounded in his chair, and the colour swept back into his cheeks. He was himself again.

"So!" he cried, and suddenly found that he could stand erect, and did so. "So! It is about those swine! I knew that all was not right; I knew that they were not as they pretended!"

"What was it they pretended?"

"That they were of America. But it did not deceive me—no, not for one instant. They had not the air of Americans. Besides, do Americans go tramping about the country with knapsacks on their backs? No; only Germans do that! To Gabrielle, as they departed, I said, 'Americans, no; Germans perhaps, or Austrians—but not Americans!'"

"Yes, gentlemen, those were his very words!" said Madame Brisson, with an emphatic nod.

"And there is a final proof," went on Brisson, excitedly; "a proof conclusive. When I present my bill, the one who takes it grows quite red with anger. It was a most reasonable bill—ninety-six francs for three days, with many extras—a most reasonable bill, for Americans. It was then that I knew there was something wrong—that they were imposters who feared the police. It was only that which prevented a scene. 'Gabrielle,' I said, as they went away down the street, 'those men have something to conceal.'" [Pg 52]

"Yes, gentlemen," put in Gabrielle, "he said just that."

"There is even worse to come, sirs," and Brisson dropped his voice as one does in speaking of great horrors. "You will scarcely credit it, but, after having had us at their heels for three days, upstairs, downstairs; after compelling us to arise in the dark of night to prepare their breakfasts—this person handed me a note for a hundred francs and said with a lordly air, 'You may keep the change.' The change—four francs! And yet from his manner you would have thought he was giving me a fortune!"

"Have you still that hundred-franc note?" Lépine inquired.

"But certainly, sir," answered Madame Gabrielle, and, turning her back to the company, she stooped quickly and arose with the bill in her hand.

Lépine took it and examined it carefully by the light of the candle. It was a new note, apparently fresh from the bank, and the Prefect's eyes were shining with satisfaction when he raised his head. [Pg 53]

"I shall have to retain this," he said. "One moment," he added, as Madame Brisson opened her

lips to protest; "I shall, of course, give you another for it," and he drew out his purse, placed the new note carefully in a flapped compartment, selected another and handed it to the anxious lady, who received it with a sigh of relief. "And now!" went on Lépine, "please tell us all that you can remember about these men—every small detail."

Both Monsieur and Madame Brisson grew voluble at once, for rarely had it been their fortune to address so attentive an audience. But there were few grains of wheat among the chaff. The two strangers had arrived, it appeared, on the evening of the twenty-second, Friday. They were Americans, they said, on a walking tour. Their names? Brisson did not remember; but they would be found on the police registration slip which he had caused them to fill out at once and had sent to the Prefecture that very evening. He had noticed on the slip that they had come from Marseilles and were on their way to Nice. Their bags had already arrived from Marseilles, and, at their direction, he had had them brought up from the station.

"Where are the bags now?" asked Lépine.

"They directed that they be sent to Nice," explained Brisson. "I despatched them yesterday morning, as I agreed."

"You have the receipt?"

"But certainly, sir," and Brisson, while his wife held the light, rummaged in his desk and finally produced the paper in question.

Lépine placed it in his purse beside the hundred-franc note.

"Proceed," he said. "In what way did these strangers occupy themselves during their stay?"

They were absent from morning till night, it appeared, walking about the streets, about the docks, visiting the ships in the harbour, climbing the hills back of the town, and even going as far as Cape Cepet, where the great fort is—penetrating, in a word, to every nook and corner which it is possible for visitors to enter. In fact, in the two days of their stay, they had seen more of Toulon than had Brisson in the twenty years of his residence.

The details of these expeditions Brisson had learned with the greatest difficulty, for his guests had talked but little, had kept to themselves, had discouraged his advances, resented his questions, and often pretended that they did not understand—all of which was in itself suspicious. When talking together, they used a language which Brisson supposed to be English; but he was not familiar with English; knew only a few words of it, indeed—"money," "damn,"—such words as every one knows. Their French, also, was very bad,—much worse at some times than at others....

Lépine finally stopped this flow of language, when it became apparent that nothing but chaff remained.

"Do any further questions suggest themselves?" he asked, looking first at Crochard and then at Pigot. "No? You understand, my friends," he added, turning back to the innkeeper and his wife, "that of all this you will say nothing—not even to each other. An incautious word, and you may find yourselves in a most difficult position. On the other hand, if you are careful, if you are reticent, you will not be forgotten."

"We understand, sir," said they both in a breath, and Brisson added, with venom in his voice, "They were swine! I rejoice that they did not get their telegram!"

Lépine jumped as though a pin had been driven into him.

"Their telegram? What do you mean?" he cried.

"About an hour after they were gone," Brisson hastened to explain, "or perhaps two hours—I do not know—a messenger appeared with a telegram addressed to a grotesque name—Zhone, Smeet—I do not remember—in care of the Hotel du Nord. I concluded it was for one of them, and told the messenger it was too late, that the man had departed—to Frejus, to Nice—I did not know whither. So he took the telegram back again."

Lépine's eyes were gleaming as he glanced at Crochard.

"I am glad that you have mentioned this detail, M. Brisson," he said. "I thank you—and you also, Madame!" and with that, he and his companions bade the worthy couple adieu.

Once in the street, Crochard paused.

"I will leave you now, M. Lépine," he said. "You have your work to do—but you do not need me. Should I have anything further to communicate, you will hear from me."

"And if we wish to find you?"

"For the present, I am staying with my friend on the Quai de Cronstadt."

"Very good," said Lépine. "Good night," and in a moment he and Pigot were lost in the darkness.

The rain had ceased and a chill wind had arisen, but Crochard did not seem to feel it, as he walked slowly toward the quays, his head bent in thought. An ironical smile curved his lips, as he pictured Lépine off upon the scent first to the Prefecture, then to the post-office. He would follow it well, of course; he would run it to the end. He would discover, no doubt, the identity of the two travellers; that would not be difficult. Crochard himself had pointed out the way.

But what then? Even if they were found to be men high in the German service, that was of

[Pg 54]

[Pg 55]

[Pg 56]

[Pg 57]

small importance. It *proved* nothing. They were at liberty to visit Toulon, if they wished to do so; and, after all, their arrival at the quay five minutes before dawn might have been an accident; they *might* have lingered for a last look at *La Liberté* without any suspicion of what was about to occur. Such a coincidence, if not probable, was, at least, conceivable; and such, of course, would be their explanation, if an explanation was ever asked for. There was no way to disprove it.

As to the yacht on which they had embarked—well, that, too, may have been an accident—a boat belonging to a friend whom they had come upon unexpectedly and upon which they had been persuaded to take a cruise. Suspicious circumstances—yes, many of them; but no proof, no absolute proof. And nothing, absolutely nothing, to show that the explosion had been caused by any outside agency.

Arrived at the water-front, Crochard walked on until he was opposite the wreck. There he sat down, with his legs overhanging the quay. Two or three searchlights were still focussed on the ruin, but the rescue parties had been withdrawn, and only a few sentries remained. He could see how that formidable monster of a ship had been torn and twisted into an inextricable and hideous mass of iron and steel. One turret remained above the water, blown over on its side, its great guns pointing straight at the zenith; but the rest was a mere tangle of metal.

[Pg 58]

Such destruction could have been wrought only by the explosion of the magazines; no mine or torpedo could have done it. And as he gazed at the mass of wreckage visible above the water, he perceived a certain resemblance to photographs he had seen of the wreck of the *Maine*. The *Maine's* forward magazine had exploded; but Crochard knew, as well as M. Delcassé himself, what had caused that explosion.

Perhaps history was repeating itself, as, proverbially, it is supposed to have a way of doing. But Crochard shook his head. If the catastrophe was not an accident, then it was the result of some agency far more subtle than mine or torpedo. And, also, if it was not an accident, those two men who had waited in the shadow of the doorway back of him for the deed to be accomplished, must have had an accomplice. They could not destroy the ship merely by staring at her! Somewhere, somewhere, concealed but not far distant, that accomplice must have awaited the first beam of the rising sun as the signal to hurl his thunderbolt, to loose his mysterious power!

[Pg 59]

What was that power? How had the thing been done? Those, Crochard felt, were the questions to be answered. As to who had done it, or why it had been done—that could wait. But if there existed in the world a force which, directed from a distance, noiseless, invisible, impalpable, could destroy a battleship asleep at her anchorage, then indeed did it behoove France to discover and guard against it!

At last, his head still bent, Crochard arose, crossed the quay, opened the door of Number Ten, and entered.

No doubt it would have interested both him and M. Delcassé to know how nearly parallel the channels of their thoughts had run!

[Pg 60]

CHAPTER V

AT THE CAFÉ DES VOYAGEURS

M. Delcassé was scarcely out of bed, next morning, when Lépine's card was brought in to him. He smiled as he read the line scrawled across it: "My report awaits Monsieur."

"Show M. Lépine into the breakfast-room," said the Minister, "and inform him that I shall be down at once. Also inquire if he has breakfasted. If not, see that he is served."

He hastened on with his toilet, and, five minutes later, joined Lépine, whom he found at his favourite amusement of standing at a window and gazing into the street—an amusement which occupied every idle moment, sometimes with the most astonishing results. Chance plays a larger part in life than most people are willing to admit; Lépine believed in it; went half-way to meet it—and, more than once, had seen drifting past him along the pavement the face for which his best men had been searching vainly.

Lépine, it appeared, had already breakfasted, and, while the Minister ate, told of the interrogation at the Hotel du Nord. He had sent one of his men to Nice, with the receipts for the bags, and if, as seemed probable, they were still uncalled for, they would be examined at once.

[Pg 61]

"Though, even if they are still there," Lépine added, "we shall probably discover nothing of moment. One does not place anything of value in a bag and then abandon it. But I have another clue of the first importance," and he produced the hundred-franc note. "Here is the note given to Brisson by one of the strangers. You perceive that it is quite new. I suggest that you send the

number of this note to the Bank of France, ascertain when and to whom it was issued, and if any other notes of the series were issued at the same time."

"I will do so," said M. Delcassé, and made a note of the number. "I agree with you that this is most important."

"One thing more," went on Lépine, replacing the note in his pocket-book and extracting a slip of paper; "a small thing, but of significance. I have here the police blanks which the two men filled out upon arriving at the Hotel du Nord. Their names, you see, are given as George Arnold and William Smith, their home as New York City, United States of America. If you will notice the 'S' of the word 'Smith,' you will see that it is made in the German manner."

"That is true; but it may mean nothing. There are many Germans who are citizens of the United States."

[Pg 62]

"Yes; but the German name is Schmidt, not Smith. I conclude that this man is a German, but was trying to conceal it."

"You may be right," Delcassé assented, with a trace of impatience in his manner; "no doubt you are right. Is there anything more?"

"There is one thing," said Lépine, colouring a little, "which I have kept until the last, because it seems to upset M. Crochard's theory."

"What is that?"

Lépine drew two sheets of yellow tissue-paper from his pocket-book.

"An hour after our men left the Hotel du Nord," he said, "a telegram arrived, addressed to this William Smith. Here it is," and he spread out one of the sheets on the desk before the Minister.

Delcassé bent forward eagerly and read:

"William Smith, Hotel du Nord, Toulon, France.

"Our mother requests that you abandon trip, cancel all arrangements, and return at once.

"ALFRED."

"Well?" and Delcassé looked up at his companion.

"That would seem to show, sir," said Lépine, "that William Smith was only an ordinary traveller, after all. You will see that it was filed at Brussels at noon of Sunday, the twenty-fourth. It was delayed in transmission, and for some reason was not received at Toulon until nine o'clock in the evening. Messages here are not delivered on Sunday evening after eight o'clock, and this was held until seven the next morning. At that hour, William Smith was no longer at the hotel."

[Pg 63]

"Well?" asked Delcassé a second time.

"Well," Lépine continued, "at ten minutes past six on Monday morning, this message was filed at the office here," and he spread out the second sheet of tissue.

Again Delcassé bent forward, and read:

"Alfred Smith, Restante, Brussels.

"We continue our trip as planned. All well. Next address Nice.

"WILLIAM."

"You will see," Lépine went on, "that these messages are such as an ordinary tourist would send and receive."

But Delcassé was not listening. He was reading the messages a second time and yet a third, and there was a wrinkle of perplexity between his brows. At last he looked up, and the Prefect was astonished at the expression of his face.

"There is one thing I forgot to tell you last night, Lépine," he said. "I did not myself see its significance until I had got to bed. The first telegram received from any foreign power in reference to the disaster was from the German Emperor."

[Pg 64]

Lépine smiled.

"The German Emperor was the first to get word of it," he said. "I examined the other telegrams filed Monday morning. At ten minutes to seven, the German consul here notified the Minister of State at Berlin of the explosion. Admiral Bellue did not file his message to you until forty minutes later. No doubt he wished to assure himself of the extent of the disaster, in order not to alarm you needlessly. You should have received it not later than eight o'clock."

"It was, in fact, a few minutes before that hour. And when I reached the Elysée Palace, I found the President with a message from the Kaiser in his hand. It struck me as most peculiar."

"It was ironic, certainly," agreed Lépine, "but, under the circumstances, easily explained."

"You think, then—"

"I think that Crochard has assumed too much; I think that, before we accuse these men, we need more proof."

Delcassé pushed back his chair and paced for some moments nervously about the room. At last he sat down again, and rolled and lighted a cigarette.

"You are right," he said; "we need more proof. It is for you to find it, if it exists. And at this moment, I am interested not so much in the movements of these men, as in the cause of the explosion. Even supposing that they had a hand in it, how was it accomplished?"

Lépine returned the telegrams to his pocket.

"I agree with you," he said, "that that is the vital question. And I am unable to answer it."

"I shall institute a Board of Inquiry at once," went on the Minister; "I have, in fact, already summoned the officers who will compose it. I will arrange for it to visit the wreck and begin to take evidence to-day, as it is important that the evidence be secured while the event is still fresh. I would suggest that you place some of your men at the disposition of the Board."

"Very well, sir," Lépine agreed, and withdrew.

Toulon was awake again, and the streets were thronged as on a fête day. The first shock of the disaster had passed, and the inborn cheerfulness of the people was asserting itself. The excuse for a holiday was not to be overlooked, and every one who could take a day, or even an hour of leisure, did so, and spent it partly on the quays staring at the wreck, partly in the Place de la Liberté listening to the orators, partly in the Place d'Armes watching the men at work draping with black the Maritime Prefecture, where the Board of Inquiry was to sit, and the church of Saint Louis, where requiem High Mass was to be celebrated. Finally as much as remained of the holiday was spent at a café before a glass of coffee or apéritif, with the satisfaction of a sacred duty conscientiously performed.

Lépine, as he made his way through the crowd, noticed that there was no longer any talk of treachery or treason,—even the word "sabotage" was no longer uttered. Every one agreed that the affair was another accident, deplorable indeed, but unavoidable and without dishonour, and so not to be taken too deeply to heart. France could build other battleships! The mercury in the national temperament was asserting itself.

For an hour Lépine walked about with thoughtful face, listening to the talk, watching the crowd, joining a group here and there, catching chance words from passers-by. He had had only three hours' sleep, but he showed no trace of fatigue. Certainly nothing was farther from his thoughts at this moment than that he needed rest.

He made his way at last to the Quai de Cronstadt and joined the crowd which was staring at the wreck. A barge had been moored alongside, and a heavy crane was lifting the detached débris into it and clearing the way for the searching parties. On the quay opposite the wreck, at Number Ten, was a café, the Café des Voyageurs as its sign announced, and to this Lépine presently crossed, sat down at a table and ordered a bock.

The café was crowded, for its situation could not have been more fortunate; a steady stream of money had poured into the pockets of its proprietor ever since the disaster. The shattered windows were in themselves an advertisement, and no effort had as yet been made to replace them. Lépine looked about the place with interest. It was not large, but it had a certain air of prosperity bespeaking a good patronage, even at ordinary times. At the Prefecture, Lépine had made some discreet inquiries concerning its proprietor, who, he was told, had the reputation of being an honest fellow and had never been in trouble with the police. Nevertheless, as a friend of Crochard's, Lépine would have welcomed a look at him; but the place at the moment was apparently in charge of the head-waiter. It was the head-waiter himself who responded when Lépine rapped for the "addition," and, as he paid it, slipped a note into his hand. Lépine opened it, under cover of his hat, and found that it contained a single line:

"Monsieur C. will welcome a conference with Monsieur L."

Without a word, Lépine arose and followed the man, who crossed the room, opened a door at the farther end of it, stood aside for him to pass, and then gently closed it. Lépine found himself in a little room with a single window opening upon a court. It was furnished with a table and three chairs, and at the table sat Crochard. He motioned Lépine to a seat.

"I was expecting you," he said, with a little smile; "and I am glad you came. In the presence of that good Pigot, one cannot talk freely. Indeed, it was with the greatest difficulty that I maintained a sober countenance. He was so astonished, so overwhelmed, that you and I should be working together—that we should be able to sit in the same room without flying at each other's throats. If he only knew—"

"Is it necessary to go into that?" asked Lépine.

"Why not? You have no reason to be ashamed of it. If you have sought my aid from time to time, it was because you realised that Crochard the Invincible has sources of information which are closed to the police."

"I said as much to M. Delcassé. It was not of myself I was thinking, but of you. What if your friends knew?"

"My friends? I have never betrayed my friends, as you know well. Surely, Lépine, you have understood that, if I assisted you, it was only because it suited me to do so!"

"Yes, I have understood that," assented Lépine, flushing a little at the other's tone. "You always had a bargain to propose. What is the bargain, this time?"

"There is no bargain," retorted Crochard, curtly. "I ask nothing."

Lépine cast at him an astonished glance.

"What!" cried Crochard, his face suddenly red, "you cannot believe the truth, then? It seems incredible to you that I should love my country? Well, I *do* love her, and I am going to prove it by saving her!"

"Is she in need of saving?" queried Lépine, ironically.

Crochard's eyes gleamed; then, in a moment, his anger passed.

"Delcassé believes so; Lépine does not: behold the difference between a great man and a clever one," he said, and looked at Lépine with pity in his eyes.

"Well, yes," said the Prefect; "I admit it; I make no claim to greatness. I perceive no danger—nor, for the matter of that, does M. Delcassé."

Crochard looked at him for a moment.

"Let me see the registration slip from the Prefecture," he said, at last.

Without a word, Lépine got out his pocket-book, produced the slip, and handed it to his companion.

Crochard studied it closely.

"You have, of course, remarked the German 'S,'" he said, at last "I thought so. Now the telegram which arrived too late." [Pg 70]

Lépine passed it over obediently.

Crochard read it and re-read it, a strange light in his eyes.

"And now the other one," he said, finally.

Lépine stared at him.

"How do you know there is another one?" he demanded.

"Of course there is another one!" retorted Crochard, impatiently. "Any fool would know that!"

Still staring, Lépine handed him the second sheet of tissue.

Crochard took one glance at it; then he looked at his companion.

"Do you mean to say, Lépine," he asked, "that, in the face of these telegrams, you remain unconvinced—that you do not see the danger?"

"I see no danger," repeated the Prefect, doggedly.

"And yet I tell you, Lépine," said Crochard, leaning forward across the table and speaking in deadliest earnest, "that the danger is desperate. You are blind to it, a thing which astonishes me; M. Delcassé can do nothing—his hands are tied by the red tape of his position. There remains only Crochard! If I sit idle, if I fold my hands, within a month Germany will declare war and will sweep over France like a pestilence. Yesterday she struck the first blow; I tremble to think what the second may be!" [Pg 71]

"But war!" protested Lépine. "Nonsense! For war there must be a cause."

"A pretext will do—and a pretext can always be found. Already Germany is preparing her pretext: she has demanded equal rights with France in Morocco—a preposterous demand, and one which France can never grant. What cares Germany about Morocco? Nothing! But the pretext must be ready. And now, Lépine," he added, pushing back the papers, and speaking in another tone, "I will tell you why I have come to you: I should prefer to work alone; but, in the first place, it was necessary to provide a means of access to M. Delcassé; in the second place, you got these papers, where I might have failed; in the third place, there are certain questions to which you can get an answer more easily than I."

"What are the questions?" asked Lépine, moved, in spite of himself, by Crochard's manner.

"There are two to which I would ask you to get answers at once. The first: does the government maintain, or has it authorised, any wireless stations in the town or in the neighbourhood? The second: have the wireless operators on any of the battleships noticed any unusual interference during the past few days? How long will it take you to secure answers to those questions—authoritative answers?" [Pg 72]

"An hour."

Crochard glanced at his watch.

"It is now ten o'clock. At eleven, you will arrange for a conference with M. Delcassé. There must be no one present but we three."

"M. Crochard," said Lépine, drily, "I do not like your imperatives. I am not accustomed to them."

"M. Lépine," Crochard retorted, "my way of speaking is my own, and I am too old to change. In this affair, it is you who work with me, not I with you. Shall we go on, or shall we stop here?"

Lépine trembled with a severe inward struggle. Crochard impressed and fascinated him; but his terms were humiliating.

Crochard met his gaze, read what was behind it, and leaned forward again across the table.

"Lépine," he said, "have I ever failed to do a thing I promised?"

"No."

"I shall not fail this time."

"What is it you promise?"

"I promise," said Crochard, and raised his right hand solemnly, as though registering an oath, "I promise to find the man who destroyed *La Liberté*, and to save my country!"

[Pg 73]

Lépine gazed at him for a moment, then pushed back his chair and rose to his feet. The patriot in him had triumphed.

"Where shall the conference with M. Delcassé take place?" he asked.

Crochard smiled at the question and at the little man's impassive face.

"Lépine," he said, "on my word, you touch greatness sometimes, and I find myself admiring you! Let the conference take place at M. Delcassé's apartment. Oh, yes; you will have a closed carriage waiting at the private entrance."

"At eleven o'clock," agreed Lépine.

"At eleven o'clock," repeated Crochard, and waved his adieu. Then, as the door closed behind that erect little figure, he sank back into his seat with a chuckle and touched a bell.

An inner door, concealed so cleverly in the wall that even Lépine's sharp eyes had not perceived it, opened and a man looked in.

"He has gone," Crochard said. "Bring some wine, Samson, and two glasses."

The door closed, but opened again in a moment to admit the man, with bottle and glasses. He placed them on the table, went back to make sure that the door was closed, and then sat down opposite Crochard. Why he should be called Samson, unless in derision, was hard to understand, for he was a mere skeleton of a man, with a face like parchment. But the brow was high and the eyes bright and the mouth as tender as a woman's.

[Pg 74]

Crochard glanced at the label on the cobwebbed bottle, and nodded as he filled his glass.

"You are good to your friends, Samson," he said. "Your health!"

"Yours!" said Samson, and drained his glass. "Everything I have is yours, my master; you know that!"

"Even your life?"

"You have only to ask it."

Crochard looked at him with smiling eyes.

"I believe you, my friend," he said. "Some day I may have to ask it—but not yet. Did you see the man who just left me?"

"It was M. Lépine," said Samson, quietly.

"Did he see you?"

"No; but if he had, it would make no difference. He would not know me now."

"Perhaps not," Crochard agreed, and glanced at the other's wasted face. "And yet he has sharp eyes and a wonderful memory."

"I will keep out of his way," said Samson.

"At worst, it is only a question of another rescue; but avoid him, if you can. You have a good station here, the business pays; you can lead a quiet life—and, from time to time, be of use to me."

[Pg 75]

"The last is the most important," said Samson, and filled his glass again.

"Have you learned anything more of the white-haired man?"

"No; but I *will* know more before evening."

"I wish especially to find his lodging. If he is no longer there, I must know when he departed and where he went."

"All that you shall know; I will see to it."

"No detail is too unimportant."

"I shall remember."

"And perhaps," added Crochard, "if things go well—for this is an affair of great importance, where for once I am working on the side of the law—I shall be able to secure for you that for which you have longed—pardon from the State, rehabilitation, so that you can resume your own name and live again openly with your family. That is worth working for, is it not?"

"Ah!" cried Samson, his voice quivering with emotion. "If you could do that! But it is impossible!"

"It is *not* impossible!" said Crochard, and struck the table with his open hand. "I promise it!"

Samson stared at him, his lips working, and two large tears formed slowly in the corners of his eyes, brimmed over and ran down his cheeks. If Crochard said "I promise it!" the thing was as good as done. Suddenly he sat upright and brushed the tears away.

[Pg 76]

"What is it I must do?" he asked. "Tell me!"

CHAPTER VI

THE MYSTERIOUS SIGNALS

M. Delcassé was a busy man, that morning, and he snorted with derision when Lépine, having secured admission for a moment, told him of Crochard's request for an audience at eleven o'clock.

"Impossible!" he said. "The Board of Inquiry is to convene at that hour, and I must be present to address them."

"Perhaps it would be possible to adjourn the meeting until afternoon," Lépine suggested.

Delcassé stared at him in astonishment.

"Possible, yes," he said; "most things are possible. But do you know what it is you are proposing?"

"I am proposing," said Lépine boldly, "that you permit nothing to interfere with the conference which Crochard requests."

"But Crochard—who is Crochard that I should disturb all my arrangements for him?"

"I will tell you who he is, sir," said Lépine, gently; "he is the man whom, next to yourself, I consider the most remarkable in France."

Delcassé softened. The compliment was, perhaps, not delicate, but it was at least deserved.

"You believe that?" he asked.

"Yes, I do believe it. I must tell you more of Crochard, some day. Beside him, I am a mere bungler—I realise it more deeply each time I meet him. And I assure you that I am not one to underestimate myself."

Delcassé looked at him with a little smile.

"It seems to me that your note has changed," he said. "This morning—"

"I have seen Crochard since then," explained Lépine, simply.

"And you are in earnest about this conference?"

"In deadly earnest, sir. So is Crochard."

Delcassé pondered a moment.

"You may bring him here at seven o'clock to-night," he said, finally. "That is the first moment I have at leisure."

"It will not do, M. Delcassé," said Lépine, firmly. "The other inquiry must wait. It is not that inquiry which is important, it is this one."

Again the Minister stared.

"But it seems to me that you are telling me what I must do," he said. "Explain yourself."

"Your official inquiry," answered Lépine boldly, "for all the famous men who take part in it, will discover nothing—it will be like that other inquiry into the affair of the *Jena*."

"And what will yours discover?"

"It is not mine—it is Crochard's," Lépine corrected. "It is he who is in command. And it seems to me that he has already made a beginning. I am convinced that he has something more to tell us. He has charged me to secure answers to two questions."

"What are they?"

"Whether there are any wireless stations in the town, or in the neighbourhood, and whether there has recently been any peculiar interference with the working of the instruments on our battleships."

"Ah!" said Delcassé, whose expression had changed from irritation to one of absorbed attention. "So he has thought of that, also!" and he fell into a moment's reverie. "Very well, Lépine," he added. "I believe that you are right. I will arrange for the President to open the sitting, and I will summon the man who can answer the questions."

He rang for his secretary, and Lépine hastened away to secure the closed carriage. He smiled

to himself as he did so. How incredulous Pigot and all the rest would be should they ever hear that their chief had obeyed blindly the instructions of The Invincible, and that the first Minister of France had altered his plans in accordance with them!

The carriage engaged and one of his own men placed in charge of it, Lépine took his station at the principal entrance, to watch the crowd until Crochard should appear. The corridors were thronged with people, hurrying in and out. Lépine knew many of them, for a whole staff had been brought from Paris to carry on the business of the State, and more than one august individual paused for a word with him. But to their questions he could only respond by a shake of the head.

[Pg 80]

At the stroke of eleven, Crochard mounted the steps to the door, and, at a nod from the Prefect, followed him up the stairs into the anteroom of Delcassé's suite. An attendant, who was evidently on the watch for them, showed them at once into the Minister's private office. He was deep in correspondence, but he instantly pushed it to one side and dismissed his secretary.

"Well, M. Crochard," he said, "Lépine tells me you have more news for us. Be seated. What is the news?"

"I requested that M. Lépine should make certain inquiries—"

"Yes, about the wireless," and Delcassé looked at him closely. "Tell me, why did you think of that?"

"I do not know," answered Crochard, rubbing his forehead slowly; "but as I sat last night gazing at the wreck, a thought came to me—a vague thought—not to be put into words...."

[Pg 81]

"Well," said Delcassé, as he paused, "I had the same thought last night, before I slept. It seems to me a most striking coincidence. Are you aware that, in the case of the *Jena*, wireless was mentioned as a possible cause?"

"Yes," answered Crochard; "I am aware of that."

The eyes of the two men met in a long glance. Then Delcassé touched a bell.

"Introduce General Marbeau," he said to his secretary.

The latter returned in a moment with a dark little man in full uniform. Then he went out again and closed the door. The little man bowed deeply to the Minister of Marine.

"Be seated, General," said Delcassé. "M. Lépine, I think you already know—as who does not! This other gentleman I will not name—I will only say that he is a coadjutor whose services we value very highly. He has certain questions to ask you, which I wish you to answer as though I myself were asking them. Proceed, sir," and he nodded to Crochard. "General Marbeau is the chief of our wireless service."

"What wireless stations are there in the city of Toulon, General?" Crochard began.

"None, sir, except the one at the arsenal," Marbeau answered, looking at his questioner with discreet curiosity.

[Pg 82]

"And in the neighbourhood?"

"None nearer than Marseilles."

"There are no private installations?"

"The government does not permit private installations."

"Yet there might be some, clandestinely built?"

"That is possible."

"However, you can assure me of this: if any such do exist, they are outside the law?"

"Undoubtedly."

"Why are private stations prohibited?"

"They are prohibited because they would interfere with the government stations. You understand, sir, that wireless waves clash in the air, as it were; when they cross or intermingle, the result is a confusing chatter, until the sending and receiving instruments have been carefully tuned with each other. Even that does not always overcome it. A few private stations have been authorised strictly for scientific purposes, but there is none nearer than that at the University of Lyons."

"Do you ever suffer from interference here?"

"Oh, yes; the English have a very powerful station at Gibraltar and another at Malta; their battleships are all equipped with it, as are those of Italy. So are most of the passenger steamers which enter the Mediterranean. The air is often filled with messages."

[Pg 83]

"Has there been any such interference during the past few days?"

"Yes, a great deal of it; one instance in particular of which my operators have complained."

"Ah!" said Crochard. "Will you tell us exactly what it was?"

"Last Saturday," explained Marbeau, "about three in the afternoon, there came from somewhere a series of long dashes, lasting nearly half a second, and spaced about two seconds apart. This continued for perhaps half an hour."

"You had no idea as to their origin?"

"We thought that perhaps the English were tuning up a new and very powerful instrument at Gibraltar."

"You had no way of verifying this?"

"We did not try to do so."

"Was this interruption repeated?"

"Yes; our automatic recorder shows that the signals began again a little before five o'clock yesterday morning and continued for nearly two hours."

Crochard's eyes were shining.

"At what hour was *La Liberté* destroyed?" he asked.

"The first explosion was at 5:50. There were two others, a few minutes apart. The main magazine exploded at very close to six o'clock."

[Pg 84]

"So that these signals began at least an hour before and continued nearly an hour past that time?"

"That is so, sir," assented Marbeau, in surprise; "but I can imagine no connection—"

"Do not imagine anything," broke in Delcassé quickly, his voice quivering with excitement. "Perhaps there is no connection; but nevertheless I think these signals should have been reported to me. Come in," he added, as a tap sounded at the door.

His secretary entered and handed him a telegram. Delcassé's eyes were positively gleaming as he read it.

"Better and better!" he cried. "Oh, this is a game after my own heart!" and he tossed the telegram to Lépine. "Read it aloud!" he added, "that I may be sure my eyes have not deceived me!"

And Lépine picked up the message and read:

"Note B162864R, one hundred francs, one of series of three hundred such notes sent to Imperial Bank, Berlin, September 8.

"LINNÉ, Governor Bank of France."

There was a moment's silence, Marbeau staring blankly, but the other three gazing into each other's faces with shining eyes.

"Perfect, perfect!" murmured Delcassé, and seized the telegram and read it again.

"The next step, sir," said Crochard quietly, "is to instruct every bank in France to report immediately the receipt of any of the other two hundred and ninety-nine!"

[Pg 85]

Delcassé drew a deep breath, pulled a pad of blanks toward him, and scribbled a few words.

"See that this is sent at once," he said, and the secretary took the message and hastened away.

Then Delcassé did something which he had not done since that night, five years before, when word came that England had signed the secret treaty: he removed his great glasses, got out his handkerchief, and deliberately wiped his eyes.

"Your pardon, gentlemen," he said, with a twisted smile. "This is for me a great moment. You know my dream! I believed it shattered; but now I think that it may yet come true!" He snapped his glasses on again and swung around to Crochard. "If it does," he added, "I shall have you to thank! Proceed with your questions."

"There are no more questions, sir," said Crochard; "but we have a little excursion to make. It will consume perhaps an hour, and I think that you will find it interesting. M. Lépine has a closed carriage at the private entrance. I would suggest that General Marbeau accompany us. He will be of great service. Can we start at once?"

For answer, Delcassé leaped to his feet and seized his hat. There was no longer in his mind any question as to the importance of this inquiry, and the comparative unimportance of that other one, opening with much pomp at the Prefecture. In fact, he had forgotten all about it!

[Pg 86]

"The private entrance, you say?" he asked. "Then come this way," and he led the way down the private staircase. The carriage stood at the curb.

Crochard glanced at the driver.

"He is your man, of course?" he said to Lépine. "Good." And, as the others entered, he stopped to speak a few words to him. Then he, too, leaped inside, and slammed the door.

The driver spoke to his horses, and they were off, along the Rue Nationale, across the Place St. Roche, through the Botanic Gardens, past the Marine Observatory, under the Porte Nationale, and through the faubourgs. At the end of twenty minutes, the town was left behind, and Crochard stopped the carriage, got out, and mounted to the seat beside the driver.

Then, at a slower pace, the carriage climbed a narrow road leading toward the hills back of the town. It was apparently little used, for it was overgrown with grass, over which the carriage-wheels rolled noiselessly. Inside the carriage, Delcassé spoke only once.

"On this day of surprises, I am prepared for anything!" he declared, and relapsed into silence.

At last the carriage stopped, and, pulling back the curtains, those within it saw they were in the midst of a grove of lofty beeches.

[Pg 87]

Crochard jumped from the seat and opened the door.

"We must get out here," he said; and when the others had alighted, he started off before them among the trees.

Delcassé kept close at the leader's heels, fairly panting with eagerness. Lépine followed and Marbeau came last. The rustling of the dead leaves beneath their feet was the only sound which broke the stillness. At the end of five minutes, they came to what was apparently a deserted shed. Its door was secured by a heavy hasp and padlock. Crochard drew a key from his pocket, opened the padlock, released the hasp, and threw back the door.

"Enter, my friends!" he cried, and stood aside that they might pass.

They crowded in and stood staring about them. For a moment, in the semi-darkness, they could see nothing; then certain vague shapes detached themselves—a table, a chair, strange jars, a queer-looking clock....

Marbeau uttered a sudden startled exclamation.

"Why, this is a wireless plant!" he cried.

"Precisely, sir!" agreed Crochard. "The plant from which came those peculiar signals!"

[Pg 88]

CHAPTER VII

THE HUT IN THE GROVE

General Marbeau bent with the interest of an expert above the rude table on which the apparatus was installed, and examined it for some moments in silence. Then he straightened up and glanced at Delcassé.

"Well?" asked the latter.

"It is, indeed, a wireless installation, sir," said Marbeau, "or, at least, part of one. Most of the instruments of transmission are here, but there are no recording instruments. In other words, wireless messages might be sent from here, but none could be received—unless this is a recorder of some sort," and he pointed to a small instrument of clock-like appearance which stood on the table.

"No," said Crochard; "that is not a recorder—that is the sender."

"The sender?" repeated Marbeau.

"Yes. You have noticed there is no key?"

"Yes, and I do not understand its absence."

"This device takes the place of it—it was by means of this that the spaced signals were sent. Listen."

He bent above the clock, and the others heard a sound as of a strong spring being wound. Then he stood erect: there were two sharp ticks; then a long white snap of electricity; two ticks and another snap; two ticks and another snap....

[Pg 89]

"Yes, that is the signal!" cried Marbeau, and bent again above the mechanism. In a moment he understood.

Before the clock-face was a single long hand, a second-hand, terminating in a thin, spring-like strip of platinum. The circumference of the face was divided into sixty spaces, and at every third space was a slender copper pin, which the end of the second-hand touched in passing. Two wires, one connected with the second-hand, the other presumably with the copper pins, ran from the clock down to the heavy batteries on the floor. Every three seconds the circuit was automatically closed, and a long flash sent along the conducting wire out into the air. Marbeau stood listening for a moment longer, then loosened one of the wires. The signals stopped.

"Now let us see the aerial," he said, and led the way outside.

But there was no aerial in sight. Then Crochard's finger pointed out a series of wires among the trees to the left of the hut. Walking directly beneath them, Marbeau saw that there were three wires parallel with each other, and that they were stretched between two trees about fifty feet apart. From each of them dropped a lead-wire, and these were gathered together into the single wire which led into the hut. An arm of wood had been secured to each of the trees, and to these the wires were fastened by means of porcelain insulators.

[Pg 90]

"But such an aerial would not be effective!" Marbeau protested. "It would be muffled and

deadened by the leaves and branches all about it."

"There are no branches in front of it," said Crochard. "If you will look, you will see that they have been very carefully cleared away in that single direction. As I understand wireless, the waves released from those wires up yonder permeate the atmosphere in every direction."

"That is true."

"With equal intensity?"

"No; they would be most intense in the direction in which the wires extend."

"Ah!" said Crochard. "And, as we may perceive from the way in which the trees are trimmed, it was only in that direction that the builder of this affair desired them to penetrate. Can you not guess what that direction is? If you will climb this tree and look along the wires, you will find that they point directly toward the wreck of *La Liberté*."

For a moment, the three stared at Crochard without speaking, then Marbeau threw off his coat and started up the tree. It was not an easy climb, but he was an agile man, and at last he reached the arm to which the wires were affixed. He remained for some moments looking out along them; then he slowly descended.

"It is true," he said, in a low voice, as he resumed his coat. "The wires could hardly have been so placed by accident."

"It was not by accident," said Crochard.

"And yet," went on Marbeau, "I do not see what all this can have to do with the disaster."

"Nor I," agreed M. Delcassé. "And yet as M. Cro— as our friend here says, all this was not done by accident."

"I would suggest," said Crochard, "that we return to M. Delcassé's apartment. We can talk there without fear of being overheard—a thing that is not possible among all these trees."

Marbeau took a last look at the wireless apparatus; then Crochard locked the door of the hut, and gave the key to the Minister.

"Where did you get this key, my friend?" asked Delcassé, looking at it curiously.

"About that there is no mystery," smiled Crochard. "I purchased it, together with that lock yonder, this morning. I found it necessary to break the original lock before I could enter the hut. It may be well to station a guard here," he added, "until you are ready to dismantle the place."

Delcassé nodded, and slipped the key into his pocket; and together they made their way to the waiting carriage.

The trip back was a silent one. Delcassé and Lépine, their brains aching with the effort, were trying to understand; Marbeau, convinced that the explosion could not have been caused by wireless, was marshaling his reasons; and Crochard—Crochard sat with placid countenance gazing straight ahead of him—but that placid countenance masked supreme intellectual effort.

At last the carriage stopped.

"You will wait here," said Delcassé to the driver, and, as soon as he reached his office, summoned his secretary and directed that a guard of four marines be sent by the carriage to the hut in the grove. Then he sat down, rolled a cigarette, and passed tobacco and paper to his companions. "And now," he said, looking at Crochard, "let us hear what you have to tell us."

"There is not much to tell, sir," answered Crochard. "I learned of the existence of this hut yesterday evening. Some children, searching for mushrooms for a friend of mine, who is a restaurateur, happened to see the wires among the trees, and told him of their discovery. He thought it so curious that he at once sent word to me."

"And you, of course, sent word back that he was to tell no one else," said Delcassé, with a smile.

"Yes, I thought that best. I paid a visit to the hut as soon as it was light this morning, entered it, examined it, and convinced myself that it was really a wireless station. Then I made certain inquiries. The grove, it appears, is owned by a gentleman of Marseilles, and was once much larger than it is now. The hut was built for the use of charcoal-burners, but has not been occupied for more than two years. I would suggest that the police ascertain whether the owner was aware he had a tenant."

"We will do so," said Delcassé. "But who was this tenant?"

"There is some doubt on that point," answered Crochard slowly. "That little road is used but seldom, for a better one now leads around the base of the hill; and few people ever have occasion to enter the grove. It was, of course, for this very reason that the hut was chosen for this installation. I have found no one who saw any man at work there. On the other hand, a friend of mine, who has a cabaret on the main road just outside the city gate, has seen pass a number of times within the past week a man who, from his face and dress, was evidently not a Frenchman, and whose actions appeared to my friend to be suspicious."

Delcassé smiled.

"You seem to have many friends," he remarked; "and unusually observant ones."

"Yes," agreed Crochard; "I am fortunate in my friends; and they find it greatly to their interest to keep their eyes open."

[Pg 91]

[Pg 92]

[Pg 93]

[Pg 94]

"Did you secure a description of this stranger?"

"Yes; but there should have been much more than a mere description. Some of my friends are more intelligent than others. Still, it may be of service. This stranger was a small man, slightly built, with grey hair and bright, dark eyes. His complexion was also rather dark, and my friend hazarded the guess that he was a Spaniard. He was dressed in dark clothes, cut after a fashion not French, and wore a soft, dark hat."

"But that is a splendid description!" cried Delcassé. "What more did you want?"

"Ah, sir," replied Crochard, "if it had been some of my friends, they would have managed to meet this man; they would have engaged him in conversation, have discovered his business and place of abode; instead of which, this friend in question merely sits at the door of his cabaret and watches the man pass! He was not doing his duty—but he will not make such a mistake again!"

"His duty?" echoed Delcassé. "His duty to whom?"

"His duty to me," replied Crochard.

"But I do not understand," said the Minister, more and more amazed. "Why should your friends have any such duty to you?"

Crochard hesitated. Lépine's face was fairly saturnine.

"I cannot explain that to you now, sir," said Crochard, finally. "I can only say that it is part of a system which has existed for a very long time, and of which I now happen to be the head."

Delcassé pondered this for a moment, his eyes on Crochard's face. Then he turned to Lépine.

"You must learn more of this stranger, Lépine," he said. "You, also, are at the head of a system—and a very expensive one."

"Yes, and a good one, sir," said Lépine, quickly. "One which is worth all it costs. But men will not work for money as they do for self-interest; and then, my system is a mere infant beside that of our friend here, which must be at least two hundred years old."

"Oh, much more than that!" said Crochard, quickly, and smiled at Delcassé's astounded face. "Please understand," he added, "that I do not assert that this is the man we want. There is as yet no absolute proof, though I hope soon to have it. But there is one significant fact: when going from the city he frequently carried a heavy bundle, but never when returning."

"That is indeed significant," agreed Delcassé. "But it indicates another thing which astonishes me. If he did all this alone, it was because he had no one to assist him. But if he had no accomplice, who were the two men who watched the destruction of *La Liberté*? And, above all, who is this man who plans, alone and unaided, the destruction of our navy? What is his purpose? Whence did he come? Whither has he gone? Is he a madman—an anarchist?" Delcassé ran his fingers through his hair with a despairing gesture. "He astounds me!" he added. "My brain falters at thought of such a man!"

But Marbeau, to whom much of this talk had been incomprehensible, began at last to understand, and shook his head in violent protest.

"Whoever the man may have been," he broke out, "or whatever his business, it could have had nothing to do with the destruction of *La Liberté*."

Delcassé wheeled upon him.

"Why do you say that?" he demanded.

"Because, sir, it is absurd to suppose that the magazines of the ship could be exploded by wireless. Wireless has no such power. And, in this instance, it is quite easy to prove that they were *not* so exploded."

"Prove it, then," said the Minister, impatiently.

"In the first place, the signals, which we now know came from that hut up yonder, were first noted on Saturday. They continued for half an hour, and yet no explosion occurred. In the second place, we caused them to be repeated to-day, and again there was no explosion."

"*La Liberté* was no longer there to explode," Delcassé objected grimly.

"True; but there were other ships near by—*La Patrie*, *La République*, *La Vérité*. These ships and others were also there at the time of the explosion, yet they were not affected, although all of them had precisely the same sort of powder in their magazines that *La Liberté* had in hers."

"But you have already said that the waves could be intensified in a certain direction," Delcassé pointed out.

"So they can; but they cannot be confined to a channel nor directed at a mark, as a bullet is. The hut in the grove is fully three miles away from the harbour, and I assert that every ship in the harbour felt the waves with the same intensity as *La Liberté*."

"And what is your deduction from all this?" inquired Delcassé.

"My deduction is that those signals did not and could not cause the explosion."

"Then what was their purpose? How do you explain them?"

Marbeau made a gesture of helplessness.

"I do not know what their purpose was; I cannot explain them," he said; "but I am confident

[Pg 95]

[Pg 96]

[Pg 97]

[Pg 98]

that they could not have destroyed *La Liberté*."

"I agree with General Marbeau," said Crochard suddenly.

They all stared at him, astonished that he should admit himself defeated.

"But I would add one word to his deduction," he added. "The word 'alone.'"

"'Alone?'" echoed Delcassé.

"I would make the statement thus: 'Those signals *alone* did not and could not cause the explosion.'"

Delcassé looked at him with puzzled eyes, and again ran his fingers impatiently through his hair.

"I do not understand," he said. "You are getting beyond me. What is your theory, then?"

The line in Crochard's brow deepened.

"It is a thing, sir," he answered slowly, "which I find difficult to express in words. There is, at the back of my mind, an idea, vague, misty, of which as yet I catch only the dim outlines. My process of reasoning is this: it is certain, as General Marbeau says, that the signals from the hut were, in themselves, harmless, or there would have been other explosions than that on board *La Liberté*. Wireless waves can be directed and concentrated only to a very limited extent. They can be made a little stronger in one general direction than in others, that is all. And, in this case, that general direction would have embraced all the ships at anchor in the harbour.

[Pg 99]

"There must, then, have been some other force which, at the appointed time, struck from this stream of signals a spark, so to speak, into the magazines of *La Liberté*, one after the other. That there was an appointed time we cannot doubt—we know that it was the moment of sunrise yesterday. That the magazines were fired one at a time, and at spaced intervals we also know. That they could not explode of themselves in that way seems certain.

"You will remember that the signals began more than an hour before sunrise, and continued for at least half an hour afterwards. We know that the signals were sent automatically. Why? Partly, no doubt, because it was necessary that they be absolutely regular; but also because the man who did this thing—who is himself, perhaps, the inventor of the method—chose to make no confidants, to have no accomplices, and he could not himself be in the hut to send the signals. Again you ask why. Not because of danger of discovery, since there was no such danger. I believe it was because it was necessary that he be somewhere else, directing from an angle, perhaps, that other force, so mysterious and so deadly. I seem to see two forces, travelling in converging lines, as two bullets might travel, their point of meeting the magazines of *La Liberté*. At the instant of their meeting, there is a shock, a spark—as though flint and steel met—and the magazine explodes—first the forward magazine, then the after magazine, then the main magazine—one, two, three! This is all mere guesswork, you understand, sir," Crochard added, in another tone, "but so I see it. And, after all, it is susceptible of proof."

[Pg 100]

"What proof?" demanded Delcassé.

"If my theory is the true one," Crochard explained, "there must have been, somewhere, another installation to create the intercepting force, which, of course, must also be transmitted by ether waves, as wireless is, if it is to penetrate wood and steel. It must have been within an hour's walk—probably half an hour's walk—of the hut in the grove. For remember, the mechanism there was set going an hour before sunrise, and the man had then to reach his other mechanism, and have it ready to start at sunrise. It is for us to discover the place where this second mechanism was installed—and where it probably still remains."

[Pg 101]

"Yes, that would be proof," agreed Delcassé thoughtfully; "and for myself, I will say that I believe your theory the right one. But you have not yet explained the part played by the two watchers on the quay."

"Their part was that of watchers merely," said Crochard. "They were sent there to observe and to report to their master—as they did."

"As they did?"

"Surely it is evident," Crochard explained, "that, if our theory is true, they would hasten to report. Imagine their master's anxiety until he heard from them! As a matter of fact, their report was filed within fifteen minutes after the explosion. M. Lépine has it in his pocket."

Delcassé stared, uncomprehending; but Lépine, his face suddenly illumined, snatched out his pocket-book and produced the sheets of yellow tissue.

"Ah, yes, certainly!" he cried. "I was blind not to see it! The report was in a form agreed upon: 'We continue our trip as planned. All well.' You will understand now, sir," he added, to Delcassé, "the reason for the high opinion I entertain of this gentleman!"

"But that message was sent to Brussels," objected the Minister.

"It was sent 'restante.' A man was waiting at the post-office to receive it and forward it instantly to Berlin."

[Pg 102]

Delcassé's face was a study, as he turned this over in his mind.

"What is your reading of the other message?" he asked, at last.

"My reading," answered Crochard, slowly, "is that, at the last moment, the Emperor, appalled

at the possible consequences, decided to forbid the atrocity, to which he had, perhaps, been persuaded against his better judgment, or in a moment of passion."

"And if the message had not been delayed, *La Liberté* would have been saved?"

"Precisely that, sir."

Delcassé's lips were twitching.

"You may be right," he said, thickly; "you may be right; but it seems incredible. After all, it is merely guesswork!"

"You will pardon me, sir, but it is not guesswork," protested Crochard. "M. Lépine will tell you that, in a case of this kind, it must be all or nothing. Every detail, even to the slightest, the most insignificant, must fit perfectly, or they are all worthless. If I am wrong in this detail, I am wrong in all the others; if I am right in the others, I am also right in this. They stand or fall together. And I believe they will stand!"

[Pg 103]

The great Minister was gazing fascinated at the speaker; for the first time, he caught a real glimpse of his tremendous personality.

"You mean, then," he said, finally, "that if any details we may discover hereafter fail to fit this theory, the theory must be discarded?"

"Discarded utterly and without hesitation," agreed Crochard. "More than that—"

A tap at the door interrupted him.

"Come in," said Delcassé.

His secretary entered, followed by a courier, carrying a portfolio.

"From Paris, sir," said the secretary, and the courier, with a bow, laid the portfolio on the Minister's desk.

Delcassé took from his pocket a tiny key, unlocked the portfolio, drew out a package and glanced at the superscription.

"Ah," he said; "the photographs!" and ripped the package open.

There were some two dozen of them, together with a long typewritten report, which Delcassé glanced through rapidly.

"These are the result of the first report from Berlin," he said, "of officers who are absent from their commands and whose present whereabouts is not definitely known. A supplementary report will follow."

[Pg 104]

"We can begin with these," said Lépine, and looked them over.

Crochard had risen and was looking at the photographs over the detective's shoulder.

"We shall have to shave them first," he remarked.

"Shave them?"

"Divest them of those ornaments," and he indicated the upturned moustaches, à la Kaiser, with which nearly all the pictured faces were adorned. "A brush and a tablet of watercolour will do it."

M. Delcassé arose.

"I will leave that in your hands, gentlemen," he said. "I must meet the Board of Inquiry almost at once. General Marbeau, I thank you for your assistance. You will, of course, say nothing of all this to any one. As for you, sir," he added to Crochard, "I shall thank you better another day. Till this evening, M. Lépine," and he bowed the three men out.

Half an hour later, Lépine and Crochard were closeted with Monsieur and Madame Brisson in the former's bureau at the du Nord. The little innkeeper and his wife were inarticulate with excitement, for they had guessed Lépine's identity from his resemblance to the pictures which every illustrated paper published at frequent intervals, and they suspected, from his bearing, that Crochard was a person of even greater importance. Their faces were glowing with pride, too, for their proffered refreshment had not been declined. In after days, when the sentence of silence had been lifted, they would tell the story to their admiring friends:

[Pg 105]

"Imagine it. Here we sat, I here, Gabrielle there; in that chair M. Lépine, Prefect of the Paris Service du Surété, a little thin man with eyes oh, so bright; and in the fourth chair, with eyes still brighter and an air distinguished which there could be no mistaking—whom do you think? None other than the Duc de B—"; or the Prince de R—, or the Marquis de C—; that was a detail to be filled in later; but a Great Highness, rest assured of that! And the way that both M. Lépine and the unknown Highness relished their Château Yquem was a great compliment to the house.

After these amenities, Lépine produced the demoustached photographs.

"Look well at these," he said; "have care—do not speak unless you are very sure," and he passed the photographs one by one to Madame Gabrielle, who handed them on to her husband. Some ten or twelve were examined without comment, and then Madame uttered a sudden exclamation.

"It is he!" she cried. "It is one of them!"

[Pg 106]

"One of whom?" asked Lépine.

"One of those men. Behold, Aristide!"

Brisson took the card and looked at it.

"Sacred heart! But you are right, Gabrielle!"

"You are sure?" persisted Lépine.

"Sure! But of a certainty! I would swear to him!"

Lépine put the photograph in his pocket, and turned to the others. But there was no second recognition. Brisson and his wife went through them twice, until they had convinced themselves that their other guest was not among them. Finally Lépine gathered the photographs together.

"I must warn you again, Brisson, and you, Madame," he said, severely, "that of this not a single word must be breathed—to no one. Let it pass from your minds as though it had never been. It is an affair of high diplomacy; and you might suffer much were it known that you are concerned in it. In behalf of France, I thank you, and I shall have care that your so great service is brought to the attention of the proper persons. But remember—not a word!"

Monsieur and Madame were faithful—only in the seclusion of their bedroom, with the light extinguished, and in bated whispers, did they ever discuss it. And, as at this point they pass from this story, let it be added that, some months later, a parcel was delivered at their door, which, when opened, was found to contain a handsome vase of Sèvres. Inside the vase was a card, "To Monsieur and Madame Aristide Brisson, from Théophile Delcassé, as a slight recognition of their services to France."

[Pg 107]

It would be impossible to say which this worthy couple value most highly, the vase or the card. Certain it is that, if you are ever a guest at the du Nord, you will be shown both of them, the vase in a velvet-lined case against the wall and the card, neatly framed, just below it. And, in consideration of their increased importance, Monsieur and Madame have considered themselves justified in increasing their tariff ten per cent.

As soon as Lépine and Crochard were alone together, the former took the photograph from his pocket, looked at the number on the back, and then consulted a typewritten list of names. Then, with a hand not wholly steady, he handed the list to his companion.

"Number eighteen," he said.

Opposite that number Crochard read, "Admiral H. Pachmann, Chief of the Wireless Service;" and then he gazed at the photograph long and earnestly, as though impressing it indelibly upon his mind.

[Pg 108]

CHAPTER VIII

THE SECOND INSTALLATION

The Board of Inquiry began its sessions that afternoon, at the Prefecture of Marine. It was composed of the most distinguished officers of France, who had donned for the occasion their most brilliant uniforms. There was much paraphernalia—secretaries, portfolios, red-taped papers, reports—all that display so dear to the French temperament; and every one wore an air of importance and solemnity befitting time and place.

M. Delcassé opened the session with a ringing speech, forming a notable contrast to the platitudes uttered by the President in the morning. In fact, it was so bold in its allusions to an approaching struggle with "the implacable enemy of the Republic," that the members of the Board glanced covertly at each other in astonishment. Their astonishment was the greater because, as they well knew, M. Delcassé was not given to indiscretions. At least, his indiscretions were always nicely-calculated ones. He knew when to speak and when to hold his tongue—none better; and the fact that he thought it necessary to speak now proved that the affair was serious indeed. At the end of the speech, the Board proceeded in a body to an inspection of the wreck.

[Pg 109]

Lépine, meanwhile, armed with the description Crochard had given him, set his men to work to discover the dwelling-place of the white-haired stranger who had been seen passing back and forth along the road outside the city gate. But, to his chagrin, evening came and his men had discovered nothing. It is true that the investigation was rendered more than usually difficult by the fact that the town was still in an uproar, and no one wished to speak of anything but the disaster. For the moment, the memories of the people went no farther back than dawn of the previous day. In a day or two, when the first excitement had passed, there would be a much better chance of success.

So, at least, reasoned Inspector Pigot, whose watchword was always Patience! But the

reasoning did not satisfy L epine. Patience was not always a virtue. In this affair, it was impossible to wait a day or two. With every hour, no doubt, the man they sought was putting fresh leagues between himself and his pursuers. Crochard, so L epine told himself miserably, Crochard would not wait a day or two. Perhaps, already....

He put on his hat and sought the Caf e des Voyageurs. Choosing the seat which he had occupied that morning, he ordered a liqueur and sat for an hour contemplating the crowd. Again he perceived that the proprietor was absent; but this time the head-waiter did not approach, or even meet his glance. He thought, for a moment, of calling him and asking for Crochard; but he finally decided that that would be too great an indiscretion. Besides, as Crochard had pointed out, in this affair it was L epine who followed. It was for him to receive instructions, not to give them. At last, with a feeling of depression and dependency quite new to him, the great detective left the caf e, returned to his hotel and went to bed.

[Pg 110]

But early next morning, things began to move again. He had scarcely finished his breakfast, when a summons came from M. Delcass e to attend him at once, and when L epine entered his office, he saw that something of importance had occurred. Delcass e already had a visitor—a tall, thin man, dressed severely in black, with the word "banker" written all over him. L epine was therefore not surprised when the visitor was introduced to him as the manager of the Toulon branch of the Bank of France.

"We have something of interest here," said Delcass e, and tossed over to L epine two notes for a hundred francs each.

The latter's eyes were shining as he picked them up, glanced at their numbers, and then compared them with a third note which he took from his pocket-book.

[Pg 111]

"They are of the same series," he said. "Where did you get them, sir?" and he turned to the bank manager.

"They were deposited with us by the cashier of the central railway station."

"When?"

"On the afternoon of Monday, the twenty-fifth."

"How did you discover them?"

"We received instructions yesterday from Paris to report immediately the receipt of any notes of this series. Our cashier, while checking up our deposits yesterday evening, happened upon these notes, and identified them as a part of the railway deposit of the day before. The matter was reported to me, and I at once forwarded the report to Paris. This morning I received a telegram instructing me to report in person to M. Delcass e, and I hastened to do so."

"You have done well, sir," said the Minister, "and I thank you. We will ask you to exchange these notes for two others, and furthermore to say nothing to any one of this discovery or of having seen me."

The exchange was made, the banker departed, and L epine, with the notes in his pocket-book, hastened away to the Gare Centrale. Arrived there, he asked for the chief, introduced himself, and stated his business.

[Pg 112]

"I have here two notes," he said, "which were deposited by your cashier last Monday afternoon. It is most important that I find out from whom this money was received, and to what point tickets were purchased. The purchase was made, no doubt, some time during Monday."

"The money might have been received Sunday," the chef-du-gare pointed out. "Since the bank is closed Sunday, we can make no deposit on that day."

"I have reason to believe it was not received until Monday," said L epine. "May I interrogate the cashiers, beginning with the one who was on duty at daybreak Monday?"

"There are two men on duty at all hours," explained the chief; "and each trick is eight hours in length. The first begins at six o'clock in the morning. At what hour was daybreak on Monday?"

"At five o'clock and forty-nine minutes."

"The clerks who were in the bureau at that hour are not here now, but I can have them called."

"Let us interrogate the ones who are here," suggested L epine. "Perhaps it will not be necessary to disturb the others."

The chief pressed a button and summoned the ticket-sellers, one after the other. The first had no recollection of having received the notes, but with his companion L epine was more successful.

[Pg 113]

"Yes, yes, I remember them perfectly," he said, when they were shown to him. "My attention was called to them because they were both quite new. I looked at them closely to make certain that they were genuine, and noticed that they were numbered consecutively. Another detail which caused them to remain in my memory was the striking appearance of the person who gave them to me."

L epine's heart was throbbing with triumph.

"Describe this man," he said.

"Ah, sir," said the clerk, "that is just it. It was not a man, but a girl—a girl of eighteen or twenty. That is what drew my attention. It is not usual to have a girl like that ask for two tickets, second-class, to Paris."

"A girl!" stammered Lépine. "You are sure?"

"Perfectly sure, sir."

"Well, describe her, then."

The clerk half-closed his eyes in order the better to visualize his memory.

"She was, as I have said, of about nineteen, and she was not a Frenchwoman."

"How do you know that?"

"Because, in the first place, she spoke French not very well; and, in the second place, there was in her manner an assurance, a freedom from embarrassment, which a French girl of her station would not possess."

[Pg 114]

"Was she light or dark?"

"She was dark, sir, with bright black eyes, with which she looked at one very steadily. She was slightly built, of medium height, simply dressed, so far as I could see through the little window, not fashionably, but with good effect. However, what impressed me most was her calm assurance—almost American; but she was too dark to be of America."

Reading between the lines, Lépine suspected that the clerk had attempted to start a flirtation with the self-possessed unknown, and had been rebuffed. And yet, what he said was true—young girls in France were not, ordinarily, entrusted with the buying of railway tickets, especially for so considerable a journey.

"You are sure the tickets were to Paris?"

"Yes, sir; second-class. I remember distinctly giving her sixty-four francs in change."

"At what hour was this?"

"About eight o'clock, sir."

"Of Monday morning?"

"Yes, sir; of Monday morning."

"At what hour was the next train for Paris?"

"At eight-fifteen, sir, the express departs."

"The girl had no companion?"

"I saw none, sir."

[Pg 115]

"She certainly had a companion, or she would not have bought two tickets."

"Perhaps the inspector at the gate can tell us something," the chief suggested, and the clerk was dismissed and the inspector summoned. But he could give them no information. There had been many passengers for the express, and, besides, every one, himself included, was so distressed and overwrought by the catastrophe of the morning that there had not been the usual attention to detail. The inquiry was extended to the baggage-porters, but with no better success. They, too, had been upset by the disaster and had thought of nothing else. Some of them had frankly deserted their posts in order to hasten to the harbour-front. None of those who remained had noticed a white-haired man and a dark-haired girl.

"Come!" said Lépine savagely to himself, as he left the station. "This is not getting ahead—we must try the cabs. But first...."

He turned toward the Prefecture and quickened his step, for suddenly he scented a new danger. This white-haired man, then, was in the pay of Germany. He had destroyed *La Liberté* for a price—an immense price, no doubt! And now he had gone to Paris. From there, where would he go? To Brest, perhaps, to work similar mischief there. Lépine shivered a little. The best men he had left at Paris must be sent to Brest with instructions to arrest the fugitives at sight. Two people, so unusual in appearance, would find it difficult to avoid the police in so small a town. But in Paris—that was different. Yet even there something might be done. And then there was always chance, divine chance, which might, at any moment, deliver them into his hands. Ah, if only he were strolling along the Boulevards, looking into this face and that!

[Pg 116]

"Decidedly, I must be getting back!" Lépine murmured; and, having arrived at the Prefecture, he sent a long telegram to his assistant at Paris and another to the Prefect at Brest. Then he summoned Pigot. "You will interrogate the cabmen at the Gare Centrale," he said, "as to which of them drove a white-haired man and a dark-haired girl to the station for the Paris express, Monday morning. And, understand well, Pigot, there must be no failure this time!" Then, as the door closed behind Pigot's retiring figure, he slapped himself smartly on the forehead. "I am a fool!" he cried, and hurried from the building and called a cab.

There are many dealers in electrical supplies at Toulon, and it was not until he reached the fourth one that Lépine found a ray of light. No; its proprietor had no recollection of any sales to strangers. A little white-haired man? No. But stay—there *had* been a white-haired man! No, he had bought nothing. He had had a battery recharged—a heavy battery of an unusual type. Yes, it had been delivered. One moment, and the man slowly turned the pages of his ledger, while Lépine bit his lips with impatience. Here it was—the address—80 Rue du Plasson, fourth floor.

[Pg 117]

In another moment, Lépine's cab was rattling over the cobbles in the direction of the quays.

"Faster! Faster!" he urged.

And then they were in the Rue du Plasson.

"Behold Number Eighty, sir," said the cabman, and pulled up sharply.

There was already a cab at the curb, and as Lépine jumped out, the door of the house opened and Pigot appeared on the threshold. He stared at his chief in astonishment.

"I was just coming to report to you, sir," he said. "The birds have flown."

"Indeed!" sneered Lépine. "So you have discovered that, have you? But the installation is here, I suppose?"

"Yes, sir," answered Pigot, very red. "On the fourth floor."

Lépine bounded up the stairs, and Pigot followed in silence. He felt that he had been used unjustly; after all, he was not a wizard—what did the Chief expect!

At the top of the house, Lépine glanced first into the narrow room which we have already seen; then he returned to the landing and opened the other door. It led into a still narrower room, also extending to the front of the house, and lighted by a single window. Lépine went to the window and looked out. Over the roof of the low market across the way, he could see the harbour, the warships, and the wreck of *La Liberté*. Then he turned to an examination of the room.

[Pg 118]

A heavy box stood before the window, and on the floor beside it were three large batteries. Some pieces of copper wire were lying about, but there was nothing else. In the top of the box, however, four holes had been bored, as though for the reception of bolts, and one side of the box was badly burned. The sill of the window was also scorched and blistered.

"You have the proprietor of this house?" Lépine inquired.

"He is below," Pigot announced, and went to fetch him.

But from the proprietor, a nervous little man with a dirty beard, Lépine learned little. He lived at the rear of the ground floor, and ten days or perhaps two weeks before, a man had knocked at the door and asked if the upper floor was to rent.

"What sort of man?" Lépine inquired.

"A dark man, with white hair, sir; not a bad-looking man, but not a Frenchman."

[Pg 119]

"A German, perhaps."

"No, most certainly not a German; an Italian or a Spaniard."

"What was his business?"

"He said he was an inventor and desired the top floor for his experiments. I told him that in that case I should have to charge extra, as experiments were always dangerous. He did not object, and paid a month in advance. He seemed a very harmless person."

"Was he alone?"

"At that time, yes, sir. But when he returned with his baggage, his daughter accompanied him."

"How do you know it was his daughter?"

"He told me so, sir. The resemblance was very evident. Besides, he insisted that I supply material to curtain off a portion of the room for her bed."

Lépine recognised the cogency of this reasoning and nodded.

"Continue," he said.

"She was a dark, slim girl, of about twenty. They gave me no trouble. She scarcely left the house except for the marketing. But her father was away a great deal."

"Did he bring much baggage?"

"Two pieces of hand-baggage, sir, and that box yonder by the window. The box was very heavy—almost as if filled with iron—and we had great difficulty in getting it up the stairs, even with the assistance of the truck-man."

[Pg 120]

"Did you enter this room while he was here?"

"No, sir; I entered neither of the rooms. My rule is never to interfere in the affairs of my tenants—they do not like it. But on one occasion, as I passed the door, I heard him at work on his invention."

"Heard him, you say?"

"Yes, sir; there was a deep humming noise as of a huge top, or perhaps of a motor. It occurred to me that it was a flying-machine which he was inventing. Then, on Sunday, came a telegram."

"A telegram?"

"Yes, sir; I brought it up myself. He read it and his face grew very grave. He informed me that he would be compelled to depart next day—that his sister was dying. But he assured me that he would return as soon as possible to continue his experiments, and that I was to hold the apartment for him—at least until the month for which he had paid had expired."

"And he did depart?"

"Yes, sir; quite early in the morning. I called a cab and assisted to carry down his baggage. The box, as you see, remains against his return, also his apparatus," and he indicated the batteries.

[Pg 121]

"Oh, certainly," agreed Lépine, with irony, "there can be no doubt of his intention to return." And then his face grew dark and his eyes flashed. "How does it happen," he demanded sternly, "that you did not cause him to fill out a registration blank for the police?"

The little man twisted his hands nervously.

"In that I admit I was most culpable, sir," he said. "But when I looked in my desk for a blank, I found that I had none. Every day I intended going to the Prefecture to get a new supply, but every day something occurred to prevent me. And then came the day of his departure."

Lépine's face was very stern.

"You have, indeed, been culpable," he said, "and I shall see that you are punished. You have broken one of the laws of your country. You have aided a malefactor!"

The little man's face was livid.

"Oh, do not say so, sir!" he protested. "There must be some mistake! That kind gentleman, absorbed only in his invention—"

"I *do* say so," broke in Lépine, savagely. "Did he receive any letters?"

"One, sir, on the Saturday before the arrival of the telegram. No doubt it, too, spoke of the illness of his sister." [Pg 122]

Lépine put his hand wearily to his head.

"At least you noticed the address on the letter?" he asked.

"Oh, yes, sir. It was 'Monsieur B. Séguin, 80 Rue du Plasson, Toulon.' Séguin, that was the name of my lodger."

"But you said he was not a Frenchman!"

"Perhaps he was a Belgian, sir. I have heard that they are sometimes dark."

Lépine threw up his hands.

"Head of a pig!" he cried, and then controlled himself. "M. Pigot," he said, "you will take this idiot to his rooms and remain in charge of him until you hear from me."

And then, as Pigot and his prisoner started down the stairs, Lépine turned to an investigation of the two rooms. Every nook, every crevice, every inch of the floor, every drawer—all these he examined with a minuteness of which only the French police are capable, but his search disclosed nothing which shed any new light on the mystery. At last, he descended the stairs and left the house.

There was still one hope, the telegram. He hastened to the post-office, inquired for the clerk of telegraphs, apologised for again disturbing him, and asked to see the telegram received for B. Séguin, 80 Rue du Plasson, the Sunday before. At the end of five minutes it was in his hands, and he read it with dismay. It had been sent from Brussels, and this is the English of its contents: [Pg 123]

"Our sister is very ill and asks for you. Come if you would see her alive.

"CHARLES SÉGUIN."

[Pg 124]

CHAPTER IX

CHECKMATE

"It is evident that this affair was not lightly arranged," said M. Delcassé, and ran his fingers nervously through his hair.

Lépine nodded gloomily.

"You may well say so!" he agreed.

The two sat together in Delcassé's room, and Lépine had just finished his report. Evening was falling, and the room was growing dark, but neither desired a light.

"Everything has been thought of and provided for," said the Prefect, at last, "even to the telegram which gave an excuse for this man's abrupt departure. Perhaps the other telegrams were also intended to mislead us—just as they did mislead me—to convince us that those other men were only ordinary travellers. They must have foreseen that the police would investigate the presence of every stranger in Toulon. It was careless to send both telegrams from Brussels, but a coincidence so small might easily be overlooked. On one point only was there an oversight—they did not foresee that we might trace them by means of the money. There is our hope. Sooner or [Pg 125]

later, the man with the white hair will spend another of his hundred-franc notes. There is a certain justice in it," he added, "that he should be betrayed by his blood-money."

"Yes, blood-money!" cried Delcassé. "That is the word for it! Oh, that I had my hands on the monster—for he *is* a monster, Lépine; he must be a monster! There he sat, in cold blood, and loosed the power that killed three hundred men! Have you considered, Lépine, that the finding of this second installation furnishes, as Crochard foresaw, proof of his theory?"

"Yes," said Lépine, in a low voice; "this is the proof."

Delcassé was on his feet, striding savagely up and down the room.

"But it is absurd," he cried, "it is incredible that here, under our very noses, such things should take place! What are our police for, Lépine—our secret service?"

"It is the fault of that miserable landlord," Lépine pointed out.

"Of him an example shall be made. But that does not help us. This man must not escape! Think what it may mean for France if he escapes!"

"I have thought, sir!" and Lépine's voice was trembling.

Delcassé turned on him fiercely.

"Where is Crochard?" he demanded. "What is he doing all this time?"

"I do not know, sir. I have not seen him since yesterday."

"Rest assured that he has not been idle. Do you know where to find him?"

"I have his address."

"Go to him, then, and say I wish to see him. We must lay these discoveries before him—though no doubt he has already made them for himself. Tell him he must not desert us—that without him, we are lost!"

Lépine was grateful for the darkness, for his cheeks were red with humiliation. But, after all, M. Delcassé was right. He rose with a sigh.

"I will seek him at once, sir," he said.

"Understand well, Lépine," said the Minister, more gently, "it is not you I blame. You have done all that is possible with the means at your command. But we cannot afford to fail. In an affair of this kind, the public is not reasonable. Should we fail, and should our failure become known, as it almost surely would, the ministry might find itself swept away before the storm. So we must find Crochard."

"I agree with you, sir," said Lépine, and took his leave.

The Café des Voyageurs was crowded when he reached it, and he had some difficulty in finding a seat. The marines who had been searching the wreck had, at last, been released from duty, and had, with one accord, hastened ashore to refresh themselves at the expense of a populace eager to listen to every detail. The café hummed with talk; weird and revolting stories of the search were told with gusto; the completeness of the destruction was described; the survivors dwelt upon their sensations at the moment of the explosion; the heroism of the rescuers was not forgotten; but, and Lépine noted this with a little sigh of relief, nowhere was there an intimation that the disaster was other than an accident.

He sat there for half an hour, listening to all this, and then, as Crochard made no sign, he summoned the head-waiter and requested a word with the proprietor. With a nod, as of one who expected the request, the man turned and again led the way to the door at the rear of the room.

"In there, sir," he said, and closed it when Lépine had entered.

A single candle burned on the table in the centre of the little room, and beyond it sat a man. At the first glance, in the semi-darkness, Lépine fancied it was Crochard; then he saw that this man was slighter, that his face was bloodless, and that he was staring with hunted eyes.

With a little start of surprise, he looked again; then he sat down.

"So, Samson, it is you!" said Lépine, quietly.

"Yes, sir," answered Samson. "I was expecting you. But I did not think you would recognise me so readily."

Lépine laughed shortly.

"I have a good memory," he said. "Crochard told you, perhaps, that I might come?"

"Yes, sir; and he directed that I give you this."

He handed Lépine a note. The latter broke the seal, held it to the light and read it carefully:

"My dear M. Lépine:

"I have found it necessary to leave Toulon, in the pursuit of a certain business, whose nature you can guess. I hope soon to have good news for M. Delcassé and yourself. Meanwhile, I would remind you of our agreement as to my friends. Samson is one of them. He has already been of some service in this affair, and may be of more. We can discuss his future upon my return. I will answer for him.

"CROCHARD, L'Invincible!"

[Pg 126]

[Pg 127]

[Pg 128]

Lépine refolded the note and slipped it into his pocket.

"When did Crochard leave?" he asked.

"He gave me the note at four o'clock yesterday afternoon, sir, and stated that he was about to depart. I have not seen him since."

"Did he mention his destination?"

[Pg 129]

"No, sir."

Lépine regarded his companion thoughtfully.

"There is one thing that perhaps you *can* tell me, Samson," he said. "Previous to his departure, did he visit the house at 80 Rue du Plasson?"

"I think it very probable," answered Samson, after a moment's hesitation. "I myself furnished M. Crochard with that address, when he returned to the café yesterday for his lunch."

"Ah!" said Lépine. "So it was you discovered it!"

He fell a moment silent, studying the other's countenance.

"You have indeed changed, Samson," he said, at last. "I suppose it was Crochard who arranged your escape?"

Samson made no reply.

"You have a good business here?"

"Very good, sir."

"You know, of course, that it is my duty to denounce you as an escaped criminal?"

"Yes, I know that, sir."

"Crochard tells me that he will answer for you—in other words, he guarantees that you will not run away. Do you understand that?"

"Do not fear," said Samson, huskily. "Monsieur will always find me here when he requires me."

[Pg 130]

Lépine looked at him for a moment, then got abruptly to his feet.

"Very well," he said; "I shall do nothing for the present," and he left the café.

It was nearly eight o'clock, and, feeling the need of dinner, Lépine made his way back to his hotel; but his hunger was destined to go unsatisfied, for, as he stepped through the door, Pigot touched him on the arm.

"M. Delcassé wishes to see you at once," he said, and Lépine, with one regretful glance in the direction of the dining-room, hurried up the stairs to the Minister's apartment. He found him dictating to his secretary, a great pile of letters before him.

Without pausing in his dictation, Delcassé picked up a telegram which lay at his elbow, and handed it to Lépine. It was dated from Paris, and had been filed but an hour before. It read:

"Seven notes one hundred francs B162810R to B162816R deposited to-day by
Thomas Cook & Son.

LINNÉ, Governor Bank of France."

Lépine laid the telegram on his desk and glanced at his watch.

"I must be in Paris in the morning," he said.

Delcassé nodded.

"Yes," he agreed. "And Crochard?"

"Is no doubt already there," and he handed Delcassé the note which Samson had given him.

[Pg 131]

Delcassé read it, and looked up with an amused smile, in which there lurked a trace of malice.

"What a man!" he said. "Nevertheless, Lépine, I think you would better go. You may be able to assist him! Give him my compliments, and keep me informed," and he turned back to his secretary.

The Paris office of the Messrs. Cook is at the corner opposite the Opera House, and here, about ten o'clock on the morning of Thursday, September 28, a little grey-bearded man descended from a fiacre, entered, and, after a short delay, was admitted to the presence of the manager, who made it clear at once that he was entirely at the service of his distinguished visitor.

Lépine sat down and produced from his pocket seven notes of the Bank of France, for one hundred francs each. They were quite new and had not even been folded.

"These notes were deposited by you yesterday afternoon," he said. "I should like to know from whom they were received."

The manager took the notes and glanced at them.

"That will not be difficult, sir," he said. "Our cashier can no doubt tell us from which of our clerks he received them. Excuse me a moment."

[Pg 132]

He hurried from the room with the notes in his hand, and Lépine, strolling to the window, relapsed into his favourite amusement. At no other corner in the city could it be practised so

profitably, for here, at the meeting of the Boulevards, all Paris, sooner or later, passed; and not Paris only, but vagrants from every nation. So Lépine watched the crowd intently, his bright eyes skipping from face to face—a mere glance at one, a longer glance at another, a close stare at a third. Perhaps, at the back of his mind, there was the hope that some incredible good-fortune might send past this corner a shrunken, white-haired man, leaning on the arm of his dark-haired daughter....

The opening of the door behind him broke into his thoughts, and he turned to find that the manager had brought another man back with him.

"This is the clerk who received the money," said the manager, and returned the seven notes to the detective.

Lépine motioned the clerk to be seated, and himself sat down facing him.

"Tell me all that you remember of the transaction," he said.

"It was Tuesday afternoon, sir," the clerk began, "about four o'clock, I should say, that a man came to the counter and stated that he desired a stateroom, with two berths, second-class, for the *Prinzessin Ottilie*, the sailing of yesterday."

[Pg 133]

"What sort of a man?" asked Lépine.

"A thin man, past middle-age. His hair was quite grey and he was of a dark complexion, with very bright eyes."

"What language did he use?"

"He spoke in English, sir."

"Fluently?"

"Quite fluently, sir."

"Very well; proceed."

"I was in some doubt as to whether such a stateroom was available, as this is the busy season; but on reference to our list, I found that there was such a stateroom. A customer to whom we had sold it had just called at the office, saying that he would not be able to sail, and leaving his tickets with us to resell, if possible. When I told the man of this, he seemed very pleased, took the tickets, and gave me the seven hundred-franc notes. My attention was called to them because they were quite new and unfolded. He took them from a long envelope which he carried in an inner pocket, and which seemed to contain a large sum of money."

"Do you remember the number of the stateroom?"

The clerk spread out before Lépine a cabin-plan of the ship.

"It was this one, sir," he said, and placed his finger on 514; "an inner room, you see, on the upper deck."

[Pg 134]

"You asked the man's name, I suppose?"

"Oh, yes, sir. I caused him to fill out the usual blank. Here it is."

Lépine took the blank and looked it over. It stated that stateroom No. 514, on the *Prinzessin Ottilie*, for the sailing of September 27, two berths, second-class, had been purchased of Thomas Cook & Son by Ignace Vard, of New York City, the berths to be used by himself and his daughter; and that he had paid for these berths the sum of six hundred and forty francs, being payment in full, the receipt of which was acknowledged. The blank also stated that Mr. Vard was a naturalised citizen of the United States, and had lived in that country for ten years.

"The sailing was from Cherbourg?" Lépine inquired, when he had assimilated all this.

"Yes, sir."

"At what hour?"

"About four o'clock, sir—four o'clock yesterday afternoon."

"How did it happen, sir," Lépine asked, turning to the manager, "that the notes were not deposited until yesterday?"

"Our deposit is made up at three o'clock each afternoon," the manager explained. "The notes came in too late for Tuesday's deposit, and were placed in our safe until the next day."

[Pg 135]

Lépine made a brief entry in his notebook, handed back the blank and rose.

"I thank you very much, gentlemen," he said. "You have been most obliging. The information you have given me will be of the very greatest service."

And with that he took his leave, returned light-heartedly to his office and sent a wireless to the captain of the *Ottolie*. The fugitive could not escape him now; it was merely a question of arresting him as he left the boat at New York; soon, soon, Lépine would have the pleasure of putting him on the grill, and, once there, the detective felt sure that there would be some important revelations before he got off again. One fact surprised him—that Vard should be an American citizen; but perhaps that was not the truth. If it was the truth, it would make the arrest at New York a little awkward; a formal complaint would have to be made, a charge of some kind trumped up. But there was no hurry—a week remained in which to mature the plans.

So Lépine, after sending a brief report in cipher to M. Delcassé, turned to the work which had

accumulated during his absence in a happier and more contented frame of mind than he had enjoyed for some days.

"I shall relish my lunch to-day!" he reflected; but, alas! it was just as he was preparing to sally forth for it that the blow fell.

"A message for you, sir," his secretary said, and handed him a light-blue envelope.

"Ah!" said Lépine, "a wireless!" and he ripped it open eagerly. Then he remained staring at it with astounded eyes. Here is the message:

"PRINZSESSIN OTTILIE, September 28, 11:10 A. M. *Radio via Cherbourg.*

"*Lépine, Paris.*

"No record of Ignace Vard and daughter on *Ottilie*. Stateroom 514 unoccupied.

"HAUSMANN, Captain."

[Pg 136]

[Pg 137]

CHAPTER X

THE LAND OF FREEDOM

The old town of Cherbourg was experiencing its semi-weekly apotheosis. For five days of the seven a duller place would be difficult to find, but on Wednesdays and Saturdays, when the great trans-Atlantic liners were due to pause in the outer harbour and take aboard the multitudes homeward-bound to America, the town was transfigured. The transfiguration, indeed, began on the previous evenings, for it was then that the less-knowing and more timid of the tourists began to arrive.

The knowing ones, having once tasted the Lethe of Cherbourg, remained in Paris until the last minute, and stepped from the boat-train to the waiting tender. But the less well-informed came on the day before—and never, for the remainder of their lives, forgot the dullness of their last day in Europe. Then there were the nervously-anxious, their peace of mind already wrecked by the vagaries of the European baggage-system, who dared not run the risk of arriving at the last moment. So they, too, journeyed to Cherbourg the day before the sailing-date, in order to have a clear twenty-four hours in which to search for the pieces which were certain to be missing. That day at Cherbourg was always an expensive one, for the hotel-keepers of the place, having to live for seven days on the proceeds of two, arranged their rates accordingly.

At the edge of the narrow strip of rock-strewn sand which constitutes the beach at Cherbourg, stands the Grand Hotel—familiar name to every traveller in Europe, where even the smallest hamlet has its "Grand." The one at Cherbourg is a rambling, three-storied frame structure, with a glass-enclosed dining-room overlooking the harbour, and here, at ten o'clock on the morning of Wednesday, the twenty-seventh of September, in the year of our Lord nineteen hundred and eleven, Daniel Webster was disconsolately eating that frugal meal which is the French for breakfast. Not the great Daniel—all well-informed persons are, of course, aware that he passed to his reward some sixty years ago—but a well-built, fresh-faced, rather good-looking young fellow, still on the right side of thirty, who had most inadvisedly chosen to appear in this world of trouble on the one hundredth anniversary of the birth of the great Daniel, and who had forthwith been handicapped with his name.

John Webster, an honest farmer of the Connecticut valley, had always been a worshipper at the shrine of the eloquent New Englander, to whom he fancied himself related, and when, having taken to himself a wife, that wife presented him with a son on the very day when the centenary of his hero's birth was being celebrated, the coincidence appeared to him too momentous to be disregarded, and the boy was christened Daniel.

It was a thing no thoughtful father would have done, and as Dan grew older, he resented his name bitterly. It was the subject of brutal jests from his playmates, resulting in numberless pitched battles, and of still more brutal hazing when he pursued his predestined way through the portals of the university at New Haven. Here he was promptly rechristened Ichabod, and his real name was gradually forgotten.

In the depths of his heart, John Webster may perhaps have hoped that this was to be a real reincarnation. If so, he was doomed to disappointment, for the younger Daniel gave no promise of being either a statesman or an orator. But he took to ink as a duck to water, was never so happy as when his pen was spoiling good white paper, was elected editor of the *News*, and, commencement over, took the first train for New York, stormed the office of the *Record*, for which he had acted as college correspondent, and demanded a job.

[Pg 138]

[Pg 139]

He got it; and began anew the task of living down his name. Always, when introduced or introducing himself, he saw in the eyes opposite his own that maddening glimmer of amusement. Then he gritted his teeth and waited for the joke. There were fourteen possible forms that it might take. Tempted often to return to that rocky Connecticut hillside, he nevertheless stuck it out, and, as time passed, found he didn't mind so much. He even reached the point where he made bets with himself as to which of the fourteen it would be. And he progressed in other ways: the material symbol of the progress being that, instead of cub reporter at twelve dollars a week, he was now one of the trusted members of the staff at six times that salary.

[Pg 140]

Also he was seven years older, and this had been his first long vacation—six weeks in England, Belgium, Holland and France—glorious weeks; but his eyes were aching for the lights of Broadway and his fingers itching for the pencil. The most exacting and bewitching of all professions was clamouring for him again.

Having disposed of the rolls and coffee, he rose reluctantly, stepped out upon the beach, and filled and lighted his pipe—with a grimace at the first puff, for French tobacco is the worst in the world, outside of Germany. Before him lay the mighty breakwater which guards the harbour, with its lighthouse in the middle and its fort at either end, while to his left were the great naval basins, hewn from the solid rock. To the right, below the high sea-wall, the narrow beach stretched away, empty and uninviting.

[Pg 141]

Dan felt depressed. Cherbourg, evidently, was not an exciting place. He had never seen an uglier beach, but, after a moment's hesitation, he started off along it. Perhaps, farther on, it might improve.

The tide was going out, and in the little basins in the sand minute crabs and strange sea-midgits scuttled about panic-stricken at finding themselves marooned; here and there a stranded jelly-fish glowed like an iridescent soap-bubble, and, farther out, an ugly mud flat began to be revealed by the retreating water. Some distance ahead, a ridge of tumbled rocks ran from the sea-wall down into the water, and, as he drew nearer, he saw that on one of the rocks a girl was sitting.

He glanced at her as he passed, and would have liked to glance again, for he had never met more arresting eyes, but he was going on with face rigidly to the front, when her voice startled him.

"*Pardon, monsieur,*" she said. It was a contralto voice, of a quality that made his pulses leap.

He stopped short and turned toward her, incredulous that it could be he to whom she had spoken. But there was no one else in sight; and then he saw that her hands were gripped tightly in her lap and that her lips were quivering.

"Is something wrong?" he asked, and took a step toward her. "Is there anything I can do?"

[Pg 142]

"Oh!" she cried, her face lighting, and a wave of colour sweeping into her cheeks. "Then you are an American!"

"Yes; thank God!"

"So say I!" she echoed. "For myself, I mean. I also am an American. We will speak English, then."

"I should much prefer it," he smiled. "My French is wholly academic—and covered with moss, at that. It doesn't even enable me to get my eggs turned!"

She looked at him, the colour deepening in her cheeks. Dan, looking back, decided that he had never seen such eyes; he could scarcely believe that she was an American. She did not look in the least like one. But she was speaking rapidly.

"I am in trouble," she said, "as the result of my own carelessness. I was crossing these rocks, without watching sufficiently where I was going, and my foot slipped. See," and she swept aside her skirts. "I cannot get it out."

Dan was on his knees in an instant.

"Is it hurt?" he asked.

"I think not; or at most only a little strained. But it is wedged between these big rocks, and I cannot move it."

Dan touched the foot, and found that it was, indeed, wedged fast. Then he examined the rocks, and finally, bending above the smaller one, placed his arms firmly about it, braced his feet and lifted. It would have been worth while to have seen the play of his back and shoulder muscles as the strain tightened, but it was over in a moment. For the rock rose slowly, slowly, and the foot was free. He let the rock drop softly back, stood up and brushed the sand from his sleeves. The girl bent and rubbed her ankle.

[Pg 143]

"Is it all right?" he asked.

"I think so," and she took an experimental step or two. "Yes; not even sprained. That reminded me of Porthos," she added, looking up at him, her eyes very bright.

He laughed.

"Porthos would have done it with one hand," he said, "while saluting you with the other."

She hesitated a little, looking along the beach; and he, guessing her thought, raised his cap and started to walk on. But again her voice stopped him. Perhaps she, too, was something of a mind-

reader.

"I owe you some thanks, you know," she said. "You mustn't go off till I've paid them!"

Dan swung around, his face glowing.

"Not thanks!" he protested. "But if you would take pity on a lonely exile and talk to him a little, you'd certainly be doing a noble action!"

"Is it as bad as all that?" and Dan noticed how the corners of her eyes crinkled when she smiled.

"You can't imagine how lonely I've been!" he said. "Especially the past few days. I didn't feel it so much till I was starting home. America!" and he took off his hat.

"The land of freedom!" she added, softly.

"Do you feel it that way, too?" he asked eagerly. "I've never been much of a patriot—just took things as a matter of course, I guess; but six weeks in Europe is enough to make a patriot of any American. Whenever I see the old flag, I feel like going down on my knees and kissing it. I've just begun to realise what it stands for!"

She had turned back toward the hotel, walking slowly with Dan beside her, and her face was beaming as she looked up at him.

"You are right—oh, so right!" she cried. "And how much more would you realise it if, like me, you had been born in another country and felt for yourself the injustice, the oppression, of which you have seen only a little! For such as I, America is indeed the Promised Land!"

So she was foreign-born! Dan glanced at her with a shy curiosity.

"You are a Russian?" he asked. "Pardon me if I seem intrusive."

"You do not. No, I am not a Russian. Worse than that! I am a Pole!"

The words were uttered with a tragic emphasis which left him speechless. He could think of nothing to say that was not banal or superficial, and he realised that here were deep waters! He glanced once or twice at her face, which had grown suddenly dark and brooding; then, with a little motion of her hands, she seemed to push her thoughts away.

"You do not know much of Polish history, perhaps," she said, in a lighter tone. "But if you are fond of tales of heroism, you should read it, for it is one long heroism. It will help you to realise more fully what your flag stands for. It is my flag, too; I have lived in America nearly ten years; and never do I grow so angry as when I hear an American speak slightingly of his country. Here is the hotel. Forgive me for talking like this; but it has done me good to meet you!"

"And me!" he said. "Must you go in?"

"Yes; my father will be wondering where I am. Good-bye."

She held out her hand and gave him a frank little pressure. Then she turned and left him.

He watched until the door swung shut behind her; then he walked on slowly, past the great basins, over the drawbridge, along the crooked streets of the old town, past the station, and finally he stopped in the shadow of a crag of rock which sprang abruptly three hundred feet into the air. Its summit was crowned by the frowning walls of the great fort which commands the harbour, and along the face of the cliff, blue with heather, a narrow footpath wound deviously upward. He ascended this for a little way, and then stopped, his elbows on the wall which guarded it. Before him stretched the bay, shielded by its jetty, and beyond rolled the white-capped ocean. That way lay America.

"The land of freedom!" he murmured, and his eyes were bright. "The land of freedom!"

CHAPTER XI

SHIPMATES

When Dan got back to the hotel for lunch, he found that there had been many arrivals during the morning. The *Adriatic* was to sail that afternoon, as well as the *Ottilie*, and the long dining-room at the hotel was a busy place. As the head-waiter led him to a seat, he caught a glimpse, far off, of the girl of the morning. She was sitting at a table with a white-haired man—her father, of course—with whom she was talking earnestly. She did not look up, and, in another instant, Dan's guide had pulled out a chair, and he found himself sitting with his back toward the only person in the room who interested him.

He told himself this deliberately, after a glance at his neighbours; and then, in the next moment, he called himself a cad, for every human-being is interesting, once you get below the skin. But degrees of interest vary, and Dan felt that he had never met any one who promised so much as this outspoken girl, with the shining eyes and sensitive mouth. Which boat was she sailing by, he wondered? It was an even chance that, like himself, she would be on the *Ottilie*. Yes—but second class? That would be asking too much of Fortune! Let it be added here that Dan was returning in the second-cabin not because—as he was to hear so many times on that voyage!—there was no room in the first, but because by doing so, he had saved the money for an extra week of travel.

[Pg 148]

He found more arrivals in the office when he left the table, and a formidable array of baggage, which was presently loaded on vans and trundled away toward the waiting tender. He paid his bill, collected the two suit-cases which constituted his total impedimenta, saw them safely off for the pier, tipped the porter, and left the hotel. The whistle of the tender was blowing shrilly, and, when he reached the pier, he saw far out at sea the smudge of smoke against the sky, which told that one of the steamers was approaching. He boarded the tender, assured a medical inspector that he was an American citizen and so did not need to have his eyes examined, dug his suit-cases out of the pile of luggage, and found himself a seat near the bow of the boat. Presently the special boat-train rolled in along the pier and disgorged the final quota of passengers.

Ten minutes later, with a shrill toot, the tender backed away and headed out across the harbour. With a queer feeling, half of sorrow, half of joy, Dan looked back at the receding shore, telling himself that the next soil his feet touched would be that of America.

[Pg 149]

A mile out, the great liner lay waiting, impressively huge as seen from the deck of the little tender, and presently they were alongside and filing through an open port. A steward grabbed his suit-cases, the instant he was on board, asked the number of his room, led him to it along interminable passages, and left him to make himself at home.

There were two berths in it, and, as he had paid for only one of them, he knew that, at this crowded season, he could scarcely hope to have the whole room to himself. But there was as yet no sign of any other occupant, so Dan, thrusting his bags under the lower berth, went on deck again. The last of the baggage and mail was being lifted aboard by a block and tackle, worked by a donkey engine, and, even as Dan looked, the tender tooted its whistle, cast loose, and backed away, and suddenly beneath his feet Dan felt the quiver which told that the screws had started. Slowly the great ship swung around and headed away into the west toward the setting sun—and toward "the land of freedom." How that phrase was running in his head!

He made a little tour of that portion of the boat set aside for passengers of the second class, and realised that the frugal Germans were much less generous in their provision for those humble ones than was the English line on which he had come to Europe. There the second class was well amidships, with a deck-room almost equal to that given the aristocrats at the bow. Here the second class was at the very stern, and the deck-room was limited indeed. Of course, Dan told himself, the *Ottilie* was a crack boat, designed to cater to the most exclusive trade; but he looked forward at the long stretches set apart for the first cabin with a little envy.

[Pg 150]

The boat was crowded, but he saw nothing of the black-haired girl, and finally, after finding that there was no hope of getting a deck-chair, he sought the dining-room steward, got his table-ticket, and made his way back to his stateroom. But on the threshold he paused. A man was lying in the upper berth, the light at his head turned on and a paper in his hand. He raised his head and looked down, at the sound of the door, and Dan had the impression of a bronzed countenance lighted by a pair of very brilliant eyes.

"Ah," said a pleasant voice, "so this is my shipmate," and the stranger swung his legs over the side of the berth and dropped lightly to the floor. Again Dan had the impression of the bright eyes upon him.

"It looks that way," he said. And then a sudden compunction seized him. "I didn't mean to be a pig and take the lower berth. You are quite welcome to it."

"Oh, no, no," protested the other. "The choice is always to the first comer. That is the rule of the sea."

[Pg 151]

Dan noticed that, though he spoke English well, it was with the clipped accent which betrayed the Frenchman.

"Then I choose the upper one," he said, laughing.

The other shrugged his shoulders.

"I can but thank you," he said. "After all, you are younger than I. My name is André Chevrial, very much at your service," and he held out his hand.

If he had announced himself to be a prince of the blood, Dan would not have been surprised, for there was that in his bearing which bespoke the finished gentleman, and a magnetism in his manner to which Dan was already yielding.

"Mine is Webster—Dan Webster," he said, and took the outstretched hand warmly.

M. Chevrial looked a little puzzled.

"The name seems somehow familiar," he said; "but I cannot quite place it."

Dan laughed.

"My father made the mistake of naming me after the great Daniel—a hundred years after," he

explained.

"Oh, so that is it! Daniel—Daniel Webster. A statesman, was he not?"

"One of our greatest."

[Pg 152]

"Though it did not need that to tell me you are an American. You of America have an atmosphere all your own. Shall we go on deck and have a cigarette?"

So presently Dan found himself seated beside M. Chevrial, talking very comfortably. The Frenchman, to Dan's surprise, proclaimed himself to be nothing more important than a wine-jobber who visited America every autumn to dispose of his wares; but, whatever his business, he was certainly a most entertaining companion. And then, suddenly, Dan quite forgot him, for coming toward them down the deck was the dark-eyed girl, arm in arm with a man whose burning eyes strangely belied his snowy hair. Dan sat staring at them, scarcely able to credit such stupendous good fortune, and, as they passed, the girl looked at him, smiled and nodded.

M. Chevrial, whom no detail of this little scene had escaped, lighted another cigarette.

"A very striking-looking young lady," he said. "The gentleman, I take it, is her father?"

"Yes, I think so," said Dan. "I met her for a moment on the beach at Cherbourg this morning, and she mentioned that she was with her father."

"Ah!" commented Chevrial. "And now tell me more about this journalism of yours, of which we hear so much. Is it really free? Is it not true that most of your papers are controlled by wealthy syndicates, who use them for their own purposes?"

[Pg 153]

This was a red flag to the bull, and Dan plunged into a defence of American journalism, citing instances and proofs, telling of incidents in his own experience showing that most editors really have consciences by which they are guided, and a high conception of their duty to the public.

"There are exceptions, of course," Dan went on, carried away by his subject; "there are scoundrels in the newspaper business, just as in all businesses; but it is one of the beautiful laws of compensation that, just as soon as a newspaper goes wrong, its influence begins to slip away from it...."

He stopped suddenly, for he had glanced at M. Chevrial and found him inattentive. His head was turned a little aside and his eyes were fixed with a peculiar and intent expression on two men who stood together by the rail, a little distance away. One of them was the man with the white hair. The other was evidently a tourist, from his costume, and though he was clean-shaven, some instinct caused Dan to classify him as a German. He glanced back at Chevrial at last, but the latter was gazing dreamily out over the water and stifling a little yawn with his hand.

"Your pardon, M. Webster," he said. "But I arose very early this morning, in order to catch my train, and I am tired. I think that I shall lie down for a few moments before dinner. Au revoir."

[Pg 154]

Dan sat on by himself for a little while; then it suddenly occurred to him that, if he looked about, he might find the dark-eyed girl alone somewhere. He leaped to his feet and began the search. She was not on the promenade deck, nor in the library, and he had about decided that she had returned to her stateroom, when it occurred to him that she might be on the boat-deck. So he climbed the narrow stair and emerged upon that lofty eyrie. No, she could not be here—it was too windy; then, as he glanced around, he saw, through the deepening twilight, a dark figure sitting on a bench in the lee of one of the boats.

Could it be she? He hesitated to approach near enough to be sure; but at last he mustered up courage to stroll past. And then, in an instant, his cap was off and his hand extended.

"I can't tell you how glad I am that you are on the boat!" he began. "May I sit down?"

"Certainly," and she moved a little, looking up at him, smiling. "I am glad, too."

"Are you? It's nice of you to say so, anyway. A voyage is so dull if there is no one to talk to. Of course, there is always some one to talk to—but I don't mean that kind of talk. I mean plumbing the depths—you know, that sort of thing."

"You think I can plumb the depths?"

[Pg 155]

"You certainly plumbed mine this morning. Not that I have any great depths," he added, laughing; "but your line touched bottom, and gave me a new feeling which I think was good for me. Now, since we're going to know each other, I want to introduce myself. My name is Webster—named after the great Daniel, but called Dan so that future historians can distinguish between us—and I earn a precarious living by chasing news for a New York paper."

"And my name," she responded instantly, "is Kasia Vard; and I have earned a precarious living in many ways—I have worked in a factory, I have sold papers—I have even cleaned the streets."

"Cleaned the streets?" he repeated incredulously.

"Oh, that was not in America," she said. "It was at Warsaw. In Poland, just as in many other countries of Europe, the streets are cleaned by the women and children. The men, you see, are needed for the army."

There was a bitter irony in her voice which drew him closer.

"I have seen women and children working in the fields; in Holland I saw them helping tow the boats and working in the brickyards. That was bad enough. But I never have seen them cleaning the streets."

"Did you go to Munich?"

"No."

[Pg 156]

"You would have seen them doing it there—as they do it all over Germany. Had you gone to Chemnitz, you would have seen them carrying the hod."

She fell silent, and Dan leaned back, strangely moved. How young he was; how little he knew! Here was this girl, certainly not more than twenty, who had lived more, felt more, thought more than he had ever done; who had ideals....

"Miss Vard," he said finally, in a low voice, "permit me to tell you something. I am just an average fellow with an average brain, who has gone about all his life with his eyes only half open—sometimes not even that. I have walked up and down Broadway, and fancied I was seeing life! I must seem awfully young to you—I feel a mere infant—intellectually, I mean. But I want to grow up—it isn't good for a man of twenty-nine to be a mental Peter Pan. Will you help me?"

She smiled, the bright, sudden smile, which he had grown to like so much, and impulsively she held out her hand.

"Yes," she said, "I will help, as far as I can. The best thing I can do for you is to introduce you to my father. He can help far more than I!"

"Thank you!" and he took her hand and held it. "It was your father I saw you with?"

"Yes. You will like him. He is the most wonderful man in the world. Now I must be going. He will be looking for me."

[Pg 157]

He went with her to the lower deck, then returned to the bench, and stared thoughtfully out over the dark sea. What a woman she was! And then he smiled a little as he recalled her last words, "The most wonderful man in the world!" He did not suspect that the time would come when he would echo them!

[Pg 158]

CHAPTER XII

UNDER RUSSIAN RULE

When Dan found his seat in the dining-saloon, that evening, he glanced up and down the long table, in the hope that Miss Vard and her father might be among his neighbours. But they were not, and it was not until he was half through the meal that he descried them at one of the tables on the other side of the room. At his own table there were the usual assorted types of the middle-class tourist, his wife and family, most of them frankly glad that they were homeward bound, with the greatest part of their pilgrimage accomplished.

The sea was smooth and the great boat forged ahead with scarcely any motion, so that every seat was occupied and every one in good spirits. There was a hum of talk and rattle of dishes; the white-coated stewards scuttled back and forth, and the scene was as pleasant as the wholesale human consumption of food can ever be.

Dan went on with his dinner with one eye on the far table where Miss Vard and her father were seated; but his attention was distracted for a time by a discussion which an Anglomaniac across the table started as to the relative merits of England and America, and to which he could not resist contributing a few remarks. When he glanced across the saloon again, he saw that Miss Vard and her father were no longer there. However, he finished his dinner with the comfortable consciousness that the second-class quarters were limited, and that she could not escape from them except by jumping overboard; and when the meal was ended, he made his way leisurely through the lounge and along the decks in search of her. There were girls, girls everywhere, but not the one he sought; and finally, with a little smile, he mounted the ladder which led to the after boat-deck.

[Pg 159]

Already other couples, scouting about the ship, had discovered the advantages of its dim seclusion, and most of the benches in the lee of the boats and about the little wireless-house were occupied; but, on that one bench, in the shadow of the after life-boat, Dan descried a solitary figure. He advanced without hesitation.

"I was hoping I should find you," he said.

She moved a little aside, as an invitation for him to share the bench.

"I like it up here," she said, "with no light but the stars, and that strange luminous glow along those wires up yonder."

Looking up, Dan saw that the gridiron of wires stretched between the masts was, indeed,

[Pg 160]

faintly luminous against the sky.

"That's the wireless," he said. "Listen—you can hear it," and from the open window of the wireless-house came the vicious snap and crackle of electricity. "The operator is sending a message."

She looked up again at the glowing wires.

"I think it the most wonderful thing in the world!" she said. "I can't understand it—I can't believe it—and yet, there it is!"

"Yes—and I suppose it has become an every-day affair to the operator in there; it isn't wonderful to him any more. We forget how wonderful a lot of things are, when we get used to them."

"How wonderful everything is," she corrected; "the sunrise, the ocean...."

They sat for some time in silence, gazing out across the dark and restless water, touched here and there with white, as a wave combed and broke. Then Dan's gaze wandered to her face. Seen thus, in the dim light, framed by her dark hair, it, too, seemed wonderful to him; there was about it a mystic allusiveness, a subtle charm, far more compelling than mere beauty ever is; her eyes had depths to them....

She felt his gaze upon her and turned her face to him and smiled.

"You may smoke, if you wish," she said. "I can feel that at the back of your mind."

"I believe I *was* thinking about it," Dan admitted, and got out his pipe; but he had himself been scarcely conscious of the thought, and it amazed him that she should have detected it. There was the flare of a match, and he sat back again, exhaling a long puff. "Now," he said, "you are going to begin my education. I am ready for the first lesson."

"How shall I begin?"

"I think an excellent way would be to tell me something about yourself," he suggested.

She considered him gravely.

"Are you really in earnest?" she asked.

"Indeed I am," he answered quickly, colouring a little under her searching eyes. "Forgive me if I seemed not to be. And please begin in any way you think best."

"I will tell you something about Poland," she said, "and then you will understand a little what I and all like me feel for America. You know, I suppose, that there is no longer any such land as Poland?"

"I know that Russia and one or two other powers divided it, about a hundred years ago."

"Yes; but you cannot know what that division meant! The Poles were a brave and patriotic people; they loved their country as few peoples do; and all at once, great armies were flung upon them; they were overwhelmed, and their country was taken away. They lost more than their country: they lost their language, their history, their national life. But in spite of it all, they remained Poles."

"I was born in Russian Poland, not far from Warsaw. From the very first, I was taught that I was a Pole, not a Russian. But only at home, under my own roof, could I be a Pole. The teaching of Polish was forbidden in any school—every word spoken must be Russian. If children were overheard talking in Polish, they were arrested by the police and their parents summoned and fined. On every public building there was a painted notice: 'It is forbidden to speak Polish.' All trials were conducted in Russian, although none of the peasants understood Russian, and so had no idea of what was being said. No official was permitted to answer a question in Polish—I have known a tramcar conductor to be heavily fined for doing so."

"We were taught history in which the name of our fatherland was never mentioned, but where Russia was treated as the wisest, best, and most powerful of nations, with the Czar second only to God himself. We could not leave our native village without permission from the police. No Pole could fill any public office. No Pole was permitted to publish a book or a newspaper or even a handbill, until a Russian censor had passed upon it. If you ever visit Poland, you will notice, here and there, groups of tall wooden crosses. They mark graves. But if one of those crosses decays or falls down, it may not be replaced without permission from the government. One night, the cross over the grave of my father's mother was struck by lightning; and for two years it lay there, until permission to replace it had come from Petersburg. It was among such surroundings that my childhood was passed."

Kasia did not seem to realise that, instead of telling about Poland, she was telling about herself; and Dan was deeply moved. He had listened, in his day, to many stories, but never to one like this. It was as though the dead wrappings of history were stripped away, and its seething, desperate, tragic heart laid bare.

"Go on," he said thickly, and folded his arms tightly across his breast.

"My father had hoped to be a student of science," she went on; "but he was refused admission to the university because of some absurd suspicion, and after that he could study only secretly. When he married, he rented a little farm near Warsaw; and there he and mother toiled all day long, and the children too, as soon as they were old enough. There were four children—two boys and two girls. I was the youngest. Twice every year, my mother, my sister and I walked in to

[Pg 161]

[Pg 162]

[Pg 163]

[Pg 164]

Warsaw, and spent a week there helping to clean the streets; this service was required of all families in the villages about Warsaw, and could be escaped only by paying a heavy tax. We had also to assist in keeping the roads in repair, and for this, too, the women and children were employed, since the men could not be spared from the work of the farm. At nightfall we were always exhausted, and would swallow our soup and black bread hastily, and then fling ourselves down, dressed as we were, on a heap of straw in one corner. We were very poor, and yet not so poor as we seemed; but to have added one little comfort to our home would have meant a visit from the tax-inquisitor, and perhaps a search. The only way to escape this was to live in miserable poverty.

"In spite of all this, my father still kept up his studies. At night, after carefully closing the shutters and stuffing the cracks with rags, so that no ray of light could be seen outside, he would light a little tallow dip and sit reading for hours. He read the same books over and over, for books were very hard to get. The ones he wanted were almost always forbidden. To be found possessing one meant banishment. So all of his books he kept concealed even more carefully than he did his money. Indeed, he valued them more!

"Sundays he devoted to the education of his children, always with one of us on guard outside the door. It was then that I learned to read English. Father had taught himself with great thoroughness, because he was determined some day to go to America. America—that was his dream! But how to get there! It seemed certain that he could never save money enough to pay for so many. That problem was soon to be settled."

[Pg 165]

She paused and put her hand to her throat, shivering a little.

"Are you cold?" Dan asked.

"No; I am trembling at the thought of what remains to tell. A case of cholera appeared in our village. It was reported to the magistrate. At once all the Russian officials removed to Warsaw, and a cordon of Russian troops was thrown about the village. No one was permitted to enter or to leave. The cholera spread. The people were ignorant; they did not know what to do, and there was no one to tell them; they could only wait and pray. At the end of a month, the disease had spent itself, but of those who had lived in the village, only one in ten remained. Of our family, there were left only my father and myself."

Dan's hand went out to hers. She did not draw away.

"For a time," she went on, "father was stunned by the blow; I have always believed that he was very near madness. But he shook off his sorrow and decided that the time had come to seek America. We could not depart openly; that was not permitted; so one night he dug up the little hoard of money he had concealed, cut off my hair and dressed me in boys' clothes, arrayed himself in the rags of a goat-herd, and about midnight we set off. I was eleven years old at the time, and I remember every incident distinctly. We could travel only at night, hiding at every sound. By day, we concealed ourselves under culverts, in ditches, under heaps of brush. Luckily, Polish people are eager to help each other, so we did not starve, and we got forward a little every night. At the end of six weeks, we crossed the frontier and were safe."

[Pg 166]

"There is not much more to tell. We reached New York; and I was placed in school—I wish you could realise all that meant to me! For a long time, I could not go out into the street without being afraid. It seemed impossible that there was no longer anything to fear. When at last I understood, it was as though a great load were lifted. That was ten years ago. For the past three years, I have been a teacher in the Hester Street school."

She sat silent for a moment, then with a long breath, drew her hand away.

"Do you wonder that I love America?" she asked.

"No," said Dan; "and you have made me a better patriot."

She turned to him, with a little smile.

[Pg 167]

"And now I think of it," she added, "it was my story I told you, after all!"

"Your story helps me to understand Poland's. That is the way history should be written."

"I think so, too. There is not enough in most histories of the common people. And my father says it is only they who really matter. He has thought very deeply. It is his dream to make all other countries like America—free, peaceful, industrious—only better than America has yet become, in that poverty and inequality and injustice will be abolished."

"A magnificent dream," Dan agreed, with a smile; "but impossible of accomplishment, I'm afraid."

"No, it is not impossible!" she cried quickly. "It will be accomplished, and by him!"

Dan looked at her curiously. Her eyes were blazing, and she spoke with a conviction, with an enthusiasm, which puzzled him.

"Tell me something about your father," he suggested. "You said he was the most wonderful man in the world."

"And I meant it. Could anything be more wonderful than to force all the nations of the earth to break up their navies, to dismantle their forts, to disband their armies? Could anything be more wonderful than to put an end, once for all, to this waste of life and treasure, which is eating at the heart of the world? Could anything be more wonderful than to turn all these armies of useless men back into honest and useful labour? Then no longer would you see women gathering the

[Pg 168]

harvest, or struggling under cruel burdens, or cleaning the streets, or spreading manure over the fields! No, nor walking the pavements of the cities! Would you not say that the man who brought all this about was a wonderful man?"

"Wonderful!" echoed Dan. "Why, wonderful would be no name for it! But it is something that no man can ever do."

"It will be done, believe me," she said, solemnly, "and by my father."

Dan could only stare at her. It seemed absurd to suppose that she could be in earnest; but certainly her face was earnest to solemnity. It shone with consecration.

"But I don't understand," he stammered. "It's too big for me. How is it to be accomplished? How can one man bring it about? I can see how the Czar or Kaiser might set to work, but even they could not hope to succeed. The Czar did try something of the sort, didn't he?"

"Yes; but he was not in earnest, and the other nations laughed. At my father they will not laugh, for he is in deadly earnest. As to how this is to be done, I may not tell you, not yet—some day, perhaps. But one thing I may tell you, and it is this—my father holds the nations of the world in the hollow of his hand!"

[Pg 169]

For a moment there was silence between them. The moon had risen as they talked, and the dark sea was illumined by a broad path of silver. The boat-deck was almost deserted; the snapping of the wireless had ceased. Miss Vard looked about her with a little start.

"It must be very late," she said. "I must be going."

As Dan followed her across the deck, he noticed a dark figure on the bench next to the one where he and Miss Vard had sat. And as they passed, the stranger struck a match and lighted a cigarette. By the glare of the flame, Dan saw that it was his roommate, Chevrial.

[Pg 170]

CHAPTER XIII

IN THE WIRELESS HOUSE

Fritz Ludwig, the tall, blond young man who earned his eighty marks per month as wireless man on the *Ottillie*, having eaten his dinner with the passengers of the second-cabin and smoked a meditative pipe at the door of the little coop on the after boat-deck which served him as office and bedroom, knocked out the ashes and entered his citadel to prepare for the night's business. But first he connected up his detector and snapped the receivers against his ears, just to see what might be going on. The operator on the *Adriatic*, a hundred miles behind them, was gossiping with Poldhu, and far ahead two boats were exchanging information about the weather. Then Ludwig glanced up quickly, for a step had sounded at the door, and he saw a man just stepping over the threshold.

"No admittance here!" he called sharply; but the man advanced another step, smiling broadly.

"My dear Fritz!" he said in German. "Do you not know me?"

And Fritz, staring upwards, and seeing his visitor's face clearly, tore off the receivers, sprang to his feet and saluted.

[Pg 171]

"Admiral Pachmann!" he gasped.

Pachmann laughed. Then he turned, closed the door, and drew the shade before the window.

"Yes, it is I; but don't shout it so loudly, Fritz. Let us sit down. I saw you at dinner to-night—yes, I, too, am of the second class!—and I trembled lest you might recognise me and shout my name out in just that fashion. So, as soon as I could, I hastened up to warn you. I am travelling incognito upon official business, and in public you are not to know me."

"I understand, Herr Admiral," said Fritz. "I shall be most careful."

"It is most important," Pachmann warned him; "and I shall trust you not to forget. How do you like your work here?"

"Very well, sir. I find it very interesting."

"I shall have you back in the service, nevertheless, one of these days," Pachmann said. "Perhaps sooner than you think," he added.

"I am always ready, sir," said Fritz.

Pachmann drew out a cigar and lighted it.

"Go ahead with your work," he said. "There is no music to me so pleasant as the snapping of the spark."

Fritz laughed.

"I know that, sir," he said. "I have an extra receiver, if you care to put it on."

"Yes, give it to me," said the Admiral; and in a moment it, too, was connected with the detector.

Fritz replaced his own, started his converter and snapped out into the air the signal which told the waiting world that the operator of the *Ottilie* was ready to receive anything it might have to communicate. Almost at once Southampton answered, and there was a little preliminary tuning, till the signals came clear and strong. Then Fritz drew a pad toward him, picked up a freshly sharpened pencil, and told Southampton to go ahead.

"SN three fr DKA," began Southampton. "Time 9:50 G."

Which meant that Southampton had for the *Prinzsessin Ottilie* three messages and that the time was 9:50 o'clock Greenwich.

Fritz glanced at the clock above his desk.

"Time OK. GA," he signalled, the "GA" being radio for "Go ahead."

"MSG one," went on Southampton. "Eight w Gary. DKA. Directors have command of situation. Morrissy.

"MSG two. Nine w Gardenshire, DKA. Missed boat will follow by *Carmania*. Hickle.

"MSG three. Eleven w Hodges, DKA. Coffee will go thirteen Thursday shall I sell. Perkins."

Fritz had taken it all down with religious care. At the last word he snapped open his key.

[Pg 173]

"OK. Thanks GN," he ticked off, the "GN" being, of course, "good-night."

He waited a moment, but there were no other calls for the *Ottilie*, and he took off his receiver. Pachmann followed suit.

"That was a great pleasure," said the latter. "The signals are very clear to-night."

"If you could come in later on, sir," Fritz suggested, "you could hear the news service from Poldhu. There is a station for you!"

"At what hour does the service start?" asked Pachmann.

"Poldhu always calls at eleven-thirty, sir, and starts the news service as soon as the commercial business is out of the way."

"I shall try to be here," said Pachmann. "This long-distance service is a great delight to me, especially when it works so clearly as it does to-night. You will not forget about my incognito?"

"I shall not forget, sir," Fritz assured him, and with a short nod, Pachmann left the house. Fritz sat down again to copy out his messages and to send three or four which the captain's steward at that moment brought in. That done, he thrust his head out for a breath of air, noticed with a grin the couples who had already discovered the advantages of the boat-deck benches, and then went back to his key for a little gossip with such other Marconi men as might be within reach. It was nearly eleven-thirty, and all of them were sitting at their tables, waiting for the far-flung signal which would tell that the operator at Poldhu, that lonely station on the last sheer cliff of Cornwall, was ready for his night's work. And a minute later, the door opened and Pachmann came in.

[Pg 174]

"I could not resist your invitation, Fritz," he said. "This gets into one's blood," and he adjusted the extra receiver and sat down.

Almost at once came the CQ, CQ, CQ, ZZ, ZZ, ZZ, which told that Poldhu was calling for all stations and on every ship within a thousand miles of that point of rock, the wireless man tuned up his instrument, and waited. The commercial messages came first, and there were a lot of them; four for the *Ottilie*, three for the *Adriatic*, five to be relayed far ahead to the *Mauretania*, one for the incoming *Majestic*, and one for the *Rotterdam*. Then the Poldhu man announced that he was ready to receive, and as many more were sent out into the night to him, for relay on to London, and from there to far-separated points on the continent. At last there was a moment's pause, a moment's silence, and then the SP, SP, SP, which told that the news service was about to start. And every man within hearing picked up a fresh pencil and made ready to write, as from dictation.

[Pg 175]

"SP, SP, SP," snapped Poldhu. "Time 12:54 G. Three hundred wds.

"War between Italy and Turkey seems inevitable stop Italy gives Turkey twenty-four hours to agree to Italy's occupation of Tripoli stop Six thousand troops at Palermo ready to embark stop Turkish munitions and reinforcements already landed stop Board of Inquiry into *La Liberté* disaster goes into secret session stop Rumour of attempt to destroy *La Patrie* also stop Moroccan situation grows more serious stop Germany demands equal rights with France abrogating Algeciras treaty stop Directors steel trust declare company is legal corporation and will not take voluntary steps to dissolve stop Officially announced at Chicago that one hundred thousand men on Harriman lines will strike Saturday stop September coffee sells at twelve-ninety-eight New York exchange record price stop Boy Scouts called out to fight plague of wasps in England stop...."

And so on to the end of the message. And when the end was reached, the man at Poldhu waited fifteen minutes and then started all over again and sent the message a second time, so that every one would be sure to get it all. Then he shut off and went to bed.

Thursday dawned clear and warm, and the *Ottilie's* passengers, appearing on deck by twos and

[Pg 176]

threes, rejoiced that the day was to be a fine one. They found the world-news of the day before awaiting them on the bulletin board at the head of the main companion-way, and had great fun deciphering it, very few of them stopping to think how wonderful it was that it should be there at all. And then some of them celebrated their first morning at sea by a three-mile tramp before breakfast; others, less strenuous, lounged at the rail, waiting impatiently for the breakfast-gong; a few, finding themselves disturbed by the slow and even motion of the ship, bundled themselves up in their steamer-chairs and hoped that nature would soon readjust itself. Then the gong sounded, and the deck was deserted, except by the bundled-up occupants of the chairs, to whom the solicitous deck-steward brought, more or less vainly, various light articles of food.

An hour later, the decks were full again. From the upper deck came the clack of shuffle-board; on the promenade deck the chairs were full of novel-readers, and little groups here and there were making each other's acquaintance. The life of shipboard had begun.

On the boat-deck, various passengers, singly or in twos and threes, paused to listen to the crackle of electricity which came from the little wireless-house. The door was closed, but by standing on tiptoe they could see over the screen at the window, and catch a glimpse of a blond young man, with a receiver clamped over both ears, bending above his key, from which came a series of vicious-looking sparks. The sound was vaguely disquieting, suggesting lightning to the more timid, or some strange and dangerous force of nature not to be trifled with, so most of them preferred to descend again to the upper promenade, or to sit down some distance away. Presently two men climbed the ladder from the deck below, and looked about them.

[Pg 177]

"Let us sit here," said the younger of them, in German, and motioned toward a bench which had been built against the cabin.

"Very well, Your...." He stopped himself abruptly. "It is difficult to break oneself of a long habit," he said, with a little laugh; and, waiting for the other to seat himself, sat down beside him.

They lighted cigarettes and sat for a moment without speaking.

There was a considerable difference in the ages of the two. One was past middle-age, heavily-built, and with a face bronzed as only years of exposure to wind and rain could bronze it. His upper lip was a shade or two lighter than the rest of his face, and spoke of a moustache recently removed. The other man had also an outdoor look, but he had not been hardened by long service as his companion had. He was softer, more effeminate. He seemed to be not over twenty-one or two, was tall, a little too much inclined to plumpness, but with an open and ingenuous countenance, lighted by a pair of honest blue eyes.

[Pg 178]

"It is good," said the older man, at last, speaking in German and in a tone carefully guarded, "to sit here and listen to the crackle of the wireless—it seems to fit in, somehow, with this beautiful morning. I have grown to love it; and I have never conquered my wonder—it is so marvellous that one can throw into the atmosphere a message to be picked up and understood hundreds of miles away. It seems even more wonderful on the ocean than on the land. A message that travels as fast as light travels. Think of it, my Prince!"

"It is, indeed, wonderful," the younger man agreed. "But it seems to me, my dear Admiral, that, if what you tell me is true, there is in the world at this moment something more wonderful still—a force which even you do not understand."

"You are right," agreed the older man, gravely. "But we *must* understand it—we *must* control it. It means world-empire!"

Both their faces were set and serious, and they spoke almost in whispers, with a glance from time to time to make sure no one was near, or a lapse into silence when any one approached.

[Pg 179]

"If we succeed," the younger man began; but the other grasped him by the arm.

"There must be no 'if,'" he protested. "Do not permit yourself to use that word. There must be no failure! Think, for a moment, of the tremendous issues which hang upon it! And, after all, the game is in our hands."

"I have not yet met the inventor," said the younger man; "but from what you have told me, I fear he is an enthusiast who will make difficulties. However, as you say, we must succeed at any price."

"Yes; at any price!" and as he uttered the words, the Admiral glanced searchingly at his companion's face. But the other was gazing out across the water, and did not seem to notice the other's peculiar emphasis.

Again they sat silent as three or four persons, passing, paused to peer in at the window of the wireless-house.

"Are you sure the French do not suspect?" asked the younger man, when they had gone.

"How could they?"

"The inventor must have left some trace—that wireless station in the grove."

"A small affair, well hidden. Even if it is discovered, it cannot possibly be connected with the disaster."

[Pg 180]

"Perhaps not. But the other installation?"

"The other installation was brought away by the inventor. He left nothing behind except some batteries, which can betray no secret."

"And he has the mechanism with him now?"

"Yes—in his baggage. You see how complete our power is."

"I see," nodded the other briefly. "You have arranged a conference with him?"

"I will do so. There is plenty of time."

"Why do we go to America?"

"It is a whim of his—that this great treaty should be signed there. We had to humour him, or he might have grown suspicious. I think he is a little mad."

Again there was a moment's silence. Then the older man threw away his cigarette and rose.

"The wireless man is an old protégé of mine," he said. "I spent a very pleasant hour with him last night. If you do not object, I will go in again to see him."

The other nodded, and Pachmann opened the door of the wireless-house and disappeared inside. His companion lighted another cigarette and smoked it gloomily, as his thoughts reverted to his own affairs. It was flattering, of course, that he should have been selected to accompany Pachmann on this mission; but, nevertheless, he regretted Berlin—or, rather, he regretted a certain blue-eyed, flaxen-haired girl, with a figure like Juno's.... Confound it! It was only to separate him from her that he had been sent with Pachmann! Why couldn't his father leave him alone! He was old enough to manage his own affairs! And besides....

[Pg 181]

The door of the wireless-house opened and Pachmann appeared. Very quietly he closed the door, very quietly he sat down beside his companion. And then he mopped a shining forehead with a hand that trembled visibly, and the younger man saw with astonishment that his face was livid.

"What is it? What has happened?" he asked.

Pachmann tried twice before he found his voice. When he did speak, it was in a hoarse whisper.

"I was wrong," he said. "France *does* suspect!"

[Pg 182]

CHAPTER XIV

THE MESSAGE

A little group of laughing young women came scurrying up the ladder from the promenade, and the Admiral and his companion sat stonily silent until they had passed. Then the Admiral spoke again, still in a whisper, but his voice was under control.

"The most astounding thing has happened," he said. "I cannot understand it. The operator in there has just received a message from Cherbourg, asking if there is not on board, in stateroom 514, a man named Ignace Vard, accompanied by his daughter. It is signed by Lépine, chief of the French secret service."

The younger man drew a quick, sibilant breath, and his face, too, turned pale beneath the tan.

"But how could he know?" he gasped. "How could he suspect?"

"Lépine is the very devil!" growled the other. "Perhaps it was that wireless installation, as you suggested."

"But that could not betray the man's name—the boat—even his stateroom!"

"No; I cannot understand it," and Pachmann mopped his face again. Then he thrust his handkerchief back into his pocket and sprang to his feet. "However it occurred, we must stop it," he said. "Come."

[Pg 183]

"Stop it—but how?"

"There is only one way. Come!"

The Admiral hurried down the ladder, his companion at his heels. From the upper promenade he descended to the deck below, and then, without hesitating, climbed another ladder and stepped over a low gate which gave entrance to the first-class promenade. The gate, it is true, bore a sign stating that second-class passengers must not pass it; but Pachmann did not even glance at it. He seemed to know the ship, for he pressed on, disregarding the curious glances cast at himself and his companion, mounted again to the boat-deck, and did not pause until he had reached its extreme forward end, just under the bridge. There he stopped at a door just abaft the ladder leading to the bridge and knocked sharply.

"Enter!" cried a voice, and the younger man, following the Admiral, found himself in a large and handsome stateroom, whose windows looked straight forward over the bow. At the desk a bearded man of middle-age was glancing through some papers. He looked up at the intruders with evident astonishment. "Really, gentlemen," he began, and then he stopped, his gaze shifting from one face to the other and back again in frank bewilderment.

[Pg 184]

"Captain Hausmann," said the Admiral, stepping forward, "probably you do not remember me, since we have met but once. But I think you know the Prince."

Captain Hausmann's eyes widened, and he sprang quickly to his feet, his hand at the visor of his cap.

"Your Highness," he began, but the Prince stopped him.

"I am not a Highness at present, Captain," he said, laughing; "only a humble passenger of the second class. I am very glad to see you again," and, holding out his hand, he gave that of the astonished mariner a hearty clasp.

"A passenger of the second class!" stammered the Captain. "But I do not understand!"

"It is not necessary that you should," said the Admiral, curtly, and at the words, the Captain reddened a little.

"Ah, now I know you," he said, quietly. "Admiral Pachmann," and again he saluted.

"Yes," said the Admiral, acknowledging the salute. "We had not intended to betray, even to you, our presence on board, but an unforeseen circumstance has made it necessary. No one else, of course, must suspect it. All that you need to know—indeed, all that we are permitted to tell you—is that His Highness and myself are at this moment engaged upon an affair of state of the first importance. Here are my credentials."

[Pg 185]

He took from an inner pocket a long leather pocket-book, extracted from it a heavy envelope sealed with a great black seal, and passed it to the Captain.

The latter took it, glanced at the seal and hesitated, for it bore the Imperial crown.

"Do you intend that I should open this?" he asked.

"I wish you to do so," answered Pachmann.

With fingers that trembled a little, the Captain loosened the seal, lifted the flap, and drew out the sheet of paper which lay within. It was an ivory-finished white, almost as stiff as a card, the entire upper left quarter occupied by the Imperial crown and monogram, the other three quarters covered by writing in a large and rather stiff hand, with a scrawling signature at the bottom. The Captain glanced at this signature, then, his face very grave, read the missive slowly and carefully. Finally he returned the sheet to its envelope, and handed it back to Pachmann, his eyes meeting the Admiral's with a kind of awed wonder.

"I am at your service," he said. "Will you...."

There was a tap at the door. The Captain went to it and opened it, standing so that his body filled the doorway. He exchanged a word with some one, and then closed the door and turned back into the room, a sheaf of papers in his hand.

[Pg 186]

"Will you not sit down?" he asked.

"We shall be but a moment," said Pachmann. "That was the wireless man, was it not?"

"Yes."

"Among the messages you have in your hand is one from Lépine, Prefect of the Paris Service du Surété. He asks whether you have aboard in stateroom 514 a man named Ignace Vard, accompanied by his daughter."

Captain Hausmann, with an admirable composure, glanced through the messages.

"Yes; here it is," he said.

"I will dictate the answer," said the Admiral.

Without a word, the Captain sat down again at his desk and wrote to Pachmann's dictation:

"Lépine, Paris.

No record of Ignace Vard and daughter on *Ottolie*. Stateroom 514 unoccupied.

HAUSMANN, Captain."

"It would be well to have the message sent at once," added Pachmann. "You will also see that the name of Vard and his daughter do not appear on your passenger list, and that they are moved from the stateroom they now occupy to some other one. The records for the voyage must show that that room was indeed unoccupied. You will also instruct the purser that the tickets surrendered by Vard and his daughter are not to be turned in, but, in case of inquiry, to be reported unused."

[Pg 187]

The Captain had listened carefully.

"On what pretext will I move these people?" he asked.

"The pretext must be found."

The Captain stroked his beard with a troubled air.

"I fear there is no second-cabin room empty—we are very crowded. Would it matter if I brought them forward?"

Pachmann pondered a moment.

"No," he said at last. "On the whole, that might be better. You will enter them on your passenger list by some other name—or, better still, omit them altogether."

"But the immigration authorities!" protested the Captain. "You have forgotten them!"

"We will think of them at the proper time," said Pachmann, impatiently. "This is not the moment to make objections. I think you understand?"

Hausmann bowed.

"We will say good-bye, then, for the present," added the Admiral, with a touch of irony. "We shall, perhaps, be forced again to call upon you."

A second time Hausmann bowed.

[Pg 188]

When Miss Vard entered her stateroom, that day, to brush her hair before going to lunch, her nostrils were assaulted by a most unpleasant odour, and, when a cursory inspection of the room failed to disclose its cause, she summoned the steward and asked him to investigate. An hour later, a white-capped official approached Mr. Vard, who was looking vainly through the collection of books in the library for something he cared to read, and informed him, with many apologies, that it would be necessary for him to change his stateroom. Just what was wrong with No. 514 it was impossible to say; but it could not be denied that there *was* a bad odour there, whose source had not been discovered, and the only alternative seemed to be to shut it up until the end of the voyage and then to overhaul it thoroughly.

"Very well," said Vard. "I have no objection to changing. But I cannot understand how a cubicle with floor, ceiling and walls of steel, could so suddenly become insanitary."

"It is a mystery to us also, sir, and one which we shall look into very thoroughly. We regret it extremely."

"Not at all," said Vard, somewhat astonished that so much should be made of the matter. "Have the steward change our baggage to the new quarters, and then come and show me where they are, and let us forget all about it."

[Pg 189]

"It is most kind of you to take it so good-naturedly," protested the officer. "The embarrassing thing to us is that, as there is no vacant stateroom in the second-cabin, we shall have to transfer you to the first."

Vard looked at him.

"And you expect me to pay the difference?" he asked.

"Oh, no; not at all," the other hastily assured him. "We had not thought of such a thing! But we feared you might have some objection to first-class, and that the change would inconvenience you still more."

Vard smiled grimly.

"As a matter of fact, I *have* an objection to first-class," he said, "but it is largely that of wasting money for which I have a better use. The people one sees there also do not appeal to me. I fear most of them are idle fools. But perhaps the library is better selected."

"Oh, it is much larger than this!" the officer agreed. "I may take it, then, that you consent?"

"Certainly. We can't stay in a stateroom that smells as ours does."

"Then," said the other, "if you will inform your daughter, I will myself conduct you to your new quarters."

[Pg 190]

So Miss Vard was summoned, their steward was loaded with the baggage, and after a glance around No. 514 to assure herself that nothing had been overlooked, Miss Vard found herself following her father and the white-capped German along a narrow passage, past a steel door that was unlocked for them, and up the companion-way to a very handsome suite opening on the upper promenade. It consisted of two bedrooms and a sitting-room, and Kasia, as she glanced about it, could not repress an exclamation of surprise.

"Are we to stay here?" she asked.

"Yes, Madame," and the official smiled. "It is the only thing we have to offer. I am glad that it pleases you. It will help you to forget the inconvenience of changing," and, having waited until the steward had deposited his burden, he motioned him out before him, bowed and withdrew.

Kasia made a quick tour of the room, admiring its elegant furnishings, glanced into the bedrooms, and then came back to her father.

"I don't understand it!" she said. "Why should they give us all this?"

Her father regarded her in some surprise.

"Why, my dear," he said, "you have heard the explanation. I do not for a moment imagine that the steamship company would have been so generous if there had been any way to avoid it!"

[Pg 191]

"No, I suppose not!" Kasia agreed, and set herself to arrange their belongings—it was almost

like fitting up a flat! "This suit-case is very heavy, father," she added, after a moment. "Will you put it in your room?"

"Of course," and Vard lifted it, started for the bedroom, and then turned and placed it on the little table which stood between the windows. "I will have a look at it, first," he said, loosened the straps, took a key from a flapped compartment of his pocket-book and put it in the lock. "One would scarcely believe, Kasia," he added, with a smile, "that this little bag contains the destiny of the world!"

"No," she said, and came and stood beside him, one arm about him, her head against his shoulder.

He turned the key and raised the lid. Then he put aside some articles of clothing and lifted from beneath them an oblong box, open at the ends. One saw, on looking closer, that the sides of the box were of glass, partially covered on both sides with tin-foil; and peering in at the open end, one perceived a vague maze of wires and pinions.

Vard gazed at it for some moments without speaking.

"There it is, Kasia," he said, at last, "the wonder-worker, which, properly tuned and connected with its batteries, generates a force which puts an end to armies and to fleets. With it in the world, there can be no more war—and if there is no more war, there is the end of kings and tyrants. It is a great thought, is it not, my daughter?"

[Pg 192]

"A great thought!" she echoed, but her voice was shaking, and she shivered a little and drew closer to him. "And yet, father, think what an awful force it would be if it fell into unscrupulous hands! It is that which makes me tremble sometimes!"

"You do not fear me, Kasia?" he asked reproachfully.

"No, father; of course not!"

He replaced the mechanism, covered it carefully with clothing, closed the lid, locked it, and returned the key to his pocket. Then he carried the bag to his bedroom and slipped it under the bed. At last he came back to his daughter.

"I will not deny, Kasia," he said, "that I have been tempted, more than once. Not by the prospect of wealth or power—those cannot tempt me; but by the thought that, after subduing the world, I might 're-mould it nearer to the heart's desire.' And yet how vain to fancy that I or any man possesses the wisdom to do that! No; that cannot be. Each nation must shape its own destiny, as friends and brothers. It is for me to strike the swords from their hands!"

[Pg 193]

But still Kasia trembled and a shadow lay across her face.

"What is it you fear?" her father asked, looking at her.

"It seems too great a destiny!" she answered, with quivering lips. "There is so great a risk! Suppose some one should steal that instrument...."

"That would do no harm. I can make another—a hundred others! That is my purpose. The whole world must know of it—must possess it. Every nation must know that, the instant it marches to war, it risks annihilation. I see no danger there."

"But suppose," Kasia persisted, "that the man who stole it should kill you—what then? Oh, I have thought of it, father, so much, so closely, all through the night! We must run no risk like that."

Vard took a rapid turn up and down the room. He was deeply perturbed. At last he paused beside her.

"You are right, Kasia," he said. "I do not believe there is any danger—and yet we must run no risk like that! Well, it is easy to avoid it! Wait!"

He disappeared into his bedroom, and Kasia heard him pulling out the bag and opening it. Then the lock snapped again, the bag was pushed back under the bed, and her father rejoined her. He held in his hand a little case of polished steel. Within it were three filament-like wires wound peculiarly around a series of tiny pins.

[Pg 194]

"Here it is," he said, "the very heart of the mechanism. Without this it is useless. Without this, it is merely a transformer. It can do no one any harm—can betray no secret."

Kasia took the little box and looked at it.

"Is this difficult to make, father?" she asked.

"It took me eight years to make that one; but I can make another in two days, or perhaps three."

"You are sure of that?"

"Oh, yes," and he smiled. "It is very intricate, yet very simple when one has the clue. Every convolution of those filaments is photographed on my brain. I can close my eyes and see them winding in and out."

The girl hesitated, the little box still in her hand.

"Then it would be safe to destroy this?" she asked, at last.

"Safe? Yes! That is my meaning! Let us destroy it!"

Still a moment she paused, then she closed her hand.

"Yes," she agreed; "let us destroy it."

Her father nodded his head indifferently. With him the moment of tension had passed.

"Drop it into the sea," he said. "That will end it. Now, I think, I shall go and examine the books in the library."

[Pg 195]

He went out and closed the door; but Kasia stood for a long time without moving, staring at the little box of polished metal. After all, if he *could* not reproduce it; if there *should* be some convulsion he had missed, some accidental conjunction he was not aware of! If to destroy it now would be to destroy it forever! Better that, of course, than run the other risk! But was there no other way? Perhaps, perhaps....

[Pg 196]

CHAPTER XV

A WORD OF WARNING

Wherefore it happened that Dan Webster, searching promenade and saloon and library, that afternoon, mounting to the boat-deck, descending to the lower deck, peeping into every nook and corner where passengers of the second-class were permitted to penetrate, looked in vain for Kasia Vard. Nor was her father anywhere to be seen. At last, perceiving the curious glances shot in his direction, and having stumbled for the third time over the same outstretched pair of feet, he mounted gloomily to the boat-deck and sat down to think it out.

The weather continued fine and the sea smooth, so that it was absurd to suppose that either of them was ill; and that they should keep to their stateroom on such an afternoon for any other reason, or even for that one, was more absurd still. Perhaps, if they were working....

The thought brought him sudden relief. That explained it! They had some work they were doing together. Perhaps Kasia acted as her father's secretary, and even now was writing to his dictation. She had said that he was engaged in some gigantic project, the nature of which Dan understood but dimly—a plan for the disarmament of the world, or something like that. As he remembered them here in the cold light of day, her words of the night before seemed more than a little fantastic; but perhaps he had not understood, or perhaps she had spoken figuratively. "The nations of the world in the hollow of his hand"—that, of course, was figurative. And, equally of course, Vard's plan would come to nothing. But it would be interesting to know more of it.

[Pg 197]

He must have a talk with Vard before the voyage ended. A story like that would make good copy, and a little newspaper propaganda would help the thing along. Meanwhile, there was nothing to do but wait until Miss Vard should choose to reappear. He cast his mind back over the story she had told him—ye gods! what a feature *that* would make, told just as she had told it, simply and earnestly and without embellishment. Perhaps he could persuade her to write it for the *Record*. He could picture the shining face of Craftsman, the Sunday editor, as he read it!

Some one, crossing the deck unperceived by him, sat down beside him. He turned quickly; but it was only Chevrial.

"Ah, M. Webster," said the Frenchman, smiling, "you were among the day dreams; and they were not of me. That is apparent from the look with which you regard me!"

[Pg 198]

Dan flushed a little, and then he laughed. There was no resisting Chevrial's genial humour.

"No," he admitted; "they were of some one quite different."

"Nevertheless, until that 'some one' appears, I trust that I am welcome?"

"Indeed you are. I'm glad you came!"

Dan spoke warmly, and his companion, with a little satisfied nod, settled back into the seat. They had seen very little of each other since the moment of meeting. Dan had gone to bed the previous night before his roommate appeared, and had not even heard him come in. This morning, when he arose, Chevrial was sleeping calmly, and Dan had gathered his clothes together as noiselessly as he could and stolen away to the bathroom. They had passed each other once or twice on the promenade, and had nodded but had not spoken—and then Dan remembered suddenly the flare of light from the near-by bench the night before, as he and Kasia rose to go below. Chevrial smiled again as he met his glance.

"You are thinking of last night?" he said. "Yes? It is concerning that I wish first to speak to you. When I sat down yonder I was not conscious that this bench was occupied. You and the young lady were speaking in very low tones, and the bench itself was in shadow. It was only when she raised her voice that I realised I was hearing what was not intended for me. I was just about to go, when she stopped abruptly, and a moment later you went down together. It was then that you

[Pg 199]

noticed me. I struck the match in order that you might see that it was I, and so have no uneasiness."

Dan stared at his companion in astonishment.

"Uneasiness?" he repeated. "But why should I have any uneasiness?"

"Not on your own account, of course, but on the young lady's account."

"But I don't see why, even for her, I should be uneasy," said Dan perplexedly.

"My dear sir," and Chevrial dropped his voice and spoke very earnestly, "there are always spies on these big boats—this is a most productive field for them—German spies, French spies, English spies, listening to each word, watching each gesture. Suppose one of them had chanced to hear what I did...."

Dan stared a moment longer, then he burst into a laugh.

"Oh, come, M. Chevrial," he protested. "You don't really believe that!"

"Believe what?"

"About the spies."

[Pg 200]

Chevrial's face grew a little grim.

"I am not one to offer advice where it is not desired," he said; "but I assure you, M. Webster, that what I have told you is true, and furthermore had any one of three or four persons who are on this boat heard what I heard, that girl and her father would have been under espionage for the remainder of their lives."

It was easy to see that Chevrial spoke in deadly earnest, and, in spite of himself, Dan was impressed and sobered.

"I beg your pardon," he said; "perhaps you are right; but to an American the very idea of such a system is laughable—it savours too much of cheap melodrama. But why should the story Miss Vard told me interest any one?"

"My dear sir," answered Chevrial, drily, "when a girl goes about boasting that her father is more powerful than the Czar or Kaiser! Suppose she had stopped there, any hearer would have concluded that he was an anarchist, and therefore to be watched. But she went further: she asserted that he can blow up forts and destroy armies! That he can wreck battleships! Why, M. Webster, it is only four days since *La Liberté*, the greatest of French battleships, was destroyed in the harbour of Toulon by an agency not yet determined!"

Dan had turned a little pale.

[Pg 201]

"But you don't imagine," he stammered; "surely you don't think...."

Chevrial flipped away his cigarette-ash negligently.

"That *La Liberté* was destroyed by this man? Absurd! But, nevertheless, it is a bad time to make such boasts."

"I can see that," agreed Dan. "I will speak to Miss Vard."

"I would do so, by all means. She seems a most interesting girl, and I should regret to see her involved in an unpleasant situation. Or her father," Chevrial added. "A most interesting enthusiast!"

"You have talked with him?"

"Oh, yes; last night for some time. He has great ideas—too great, I fear, to be practicable."

"Then you don't believe...."

"That he can destroy armies and all that?" and Chevrial laughed lightly. "My dear M. Webster, do you?"

"No," said Dan, slowly, "I don't suppose I do. It's too much to believe—without proof!"

"Assuredly," agreed his companion; "no one would believe it without proof—absolute proof." Then he leaned closer. "To me he made no such absurd claim, but from the way he talked—from his grandiose ideas, his strange philosophy, his fabulous hopes for humanity—I formed the opinion that the man is mad—not wholly mad, you understand, but touched, in one corner of the brain, by a wild hallucination. His daughter, naturally, believes in him. She is a most attractive girl. Polish women are always attractive, at least when they are young. There is, in their faces, in their eyes, an appearance of tragedy, of mystery, which piques the imagination. And they are all great patriots—it is born in the blood—oh, far greater patriots than the men. I have travelled in Poland," he added, seeing Dan's glance; "my business sometimes calls me there."

[Pg 202]

"And is there really such oppression as Miss Vard described?"

"I do not know what she told you—it was only at the end she raised her voice; but she could not exaggerate the sufferings of her people. They are little better than slaves. All careers are closed to them, and over them constantly is the shadow of Siberia."

"You mean they are banished sometimes?"

"They are banished often—for one year, two years, three years. And they are compelled to walk to and from the place of banishment. It takes a year sometimes. I knew a man who returned home one day to find a Cossack attacking his daughter. There was a struggle, and the Cossack

shot the man in the leg. The wound festered and the leg was amputated; then the man was sentenced to the mines at Yakutsk. It was I know not how many thousand miles—it took him two years to walk there on his wooden leg—walking, walking every day."

Dan felt a strange weakness running through his veins.

"But is there no way to put an end to such things?" he asked.

Chevrial rolled himself another cigarette.

"Poland has no friends," he answered. "She has been forgotten. The Poles themselves have come to be regarded as fools, as charlatans, as irresponsible children. France was supposed to be the friend of Poland; Napoleon promised to reconstitute her, and the Poles fought by thousands in his armies and won many victories for him. Then came the campaign of Russia and ended all that. To-day, Poland is remembered in France only by a proverb, '*Saoul comme un Polonais*,' 'Drunk as a Pole.' It is so we think of them, when we think of them at all, which is not often. This disdain, this forgetfulness, has been carefully fostered by Germany and Russia. No one thinks it worth while to interfere. Besides, Poland's lot is that of every conquered country. In Alsace-Lorraine it is just the same."

"Oh, surely not!" Dan protested. "Germany, at least, has no Siberia!"

"No, she has no Siberia," Chevrial agreed, "but neither has she a sense of humour, and that is worse! The very worst trait in a conqueror, M. Webster, believe me, is an absence of the sense of humour! And Germany has the strongest prisons in the world. Her system of espial is even more minute and irritating than that of Russia. As in Poland, the people of Alsace and Lorraine may not speak their native tongue nor study the history of their fatherland. Nothing escapes suspicion. It is reported that at a certain café the accounts are kept in French; the café is thereupon visited, the books confiscated, and a fine imposed. A certain gentleman goes to Nancy on the fourteenth of July, which happens to be the date of the French national fête; he is reported as suspect and his premises are visited and searched. The police, passing the house of a notary one evening, hear some one singing the Marseillaise; they demand admittance and arrest the notary, although it was a phonograph which had been singing the song. This is adjudged a very serious case."

"Do you mean to tell me," Dan demanded, "that such things actually occur?"

The ghost of a smile flitted across Chevrial's lips.

"Not those precise cases, perhaps," he said; "but cases very like them—cases not a whit less ridiculous. And can you wonder that Germany finds Alsace and Lorraine restless? Do you wonder that our hearts ache for our compatriots? Do you wonder that we dream of the day when we may remove those mourning wreaths from the statue of Strasbourg in the Place de la Concord?"

He fell silent a moment, then shrugged his shoulders resignedly.

"But I grow too serious," he continued. "Perhaps, some day, Poland will be freed, Alsace-Lorraine returned to France; yes," and here he glanced at Dan with a dry smile, "and the people of the Philippines given their independence. Indeed, this M. Vard believes that day to be close at hand. Let us hope so. Which reminds me that I have to-day seen neither him nor his daughter."

"Nor have I," Dan admitted. "I thought perhaps they had some work to do, and so had not come on deck."

"They may be there now," said Chevrial, and led the way to the forward end of the boat-deck, where, leaning against the rail, they could look down upon the promenade below.

Every one was on deck, walking up and down, revelling in the fresh air, with its tang of salt, and in the soft sunshine; but, though Dan and Chevrial stood for some time looking down, neither Miss Vard nor her father passed. Then Chevrial, whose attention had wandered, uttered a little exclamation, and caught Dan by the arm.

"See there!" he said.

He was pointing forward to the first-class promenade, which was also crowded, and Dan, following the direction of his gesture, saw, amid the crowd, a white-haired man and dark-haired girl walking side by side, deep in talk. He looked again, scarcely able to believe his eyes; but there was no mistaking them—they were Miss Vard and her father.

He drew a deep breath of wonder and perplexity. How came they among the first-class passengers? But perhaps they had merely been to see the purser, and were now on their way back. No; they had passed the gangway. In another moment, they turned back along the other side of the promenade and were lost to sight.

Only then did Dan look up. He found Chevrial smiling sardonically.

"But what does it mean?" he asked.

Chevrial pursed his lips.

"I do not know," he answered, with a little shrug, "unless some one beside myself heard Miss Vard's story, last night, and has caused her to be placed where she may be more easily kept under surveillance. Oh, there was some story trumped up, depend upon it, so that she would not suspect. No doubt she will also be given the opportunity to make certain friends among her new shipmates, in whom she may also confide. It will be delicately done; oh, so delicately!"

It might have occurred to Dan that M. Chevrial seemed, for a wine-merchant, surprisingly familiar with affairs of state and the methods of the secret service; but, for the moment, his

whole mind was concentrated on Miss Vard's danger.

"I must warn her," he breathed.

"I believe it would be wise," said Chevrial, in the same tone. "She should make friends with no one—confide in no one. Her position is very serious." And then, as Dan started from the rail, he caught his arm. "Not now," he said. "Wait until to-night. It would be too apparent if you were to rush up there in open day. And before you do speak, make sure that there is no one within twenty feet of you—and then speak in a whisper!"

"Thank you," said Dan; "you are right, of course." And he went slowly back to the bench.

[Pg 208]

CHAPTER XVI

A CHARGE TO KEEP

When Dan Webster took his seat at the dinner table, that evening, he found a printed copy of the passenger-list beside his plate, and his neighbours were a-flutter with the excitement of seeing their names in type. Dan, turning to the letter V, found that the names of Ignace Vard and his daughter were not there. Doubtless the change from second-class to first was responsible for the omission, and yet, at the back of his mind was a vague feeling of uneasiness which he was wholly unable to explain. Chevrial had impressed him, and yet one objection to that gentleman's misgivings seemed to him unanswerable: if the Vards had been changed from second-class to first with any ulterior object, the authorities in charge of the ship must be in the plot, and that was manifestly absurd.

Yet his determination to seek Miss Vard at the first moment and advise her to be cautious did not waver. He knew, from the printed announcements of the company, that the first-cabin dinner was not a table-d'hôte served at a fixed hour, as in the second-cabin, but an à la carte meal, served from six to nine, as at a fashionable restaurant; so he loitered restlessly about for half an hour after he left the table; then, deciding that he had waited long enough, he approached the ladder which led to the first-class promenade. But a uniformed figure which stood at the foot of the ladder stopped him.

[Pg 209]

"Beg pardon, sir," it said, "are you first-class?"

"No; I am second."

"Did you wish to see the purser or some officer of the ship?"

"No; I wished to *see* one of the passengers."

"In that case, I fear I cannot let you pass, sir. It is against the rules."

"Oh, is it?" said Dan, all his suspicions revived with double force, and he bit his lip in perplexity.

"I am sorry, sir; but I am here to enforce the rules."

"Oh, I understand," said Dan.

"You might get your stateroom steward to take a message," the man suggested.

"But I want to *see* the person."

"The person can come to you. There is no rule against first-class visiting second. First-class has the run of the ship."

"I see," said Dan. "Thank you," and he went away to think it over.

Mechanically he threaded his way through the crowd on the promenade, climbed up to the boat-deck, and sat down on the well-remembered bench. Some of the others were occupied, but this one was empty; perhaps the others were becoming as dear to other people as this one was to him! He got out his pipe, lighted it, pulled his cap over his eyes, thrust his hands deep into his pockets, and began to think.

[Pg 210]

He could, of course, write Miss Vard a brief warning; but what assurance had he that it would be delivered to her, at least without being opened? If Chevrial was right, if she was really under espionage, any communication addressed to her would certainly be inspected. Even to write merely asking her to meet him would arouse suspicion. There was only one way—he must watch for a chance to steal forward into first-class when no one was looking.

He considered the possible ways of doing this. In the morning, he knew, the folding gate which divided the lower promenade into first and second class was always swung back while the deck was being washed down. It would be easy to pass then; but, he reflected, in the daytime he had

never noticed that a guard was stationed at the ladder leading to the upper promenade. Perhaps it was only at night that the prohibition was in force—at night, when the women of the first-cabin had their diamonds on! There must, of course, be some police supervision of the ship; each class must be kept to its own quarters, or, at least, prevented from wandering into quarters higher up. But, just the same, he must get past!

[Pg 211]

He rose, and, walking to the forward rail, looked across at the other deck. A space of perhaps thirty feet separated it from the one on which he stood. Then he looked down. The man on guard was pacing slowly back and forth, his hands behind him; but suddenly he quickened his step, for two men had approached the foot of the ladder. The guard stopped them with the same formula he had used with Dan.

"Beg pardon, gentlemen," he said, "are you first-class?"

"No; we are second-class," answered one of the men.

"Have you business with the purser or any officer of the ship?"

There was a moment's hesitation.

"Why do you ask?" queried one of the men.

"It is forbidden to pass otherwise."

Again there was a moment's hesitation, and Dan strained his ears to catch the reply.

"We have business with the Commander," said one of the men at last, in a low tone.

The guard was obviously surprised.

"The Commander is very busy," he said, deprecatingly. "Perhaps to-morrow will do."

[Pg 212]

"To-morrow will not do," was the curt answer.

"I must, at least, announce you," said the guard. "May I have your card?"

A card was produced and handed to him. Without looking at it, he blew a sharp blast on a little whistle which hung about his neck. In a moment another man in uniform appeared at the head of the ladder. The guard mounted and handed him the card.

"For the Captain," he said, and came down again. "I regret that I must detain you, gentlemen," he added, "but I must obey the regulations."

"Certainly," agreed one of the men, and they stepped a little apart and stood talking together in low tones. But almost immediately the messenger appeared again at the top of the ladder.

"The Captain will receive you, gentlemen," he said, and swung open the gate and waited for them to pass. Then he closed the gate and hurried after them. Dan could see them going along the upper promenade; then they passed from sight.

The guard had stared after them as they climbed the ladder, and he stood staring for some little time after they had gone. Plainly he was much astonished. But at last, with a shake of the head, he turned away and resumed his walk.

[Pg 213]

Dan was about to turn away, too, when another incident attracted his attention. A barefooted sailor in white duck, coming from the stern of the ship, climbed to the rail, tested the rope holding the canvas windshield, and then, as the guard turned away, grasped a stanchion of the railing above his head and drew himself up quickly to the first promenade. Dan, looking after him, saw him run rapidly up the ladder to the forward boat-deck and disappear behind a life-boat.

That was a way, certainly, to evade the guard. Dan measured the distance from the rail to the upper deck, and wondered if he could pull himself up as quickly as the sailor had. He would have to be quick, or the guard would see him. And it was quite an athletic feat. Besides, he would be handicapped by his shoes; he might easily slip off the rail and over the side. No, that road was too dangerous, except as a last resort. Besides, if he were caught, it would be very awkward.

He returned to his bench and sat down again. After all, was there really any reason why he should warn Miss Vard? The whole thing was, most probably, nothing but a bit of rhodomontade on Chevrial's part. And who was Chevrial, anyway? How did it happen that he was so familiar with spies and secret services and systems of espionage? A most peculiar wine-merchant. Perhaps he was not a wine-merchant; perhaps....

[Pg 214]

"A penny for your thoughts, Mr. Webster," said a low voice, and some one sat down beside him.

He turned with a violent start.

"Kasia!" he cried, and then stopped, stammering. "I beg your pardon, Miss Vard," he said, also lowering his voice. "You startled me so!"

As she met his glance, he saw how bright her eyes were. She had thrown a wrap about her and drawn the hood over her head. Against it, her face looked very white.

"I think you may call me Kasia," she said softly. "You see, I need a friend, and I should hate to have a friend call me anything else. No," she added, as he started to say something, "I shall continue to call you Mr. Webster—that is not quite the same thing. And I am sorry I startled you."

"It was because I was thinking of you. I have been thinking of you all day. I tried to go to you, just now. I had something to tell you. But the guard at the ladder stopped me."

He looked around to make sure that there was no one near.

"He didn't stop *me*," she said.

"No; first-class passengers have the run of the ship. How does it happen that you are first-class, Kasia?"

[Pg 215]

It was the first time that he had used the word with intention, and his voice trembled a little over it.

She told him rapidly of the odour which had suddenly developed in her former stateroom, and how the ship's people had finally been compelled to transfer her and her father to the first-cabin.

"Oh, to quite sumptuous quarters," she went on; "you should see them. Two bedrooms and a sitting-room and bath—an imperial suite. There are no places left at the tables, so our meals are served in our sitting-room, as though we were royalties. I'm afraid our tips will have to be something enormous! I can't but feel that the steamship company is getting very much the worst of it. Both father and I offered to continue eating second-class, but the Captain wouldn't hear of it. He seems to think, poor man, that the odour has disgraced his boat. He was quite humble about it!"

Dan breathed a deep sigh of relief.

"I'm glad it's so simple," he said. "I had begun to imagine all sorts of things. Last night, when we were talking here, it happened that my roommate, a fellow named Chevrial, was sitting on that bench yonder, and overheard a little of our talk. He was quite solemn with me this afternoon about it."

"In what way?" asked Kasia, quickly.

[Pg 216]

"He said there are always spies on board these big boats, and that you oughtn't to go around talking about blowing up battleships—not at this time, anyway, since it is only three or four days since a French ship was blown up."

He could hear the startled breath she drew, and the hand she laid on his sleeve was trembling.

"Did he say that?" she gasped. "But he doesn't suspect—"

"That your father blew up *La Liberté*?" laughed Dan. "Of course not. He said that was absurd. But, just the same, he thought it unwise to talk about it."

"He is right," Kasia agreed. "What else did he say?"

"He seemed to think your being moved to first-class was part of a plot of some kind, and thought you ought to be warned not to make any acquaintances or confide in any one. But of course that was just his imagination. If the Captain himself moved you why that settles it. He wouldn't be concerned in any plot. The whole thing, anyway, sounds like a bit of ten-twenty-thirty. I told Chevrial so."

"Who is this Chevrial?" asked Miss Vard.

"I don't know. He told me he was a dealer in wine. He seems to have travelled a lot, and he is certainly a well-educated fellow, and one of the best talkers I ever met. A Frenchman all through, from the way he got worked up over Alsace-Lorraine. He said it was as bad as Poland. But I suspect he was letting his Gallic imagination run away with him when he got on the subject of spies."

[Pg 217]

"I am not so sure of that," she said, and fell silent for a moment. "I have seen more of spies than have you, Mr. Webster—I know how Europe is honeycombed with them. At any rate, it can do no harm to follow his advice. Please make sure that there is no one near us. I have something most important to say to you."

Dan glanced at her in surprise; then he got up, looked behind the boat in whose shadow the bench stood, and made a careful survey of their surroundings. Then he sat down again.

"There is no one near," he assured her.

"Mr. Webster," she began, leaning so close that a tendril of her hair brushed his cheek, and speaking in a voice that was almost a whisper, "I told you that I had need of a friend. It is a desperate need. I may rely upon you, may I not?"

For answer, he sought her hand, found it and held it fast. It was very cold.

"I was sure of it," she said, and her fingers closed upon his. "I knew, in my first glance at you, that you were to be counted on."

Dan's heart was glowing and he could not trust himself to speak.

[Pg 218]

"My need is this," she went on rapidly, as though, having nerved herself to speak, she must hurry through with it before her resolution failed. "My father has perfected an invention—oh, a great invention—which he fears some one may try to steal from him. He has many enemies who would stop at nothing to gain possession of it. Even on this boat, perhaps, there are some of them—he does not know; there is no way that he can tell; but he is very anxious. For eight years he laboured at this invention, and at last it is finished. But if some one should steal his model, all this would be for nothing—for worse than nothing. It is not a money loss he fears—this invention will not bring him money—but his whole life would be wrecked—all his plans, all his hopes. To-day he agreed with me that this model should be destroyed; he put it in my hand and he expected me to drop it into the sea. But I was afraid to do that; perhaps he could not make another. It is so complicated, so delicate, perhaps he would go wrong. So I thought and thought—I thought if I had a friend whom I could trust absolutely, whom no one would suspect of possessing it, I might

entrust it to him...."

Dan's pressure on her hand grew stronger.

"Give it to me," he said.

Kasia gazed into his eyes for a moment, as though reading his very soul; then her other hand came forward under her cloak and touched his. He felt that it held a package; and he took it quickly and slipped it into the pocket of his coat. [Pg 219]

"Now it is safe," he said. "You are not to worry about it any more."

She breathed a deep sigh of relief.

"But you must make me two promises," she said.

"What are they?"

"You must permit no one, under any circumstances, to open that package."

"I promise."

"Rather than do that, rather than permit any one to see it, you must destroy it—throw it overboard, stamp upon it—destroy it in some way."

"I promise."

"No matter who may be trying to get it—the Captain of this ship, an officer of the police—it must make no difference."

"I promise."

She leaned back against the seat, suddenly relaxed as from a great strain, and closed her eyes. But she did not draw her hand away. Then she opened her eyes and looked at him, and her lips were quivering. An immense longing to take her in his arms, to stoop and kiss those lips, to hold her close to him, rushed through the man's veins. But he held himself back. To do that would be base; to do that would be asking payment! He could not do that. But sometime, sometime.... [Pg 220]

She saw the change in his face, sat for an instant very still, then drew her hand away, got out her handkerchief and passed it across her eyes.

"Now we can talk," she said, in another tone. "You may choose the subject."

Dan pulled himself together.

"Oh, any subject will do," he laughed. "Ships or shoes or sealing-wax—just so you do the talking."

And he got out his pipe and filled it with trembling fingers. He was absurdly happy.

[Pg 221]

CHAPTER XVII

THE FIRST CONFERENCE

In the Captain's cabin, meanwhile, another conference was going forward, and one of a very different character from that on the after boat-deck. The curtains had been carefully drawn, and three men sat facing each other. They were Ignace Vard, Pachmann, and the young man whom he addressed habitually as "Prince." Vard was on the divan in the corner of the room, the others lounged in two luxuriously upholstered chairs which had been wheeled in front of the divan. Their attitudes suggested careless unconcern, but their eyes were glowing with repressed excitement. Cigars and liqueurs were on a table between them, and the air was blue with smoke.

The Captain had been chatting with a group of passengers when Pachmann's card was handed to him, but, after a glance at it, he excused himself at once.

"Show the gentlemen to my cabin," he said to the messenger, and himself hastened to it. There, a moment later, Pachmann and the Prince appeared.

"It is necessary that we have a conference to-night," said Pachmann, "with this Ignace Vard. It must be in a room where we cannot by any possibility be overheard." [Pg 222]

"It is, I suppose, an affair of state?" asked the Captain.

"Yes; of the first importance."

"My cabin, then, is at your disposal."

"Thank you, sir," said Pachmann. "There could be no better place. I was hoping that you would offer it."

"You will understand, sir," Hausmann went on, stroking his beard nervously, "that an explanation of all this will have to be made to my company."

"I will see that a satisfactory explanation is made, sir," Pachmann assented.

The Captain nodded his relief.

"That is what I desire. I will have Vard brought to you," he said, saluted and withdrew.

He sent a messenger for the inventor, waited until he had entered, and then summoned a sailor and posted him as a sentry outside the door, with instructions to permit no one else to enter or even knock. Then he had another man stretch a rope across the deck some twenty feet abaft the door; and finally mounted thoughtfully to the bridge, considerably to the surprise of his subordinates, and spent the whole evening there, pacing slowly back and forth with an appearance of restlessness the other officers could not understand, for the weather was very fine and the barometer high and steady.

[Pg 223]

In the cabin below the conference proceeded.

"It is as well, Mr. Vard," Pachmann was saying, "that we should understand each other. The Prince and myself are here as the direct personal representatives of the Emperor, who has given us his fullest confidence and the most complete authority. Any agreement we may make with you, he will recognise as binding. It was a condition of yours, I believe, that you would meet only with persons so empowered."

"I should have preferred to treat with the Emperor himself," said Vard.

"You could scarcely expect him to make this trip to America," Pachmann pointed out, with a smile. "If you had been content to go to Berlin...."

"That was impossible," Vard broke in. "It was stipulated that the treaty should be signed in America, and the Emperor agreed."

"And we are here to carry out that agreement," Pachmann added. "But before we proceed to a consideration of it, I will outline the progress of affairs to the present moment, in order that the Prince may be thoroughly familiar with the matter. If I am mistaken in any detail, please correct me."

Vard nodded, and lay back in his seat, watching the smoke from his cigar, as it wreathed itself toward the ceiling.

[Pg 224]

"About the middle of July," Pachmann began, "Mr. Vard called on Count Eulenberg, the Chief Marshall of the Imperial Court, and asked for a private audience with the Emperor. The request was so preposterous that the Count was astounded when Mr. Vard persisted in it. After that he was shadowed night and day, his lodgings were searched, his mail opened, and the police authorities were about to expel him from the country as a dangerous person, when something still more astonishing happened. With incredible good fortune, Mr. Vard had in some way managed to secure an audience with Admiral von Tirpitz, Secretary for the Navy; two days later, a secret audience was arranged, at which the Emperor was present. At the request of Admiral von Tirpitz, I was also present, in my capacity as Chief of the Wireless Service.

"At this conference Mr. Vard stated that he had discovered a principle, or invented an apparatus, by which he could explode the magazines of a fort or battleship at any distance up to five miles, and that he believed the perfection of the invention would greatly increase its range. This new principle, which worked in conjunction with the ordinary wireless, was something against which there was no way to guard, since it penetrated both wood and metal. Every ship, every army, every fort was at the mercy of the man controlling it. If a single nation controlled it, that nation would become mistress of the world; if it was common to all nations, war, as we know it, would be impossible.

[Pg 225]

"Mr. Vard went on to say that it was not his purpose to make this discovery the property of a single nation. His purpose was to render war so impossible that all nations would consent to universal disarmament, and enter into an agreement for universal peace. He had come to Germany first, he said, because she was the greatest of the armed nations, and if she agreed to his proposal, the example would be very great. His proposal was that he would prove that he was able to do everything he claimed, in any way that Germany might prescribe; in the event of his success, Germany was to sign an agreement to disarm, was to secure the signature of Russia and such other nations as she could influence, and this alliance was then to force the agreement of all other nations; the navies and coast defences of such nations as would not agree to be blown to pieces and their consent compelled."

Pachmann paused for a moment and wiped his glistening forehead.

"Am I stating your proposal correctly, Mr. Vard?" he asked.

The inventor nodded, without lowering his eyes from the ceiling.

[Pg 226]

"I need not say with what astonishment we listened to this extraordinary proposal," Pachmann continued. "It seemed impossible that any merely human brain should have been able to work out the details of a plan so stupendous. But it impressed the Emperor; it impressed all of us. We held other conferences, and it was finally agreed that, before we went further, Mr. Vard should give us the proof he had suggested. The test to which he finally consented was to be a conclusive one. He was to blow up a French battleship in Toulon harbour. As his funds were limited, we agreed to bear the expense of the experiment and to reimburse him for the apparatus which he would have to leave behind. If he succeeded, we would be ready to treat definitely with him; two

commissioners, with full powers from the Emperor, would accompany him to America, where such treaty as might finally be agreed upon would be signed. Am I right so far, Mr. Vard?"

The inventor had lowered his eyes and was looking at the speaker keenly.

"Yes," he said, "except that you should add that it was distinctly understood that the treaty was to be one for universal disarmament, and that Germany was to do everything in her power to secure the consent of all other nations."

"You are right," agreed Pachmann, readily. "That was to be the general purpose of the treaty. It was only its details we were to discuss—the exact manner in which this end could best be accomplished."

[Pg 227]

The Prince had been listening intently, and at the words, his eyes and Pachmann's met. Vard was again gazing at the ceiling.

"On the twentieth of this month," Pachmann continued, "Admiral von Tirpitz received from Mr. Vard, in a code agreed upon, a telegram stating that the test would occur at daylight on Monday the twenty-fifth." He paused for a moment, then went on more slowly. "At that hour, a companion and myself were on the harbour-front of Toulon; and at that hour *La Liberté* was indeed destroyed."

He stopped, his eyes on the inventor's face. Vard met his glance without flinching.

"Understand," he said, in a low tone, "that I am no monster, that I recognise the sacredness of human life. The test proposed was yours, not mine; I protested against it, and I consented at last because I saw that you would with nothing else be satisfied. But for the destruction of that ship, you will have to atone; to those men who were killed a great monument shall be built; they shall be recognised by all the world as heroes and martyrs; their families shall weep for them, indeed, but with tears of joy and pride. To banish war from the world those men laid down their lives, even as I would lay down mine—even as any brave man would—gladly, eagerly!"

[Pg 228]

His eyes were shining, and the Prince, looking at him, felt himself shaken by a strange emotion. But across Pachmann's lips flitted an ironical smile, as of one who disdained heroics.

"For the decision as to *La Liberté*," he said, "I assume full responsibility. It was I who suggested it; it was I who showed that no other proof could be conclusive; it was I who arranged for it. I have no regrets. You have your part of the bargain accomplished, Mr. Vard," he added. "His Highness and myself are here to accomplish ours. We are ready to discuss the details of the treaty."

"I think that first, perhaps, I should look at your credentials," Vard suggested.

"That is just," and Pachmann, getting out his pocket-book, took from it the envelope sealed with the black seal, and handed it to Vard.

Vard took it, glanced at the seal, and hesitated, just as the captain of the *Ottilie* had done.

"I am to open it?" he asked.

Pachmann nodded.

"It contains my credentials," he said.

A careful inspection of the seal would have disclosed the fact that the envelope had already been opened once—perhaps more than once—but Vard made no such inspection. Instead, he broke the seal with nervous fingers, and drew out the stiff sheet blazing with the Royal insignia. This is the English of what he read:

[Pg 229]

"Herewith do I grant to the bearer of this paper, Admiral H. Pachmann, power extraordinary as my representative, to enter into agreements, to make treaties, and to sign the same; and I do further declare that I shall consider myself bound by such agreements and signatures as though I myself had made them; and, finally, I command all members of my family, all officers of my army and navy, all members of my diplomatic corps, and all good Germans generally, to yield to him the same obedience they would yield to me; all this for the good of my Empire.

"Signed,

"WILLIAM, R. I.

"WILHELMSHÖHE, September 21, 1911."

Vard re-read this extraordinary paper, then replaced it in its envelope and silently returned it to its owner. Again that ironical smile flashed across Pachmann's lips, as he restored it to his pocket-book.

"You find it ample, do you not?" he asked.

Vard nodded, and glanced curiously at the Prince, wondering if that young man was aware of the exact wording of this remarkable document, especially of the clause, "all members of my family."

"And now," proceeded Pachmann, adjusting himself to an easier posture, "we shall be glad to hear the further details of your proposal."

[Pg 230]

Vard paused for a moment to collect his thoughts.

"There is one thing I would understand first," he said. "From that paper, I infer that the Emperor alone is concerned in this—that his cabinet is not aware of it."

"No member of the cabinet except one—whom I will not name," assented Pachmann. "I will not conceal from you that the Emperor is desirous of reaping for himself the full glory of this achievement. He realises that the man who brings about world-peace will be the most famous man in history. He has his ambitions, as you doubtless know."

"Yes, I have heard so," said Vard, with an ironic smile. "Well, let him have the glory—I do not object; besides, he will deserve it. And now for my proposal. It is this: the nations of the world, with Germany and Russia as the first signatories, shall enter into a treaty providing for the immediate disbanding of their armies, dismantling of their forts, and disintegrating of their fleets. Only such troops shall be retained as are needed to provide garrisons for such outposts as may be necessary to protect the Christian world from the incursion of barbarous or nomadic tribes, and only such warships as are needed to assist in this work. The exact number each nation shall maintain will be decided by a general court of adjudication, and all such troops and warships shall be in common; and all expenditures for what are usually known as military purposes shall be in common, apportioned by the same court of adjudication among the nations which are party to the agreement. Under no circumstances may any nation maintain any force privately or for its own use."

[Pg 231]

"I am interested to know," put in Pachmann, smoothly, "in what manner you propose to secure the consent of the various nations to this scheme. The smaller ones will doubtless be glad to fall into line; but you surely do not expect England and France, for example, to agree merely because we ask it!"

"To those who do not consent," Vard answered calmly, "we will give a demonstration of the necessity for doing so."

"Some such demonstration as that of Monday?"

"Yes—greater ones, if need be."

Pachmann considered this thoughtfully.

"It might do," he said, at last. "A few such demonstrations would no doubt be convincing. Yet there might be one or two which would be obdurate."

"I think, in the end, we can convince them."

"You will go to any lengths to do so?"

"To any necessary lengths."

Pachmann nodded.

"I was desirous of getting a clear expression from you upon that point," he said. "Pray continue."

[Pg 232]

"I do not believe there will be many such nations," Vard went on. "You have spoken of France and England. I believe France will consent, for she is a nation of idealists. I should have chosen her to lead the movement, but for the fact that her army and navy are inferior to yours, and so she might seem to be acting from fear or from self-interest. Should you refuse—should we be unable to agree—it will be to France I shall go next. As for England, she also fears you—she will be glad to escape from the burden of her armaments and from the shadow of your great power. In fact all nations in whose governments the people have a voice will be eager for disarmament. And the people everywhere must be allowed to speak. If those in power seek to crush them, to restrain them, we must assist them to throw off the yoke of tyranny and decide for themselves."

"Ah," said Pachmann, very quietly. "Socialism—I see!"

"The rule of the people," said Vard, calmly. "The freedom of the people—call it what you will. That is what I labour for. The people of each nation must be free to choose by whom and in what manner they will be governed. That evolution will, of course, take many years; but it must not be cramped or retarded. At the very outset, it will make two considerable changes in the map of Europe. Poland will be reconstituted and Alsace-Lorraine restored to France."

[Pg 233]

Pachmann started violently, and a wave of angry red swept over his face.

"Impossible!" he cried. "Impossible! To that we can never consent!"

Vard smiled at his emotion.

"Why not?" he asked, ironically.

"Because," shouted Pachmann, "Elsass and Lorraine are German—they were stolen from Germany by France two centuries ago."

"They were not German—they were independent states; and they are not German now. They are French. However, I am quite willing to leave the final decision to the people of those provinces. You cannot object to that!"

Pachmann shifted his cigar from one corner of his mouth to the other. His face was livid.

"Beware that you do not attempt too much, my dear sir," he said, and there was in his voice a covert threat not to be disguised. "I warn you. But, in this connection, some other questions occur to me. What of Ireland?"

"The Irish shall decide."

"South Africa?"

"Most of it belongs to the Boers."

[Pg 234]

"That, at least, is a grain of comfort. But India, Egypt?"

"I cannot answer that. India and Egypt must be made the subjects of careful study and the government given them which will be best for their peoples, and which will not drain them of their wealth, as England does. There will be many such problems, and the best minds of the world must study them. My answers to your questions are but suggestions. All such problems must be settled by an international court, which shall proceed upon the theory that all peoples capable of self-government shall have absolute freedom, and all other peoples shall be made capable of governing themselves as rapidly as possible. Each people shall be free to decide for itself as to its form of government, but shall be required to pledge itself to the principle of universal peace. That pledge will be necessary only at first—after fifty years of peace, no nation will ever think of war! I know that, for a generation or two, there will be difficulties. We have grown suspicious of each other; we have become hardened by hatred and injustice. But time will change all that. Let us lay down our arms, disband our armies, restore what we have stolen, and, instead of hatred, we shall find love in our hearts. Instead of oppression, we shall have justice, tempered with mercy. Each man will have his work to do, and none who works will go hungry; and we will end by becoming citizens, not of Germany, France, or of any other country, but of the world! I tell you, sir, that our great-grandchildren, looking back at us from a world at peace and united in brotherhood, will wonder at us—we shall seem to them blind savages, murderers, lunatics!"

[Pg 235]

It was evident enough that the Prince was moved. He was young, he had always been something of a dreamer. Rigid training at his father's hands had gone far to dispel the dreams, but they were not quite rooted out. Now, at the words of this supreme idealist, this inspired dreamer, they revived again. He sat regarding the speaker with misty eyes, his mouth a little open, his hands gripped in front of him. Pachmann, glancing at him, passed his hands before his lips to wipe away a sneer.

"All most interesting," commented the Admiral, in his ironical voice. "I think that we understand your proposal fully. There is only one point upon which you have not made yourself quite clear. Should we be unable to agree, what will be your next step?"

"I thought I had already told you," answered Vard, impatiently. "Should we disagree, I shall offer France the same opportunity which I now offer Germany."

"You will find France sceptical."

[Pg 236]

"Then I shall offer her the same proof I offered you. That will be just, will it not?" and Vard looked straight into Pachmann's eyes.

Pachmann sprang from his chair, his mouth working, his eyes suffused.

"You will destroy one of our ships?" he demanded, his voice hoarse.

"A ship or a fort—it shall be for France to choose."

Pachmann's fingers were twitching visibly to be at the other's throat. But by a mighty effort he controlled himself, flung himself again into his chair and poured himself out a glass of brandy from the bottle at his elbow.

"Will you drink?" he asked, over his shoulder.

"No, thank you," answered Vard.

The Prince sat without moving, still staring at the inventor. Meeting his eyes, Vard smiled slightly.

Pachmann set down his glass, and turned back to them.

"I must ask you to pardon me," he said. "I lost my self-control—a thing I do not often do—but your suggestions seemed to me insupportable. However, I can perceive that there is another side to them. I think we understand your proposal now, most thoroughly. There are certain details which the Prince and I must discuss together, before we can submit an answer. In a matter of such moment, we must proceed with the greatest care. This is Thursday. I think we can be ready by Saturday evening."

[Pg 237]

"Very well," agreed Vard, rising. "The same hour, in this room?"

"If that pleases you."

"It does."

He bowed coldly to Pachmann; then, with a sudden gesture, held out his hand to the Prince. But Pachmann interposed before the Prince could take it.

"That I cannot permit," he said grimly, and he opened the door.

A barefooted sailor, clad in white duck, standing on the deck outside, saluted. Pachmann stood for a moment staring after Vard's retreating figure; then he turned back into the room. The Prince was helping himself to a drink, and Pachmann joined him.

"Yes," he said, "this is what we need, after all that raving."

"Would you call it that?" asked the Prince.

"Raving? Yes, it was precisely that! The man is mad, my Prince; absolutely mad. No one but a madman would speak as he does—of citizens of the world, the brotherhood of man, and all that folly!"

The Prince drained his glass.

"I fear you are right," he said, as he set it down. "Yes, I fear you are right, and that it is only folly!"

"There is one thing you must not forget," added Pachmann, his hand on the door; "since he is mad, it is as a madman he must be treated!" and he led the way out upon the deck.

[Pg 238]

Somewhere in the dim hours of the night, Dan Webster was awakened by a glare of light in his eyes. He opened them to find that the electric lamp beside the wash-stand was burning. Peering over the edge of his berth, he beheld a curious sight. Chevril was sitting on his berth, half undressed, examining tenderly one of his toes, and swearing softly to himself. He glanced up, met Dan's astonished eyes, and laughed.

"Man is a ridiculous animal," he said. "The feet with which he has been provided are absurd—no doubt because they were really intended to be hands. They are too sensitive, too undefended. Blundering around here in the darkness, I have injured one of my toes, and it hurts devilishly. Pardon me for awaking you, my friend. Good night!"

He turned off the light, and Dan lay back upon his pillow, with strange thoughts whirling in his head.

[Pg 239]

CHAPTER XVIII

THE SUBSTITUTE SENTRY

Admiral Pachmann turned into his berth, that night, extremely well-satisfied with himself, for he was convinced that the cards were in his hands and the game as good as won. And what a game! For his King, world-empire; for himself—but the Admiral did not permit himself to name the reward. He knew well that he would not be forgotten when the moment came for the distribution of honours. Was not the whole plan his? Had he not worked it out to its minutest detail? Had he not carried it through? And how adroitly, how triumphantly! Even the Emperor would have to acknowledge that!

Let us do the Admiral justice: he loved his country, he was ready at any moment to lay down his life for her, he would have laboured just as earnestly without hope of other reward than the sight of her aggrandisement: but, just the same, when the honours came, he was not one to refuse them! World-empire would mean governorships, suzerainties....

He was lying in his berth next morning, half dozing, smiling to himself as all this passed before his mind in august and glittering procession, when there came a tap at the door. He got up, opened it, and a sealed note was handed in. A glance at the other berth showed that the Prince had already risen. Pachmann tore open the note and read its contents with some astonishment. It was from the Captain, and asked for an immediate conference on a matter of great importance.

[Pg 240]

Pachmann dressed hastily, and, as he did so, considered whether he should hunt up the Prince and summon him, also, to this conference. He decided against it. He foresaw that in this affair there would be many things which it would be unwise for the Prince to know—he had sat staring like an idiot, last night, while the mad Pole raved about love and mercy and universal brotherhood; he was too young, too easily impressed, too soft of heart. He had agreed that victory must be won at any price, but Pachmann very well knew that he had no idea of how terrible that price was almost certain to be. No; the Prince must be kept as much as possible on the borders of this affair! So, having finished dressing, the Admiral went forward alone to the Captain's cabin.

He found the Captain sitting at his desk, and his face was so grave that it gave Pachmann a little start.

He rose and greeted the Admiral, and then glanced over the latter's shoulder, as though expecting to see some one else.

[Pg 241]

"You did not bring the Prince?" he asked.

"Do you think it necessary?" retorted Pachmann, tartly.

Hausmann hesitated.

"I am not, of course, aware of your relative positions in this affair," he said, finally.

"The paper I showed you yesterday should have told you that," said Pachmann quickly. "The affair has been in my hands from the first. The Prince was sent along because his father wished

to separate him from a Berlin bar-maid."

"Ah, so," said the Captain, without smiling. "I understand. Be seated." He did not like Pachmann, and also, perhaps, he found the jesting reference to the royal love affairs in bad taste. "A very strange thing has occurred," he continued. "I stationed one of my men outside the door, last night, in order that you might not be interrupted."

"Yes," agreed the Admiral, "and he did his duty very well. We were not interrupted."

"He was found this morning, unconscious, in one of the boats on the upper deck."

Pachmann looked at the speaker in some surprise.

"Well," he asked, "what of it? Some sailor's row."

"I thought so too, at first. But he became conscious, just now, and declares that he was struck down from behind." [Pg 242]

Pachmann shrugged his shoulders.

"He is probably lying. In any event, it is of no concern to me. He was on duty at the door when the conference closed."

The Captain stared at him as though not understanding.

"What is it you say?" he asked.

"I say," repeated Pachmann, impatiently, "that he was on duty when we left your cabin. What happened to him after that is of no importance."

"At what hour did you leave?" asked the Captain, still staring.

"About midnight. Why do you look at me like that?"

"The man swears," said Hausmann, slowly, "that he was struck down soon after you entered the cabin."

Pachmann jumped in his chair.

"He says that!" he gasped. "But that is impossible—he is lying!"

"Perhaps you would wish to interrogate him?" Hausmann suggested.

Pachmann nodded mutely, and the Captain touched a bell.

"Send Schroeder here," he said to the man who answered.

The man saluted and closed the door again, and the Captain and his visitor sat looking at each other in silence. Both were disturbed; but Pachmann was by far the more dismayed of the two. To his companion, it was merely a fracture of the discipline of his ship; but to Pachmann it was the end of the world! Try as he might to maintain his self-composure, he could not stop the nervous trembling of his hands; and from time to time he moistened his lips and swallowed with great effort. He felt himself stricken to the heart; he scarcely dared permit himself to think what it meant for him, for his King, for Germany, if this man spoke the truth. [Pg 243]

And then the door opened and the man himself entered—a typical German sailor, with bronzed countenance, and short curly brown beard, and honest blue eyes—not too intelligent, but faithful, strong and dependable. Yes, and honest—one could see that. He was barefooted and clad in a suit of duck, which had been white originally but was now much soiled. About his head was a bandage. He saluted and stood at attention, while Pachmann looked him over.

"Tell us what occurred last night," the Captain ordered. "Think carefully and omit nothing."

"There is not much to tell, sir," the man replied. "You yourself gave me my orders. I was to stand out there, before the door, and prevent any one knocking. To all who asked for you, I was to say that you were on the bridge." [Pg 244]

The Captain nodded.

"That is right," he said. "Continue."

"You then went up to the bridge, and I took the station you had assigned me. I did not know who was in the cabin, but I could hear voices."

"Ah! cried Pachmann, with a frown. "You could hear voices! Could you also hear words?"

"I do not know, sir; I did not listen. I know better than to listen when officers are talking."

"Continue," said the Captain again.

"I stood there for perhaps ten minutes. There were a few passengers strolling about farther down the deck, but you had caused a rope to be stretched across to prevent any one coming as far as your cabin."

Again the Captain nodded.

"Yes, I took that precaution, also," he said.

"Then," concluded Schroeder, "something struck me a great blow on the head, and I knew no more until I awoke to find the doctor working over me."

Pachmann looked at him searchingly for several minutes, but the man met his gaze without flinching.

"Are you sure that is all?" he asked.

"Yes, sir."

"You do not remember standing at the door, when it was opened, and saluting the gentlemen who came out?"

[Pg 245]

"No, sir; I remember nothing of that."

"You say you were at the door only ten minutes?"

"It may have been a little longer than that, sir; a very little."

"Have you had a quarrel with any member of the crew?"

"No, sir; I am on good terms with all of them."

"Think carefully; is there not one who might have wished to revenge himself?"

But Schroeder shook his head decidedly.

"It was no member of the crew, sir; not one of them is my enemy."

"Then who was it?" Pachmann demanded.

"That I cannot say, sir."

"You heard nothing before the blow was struck?"

"Nothing, sir; I have told you all I remember."

"And you persist that you have no idea who struck the blow?"

"I have not the slightest idea, sir."

Pachmann looked at Schroeder again, and then turned away.

"That is all," said the Captain; "and remember, you are to speak of this to no one."

"Yes, sir," said Schroeder, and withdrew.

Pachmann took a turn about the cabin, frowning heavily.

[Pg 246]

"What do you make of it?" he asked, at last.

"It seems plain enough," Hausmann answered. "Some one knocked Schroeder down and took his place at the door."

"Yes, yes," said Pachmann, impatiently. "But who was it, and what was his purpose?"

"His purpose, also, seems clear to me," said the Captain, quietly. "He wished to hear what was going on in my cabin."

"He was a member of your crew," said Pachmann. "I saw him—he was barefooted—he wore a uniform."

"Did you see his face? Would you know him again?"

Pachmann hesitated.

"I fear not. He was standing in the shadow, and I was preoccupied and barely glanced at him. I cannot even say that it was not Schroeder."

"I do not believe it was any member of my crew," said the Captain.

"Then who was it?"

"That, of course, I cannot say. But why should one of my crew do such a thing?"

"There may be a traitor among them."

"We know the history of every man. They are all good Germans. We are very careful. But even if there was a traitor, how would he know of this conference?"

[Pg 247]

Pachmann threw up his hands with a gesture of despair, and dropped into a chair.

"How would any one know?" he demanded. "I mentioned it to no one but the Prince and yourself. Vard himself did not know of it till I summoned him."

Hausmann looked at the speaker steadily.

"I trust that you are not insinuating that it is I who am the traitor?" he asked.

"No, no," protested Pachmann hastily. "I tell you this in order that you may realise how incredible this is to me. After all, it may have been a member of the crew who knew nothing of the conference—who was there by accident at the moment we came out."

"I do not see," the Captain began, but a knock at the door stopped him. "Come in!" he called, and the wardrobe-steward entered. "Well, what is it?"

"I have to report, sir," answered the steward, "that a suit of white duck has been stolen."

Hausmann could not refrain from casting a glance of triumph at the Admiral.

"When did you discover it?" he asked.

"Only a few minutes ago, sir. I reported to the head-steward, and he told me to come at once to you."

[Pg 248]

"That was right. Do you know when it was stolen?"

"Sometime during the night, sir. It had been washed and returned to me yesterday evening not

quite dry. I hung it before a ventilator and when I went for it this morning, it was no longer there."

"Very well," said the Captain. "I will investigate the matter," and the steward left the cabin. Hausmann looked at his companion. "You see, it was not one of the crew," he said.

Pachmann was out of his chair and striding savagely up and down, his self-control completely broken down. He had fancied himself quite safe, and here he was tottering on the edge of an abyss.

"It is evidently the work of a spy," added Hausmann, who, perhaps, was not wholly displeased that the Admiral should have met with a reverse. "There can be no doubt of it! We know that Lépine suspects something. This is probably one of his men—and a most daring and resourceful one."

"If that is true," said Pachmann, hoarsely, "he must not leave this ship alive! We must find him. And we must watch the wireless. Every message must be most carefully inspected."

"I will see that that is done," Hausmann agreed. "But to find the man—how do you propose to accomplish that?"

"When do your officers start their examination of the passengers for the immigration record?"

"They can start at once, if you wish."

"I do wish; and I wish also to be present."

"Very well," agreed the Captain. "We will start immediately after breakfast."

"You could be of very great help, Captain," Pachmann added, "if you would go over the passenger-list and check off the passengers with whom you are personally acquainted. No doubt you know a great many of them?"

"Yes; but the purser knows even more. Shall I ask him also to check the list?"

"If you will. It would save much time."

"You will understand," said Hausmann, slowly, "that I feel I should know more of this affair before I consent to take an active part in it; but I can, at least, save the passengers whom I know, and who are friends of mine, the annoyance of needless questioning. There is one thing more I might do; there are also on board a few men who have crossed with me before, but who, I am convinced, are not the gentlemen of wealth and leisure they pretend to be. They may be only sharpers—or they may be something else. In front of the name of each of them I will place a cross."

"Thank you," said Pachmann.

"On one condition," added the Captain. "You said, but just now, that if you discovered this person, you would not permit him to leave this boat alive. That was an exaggeration, perhaps."

"Not in the least!" answered Pachmann, hoarsely. "I myself will kill him!"

"My condition, then, is," said the Captain, "that you renounce that project. I am willing that he should be detained and returned to Germany. Further than that I will not go."

Pachmann's fingers tapped the pocket of his coat.

"No," added Hausmann, "not even for that paper!"

Pachmann gazed at him a moment with distorted face. Then he nodded.

"Very well," he said; "I consent. But it is you who take the responsibility. I warn you that, if the man escapes, your career on the sea will be at an end—you will find all Germany closed against you."

"I will take the responsibility," said Hausmann, quietly. "You agree, then?"

"Yes, I agree," said Pachmann, and hurried away to get his breakfast.

And all that day, he sat beside the assistant purser, while the first-cabin passengers were called up, one by one, to make it clear that they were entitled to land in America. The questions are always searching, for the immigration laws are very strict and there are many spaces to be filled in on the great blanks which the immigration bureau furnishes; but that day they were more searching than ever—so far, at least, as the male passengers were concerned. In the women, Pachmann did not interest himself, for he took it for granted that no woman could have struck Schroeder senseless with a single blow; but on every man he directed the severest scrutiny.

Even if the name had been checked by the Captain or purser on the list he held in his hand, he never failed to satisfy himself by a few questions; and the unfortunate possessors of the names before which a cross appeared had reason to remember that interrogation all their lives. With some three or four of them, the interrogation was continued in private and even extended to a search of their belongings and a scrutiny of every document in their possession; but, while some of them were forced to confess at last that they were adventurers, gamblers, with only such means of livelihood as their wits procured them, there was nothing to show that any of them was the agent of any government.

All day Saturday the examination was continued, and by dinner-time the first-class list was completed, much to the relief of the passengers, who came away from the interrogation with ruffled tempers and a feeling of humiliation. All sorts of rumours were afloat among them. There was an absconder on board, a murderer, a political refugee, an eloping couple—the customs

[Pg 249]

[Pg 250]

[Pg 251]

[Pg 252]

authorities had got wind of the fact that there was a celebrated smuggler on board, and every passenger was to be searched when he reached the pier—the rumours ran the gamut of all crimes and all scandals, and made every one extremely uncomfortable, but none of them touched the truth.

And Pachmann had to confess himself, thus far, defeated. There remained the second-class, and he determined to scrutinise it even more closely than he had the first. The thought that he might fail, after all, dismayed him. To fail meant disgrace—personal, irremediable disgrace; it meant the betrayal of his Emperor; worse than that, in his failure France would triumph! He trembled with anguish—not wholly for himself, for he was a brave man and a patriot—but for his Fatherland.

So Saturday evening came, and with it the hour of the second conference.

For the other personages of this story, those two days had been rather eventless ones. The weather continued fine and the great ship ploughed steadily westward. The passengers got to know each other; little cliques were formed, centring about mutual acquaintances; there were card-parties, dances, the inevitable concert, dinners in the café, the usual pools, the usual night-long games of poker, the usual excitements of passing ships and schools of dolphins—in a word, the usual procession of trivial incidents which make up life on a great liner.

[Pg 253]

But in this life, Ignace Vard and his daughter had no part. Their meals were served in their sitting-room, so that they missed that great acquaintance-maker, the dinner table. Kasia, remembering the warning she had received, kept aloof from every one; and Vard's ironical manner was enough to keep every one aloof from him. However he did not notice it, for he had discovered, among the books in the library, three novels by Mr. John Galsworthy, and they absorbed him. He had been looking through the books rather hopelessly, when the title, "The Island Pharisees," had caught his eye. He opened the book, read a page, took it to his room and finished it at a sitting. Its irony expressed him precisely, and over the letter of apology and adieu from the wandering Frenchman to the lady of the manor he fairly wept with joy. After that came "Fraternity" and "The Man of Property," so that for him the two days passed quickly. One thing about these books he could not understand—that they should have been written by an Englishman!

Kasia did not return to the rendezvous on the after boat-deck. Something held her back—an emotion of shyness new to her. But on Saturday afternoon, Dan ran the blockade of the after companion-way, penetrated brazenly to the first-class promenade, joined her where she stood leaning against the rail, and led her away resolutely to a seat on the upper deck.

[Pg 254]

"Is this the way to treat an old friend?" he demanded. "Are you aware that I sat for hours, last night...."

She laid a warning finger on his sleeve.

"We must not run any risk," she said, in a low tone. "No one must suspect that we know each other."

His face brightened. She had accepted the term "old friend," without appearing surprised by it.

"Was that the reason?"

She nodded.

"You *wanted* to come?"

Another nod.

Dan breathed a long sigh of happiness.

"That makes it all right," he said. "I forgive you. And after you're ashore I may come to see you?"

"Certainly you may!"

"What is your address?"

"Two hundred and ten West Sixty-fourth Street."

He made a note of it.

"May I come the first evening?"

She laughed a delicious laugh—a laugh of pure joy. There was nothing of the coquette about Kasia. She was all woman.

[Pg 255]

"If you wish," she said.

"Thank you—I *do* wish. Besides, I shall have something to return to you."

"Hush!" she cautioned, with a frightened glance around. "Do not speak of it. And I must be going. We must not sit here so long together."

He sighed.

"I suppose you are right," he agreed. "But every evening I shall sit on a certain bench and think of you. And, remember, the first evening on land is mine."

"I shall remember."

"Good-bye till then," he said, and rose.

"Good-bye, my friend."

Her eyes were shining. He dared not trust himself to look at them a second time, but turned himself about, by main force, as it were, and marched himself off, straight along the deck, down the ladder, and up again to "a certain bench."

And there, presently, M. Chevrial joined him, but for once Dan found that witty Frenchman something of a bore.

[Pg 256]

CHAPTER XIX

THE SECOND CONFERENCE

Again a rope was stretched across the forward promenade, and, for the information of the curious, a sign attached to it bearing the single word "Paint." Again a guard was stationed in front of the Captain's cabin, but this time it consisted of two petty officers. Again the Captain surprised his subordinates by mounting to the bridge, although the night was clear and fine. They noticed that he was lost in thought, and that he went often to the head of the ladder leading to the deck and glanced down it. The second officer was on duty, and he took occasion to look down, too, on one of his turns along the bridge, but all he could see was a stretch of empty deck and two petty officers leaning against the rail chatting together. The second officer wondered more and more at his commander's uneasiness, and surreptitiously inspected the barometer, tapping it with his finger; but he knew better than to ask any questions.

Meanwhile, in the Captain's cabin, Vard, Pachmann and the Prince again faced each other. Perhaps it would be more exact to say that Vard and Pachmann faced each other, while the Prince looked on from the side-lines. In the heart of that young gentleman, for the past three days, there had been a strange distress, hitherto unknown among Hohenzollerns—the distress of realising that, if truth were told, he was a poor thing who added not to the wealth of the world, but to its poverty; who was unable to support himself, but to support whom men and women and children toiled and starved.

[Pg 257]

He had never seen it just like that before; reared in the family tradition, it had seemed a law of nature that he should have subjects to work for him and suffer for him and die for him, if need be; he had been taught that it was God himself who had given place and power to his house; and that, if other less-favoured people lived in misery and died in want, why that was doubtless God's will, too. And as for war—why, without war there could be no glory, no conquest, no chivalry. It was war which held a nation together, which made Kings more powerful and thrones more stable! But now came a man with shining eyes who talked of the sinful folly of war, of the wanton waste of armies; who dreamed of universal brotherhood, and a world governed by love! Wild words, foolish dreams, perhaps—and yet most dangerous to the idea of the divine right of Kings! So, that evening, the Prince sat and listened, and tried to understand.

It was Pachmann who did most of the talking, and a great deal of it was for the Prince's benefit.

[Pg 258]

"We have been considering your proposal, Mr. Vard," he began, "and have discussed it thoroughly."

As a matter of fact, he had not exchanged a word with the Prince on the subject; he had distrusted him ever since Vard had offered him his hand, for that action showed that this anarchist, this socialist, this enemy of Kings, had detected in this young descendant of Kings sympathy and a certain understanding. Pachmann thought of it with disgust and horror.

"We have discussed it thoroughly," Pachmann repeated, and the Prince, who detected the contempt in the words, flushed hotly, but did not speak; "and there are certain objections to your plan which we wish to submit to you. The first of these is that war does not depend upon explosives. Before gunpowder, men fought with swords and lances and arrows; before the discovery of iron and steel, with clubs and stones. Man has always been fighting, even when he had no weapons but his fists."

"That is true," assented Vard. "Pray continue."

"My argument is," went on Pachmann, dropping the plural once for all, "that, though you may render all explosives useless, and blow up forts and battleships and arsenals, you will not stop war. You will merely compel it to shift to another basis—to the old basis, probably, of brute strength, of hand-to-hand combat. And if you do that, the old days will return of barbarian invasions. The Turk will sweep down again on southern Europe; the Tartars will invade us from the east. You will not assist civilisation; you will set it back a thousand years. It will have to fight

[Pg 259]

again for its very existence, as it did in the Middle Ages."

But Vard shook his head.

"I have thought of that," he said. "In the first place, it will be permitted to continue the use of explosives against the barbarians—for defence, you understand, not for aggression—until such time as we can persuade them, too, to lay down their arms. As to your other objection, it falls to the ground the moment you agree with me that all the nations of the world must ultimately become democracies. At first, it is true, men fought of their own volition, but it was to secure food, to guard their homes, or to replenish their supply of women. But since those very early days, all wars have been wars not of the people, but of their rulers. They were wars of revenge or of ambition, in which the people joined because they had no choice. They were driven into the ranks, were sometimes sold by one power to fight for another. Left to their own choice, they would have remained quietly at home, tilling their fields, rearing their families. The only great exception I know of is the early wars of Napoleon. To those wars, the French people did undoubtedly rush; but they were still drunk from the Revolution, and their ardour soon passed. Your own people, the people of Germany, are a peaceable, home-loving people. You have always had to keep them under your thumb by forced service, by conscription, by the most rigorous laws; you have always had to drive them to war."

[Pg 260]

"Another exception occurs to me," said Pachmann, disregarding the last sentence, "and one to which I would call your attention, since it occurred in a country where the people are supposed to govern. It was the people of the United States who drove their rulers into the war with Spain."

"That is true," Vard agreed; "and it was a mistake. The people will sometimes err when their sympathy is appealed to and their passion aroused. But the results of that war were, on the whole, good. A people was freed."

"And another enslaved," said Pachmann, with a sneer.

"It was already enslaved," Vard corrected; "but I admit that it was continued in slavery. That was done by the rulers, not by the people. Had the people been permitted to decide, the Philippines would have been free, no less than Cuba. Their independence must, of course, be guaranteed when the United States signs our treaty."

[Pg 261]

"But you admit, as I understand you," said Pachmann, returning to the main point, "that to abolish explosives will not abolish war."

"I admit that, yes. To abolish explosives is only the first step. The final step will be the abolition of hereditary rule."

"The abolition of Kings?"

"The abolition of Kings, of Emperors, of Czars, of Princes, of Dukes, of all tyrants, great and small, who, by reason of birth, now claim the right to tax or oppress or command even the meanest of their fellow-creatures. There must be rulers, yes; but it is for the people themselves to choose them, and then willingly to submit to them."

"But you are at this moment treating with a King," Pachmann pointed out. "Can you expect him to agree to such a programme?"

"The world has outgrown Kings," retorted Vard. "In any event, another fifty years will see them all abolished. I but hasten the end a little—the millennium. And he will be happier when he is merely a man like other men."

"Happiness is not the greatest thing in the world," Pachmann objected.

"And I say it is!" cried Vard, with sudden violence. "Not our own happiness—no; but the happiness of our fellow-creatures. That is the greatest thing in the world; the thing for which every wise and good man labours!"

[Pg 262]

There was a moment's silence. The Prince shifted uneasily in his chair and clasped and unclasped his hands. There had never been such talk as this in the royal nursery!

Pachmann's face was cynical, as he lighted a fresh cigar.

"Dreams!" he sneered. "Beautiful dreams! Do you know what it is you are undertaking? You are undertaking to change human nature."

"That is an old cry," retorted Vard scornfully. "And what if I were? Human nature is changing every day! But I am not undertaking to change it—I wish merely to free human nature from the fetters with which tyrants bind it, so that it may grow straight and strong, as God intended."

"I am not acquainted with God's intentions," said Pachmann coldly. "He does not confide in me. But my philosophy, my observation, and my experience teach me that the wise man makes the best of things as they are, accepts the facts of life, and does what he can. He sees that the world is too big for him to overturn, he realises that there are many things he cannot understand, his intelligence sometimes revolts at what seems to be oppression and injustice. But he puts away from him the fallacy that all men are equal—they are not equal, their very inequality proves it. Some must rule and some be ruled; for some life must be pleasanter and more full of meaning than it is for others; some men must be strong and some weak, just as some women are beautiful and some ugly. It is not their fault; it is their misfortune, and they suffer for it. Which brings me to the principal objection I have to your proposal. It is this: I believe that we shall find it a mere waste of time to invite the nations of the world to sign a treaty for complete disarmament; they distrust each other, and that distrust has proved too often to be well-founded. The long centuries have made them jealous, sullen, watchful. There is only one motive which can make them sign—

[Pg 263]

fear—fear of what may happen if they do not!"

"I have already said," remarked Vard, "that I am ready to apply compulsion, should it be necessary."

"But you are finite," Pachmann objected, gently. "You are but an individual, whose life may end at any moment; while, as you yourself have said, this plan of yours will take long years, generations perhaps, to consummate. To perfect it will test the best intellects of the world. Once begun, it must be carried through. Do you think it wise to imperil its success by making it depend so largely on yourself? Besides, what would be easier than for an unwilling nation to suppress you? A pistol-shot, a blow with a knife, and the brotherhood of man tumbles to pieces."

[Pg 264]

"What is it you propose?" asked Vard, who had listened to all this with growing impatience.

"I propose that, instead of so great a task being assumed by an individual, it be assumed by an entire nation, which shall pledge its honour to carry it to success."

"And this nation," said Vard, sarcastically, "should, of course, in your opinion, be Germany."

"I admit," replied Pachmann, with dignity, "that I consider Germany best-fitted to carry out the plan. I think you will agree with me that, if a single nation is to undertake it, it must be one of the five great nations. In world-politics, the others are negligible. Well, let us see. France, a nation of peacocks, excitable, impressionable, easily angered, making much of trifles, jealous of their dignity, a dying nation which grows smaller and weaker every year. England, also a degenerate nation, soaked in gin, where a hundred thousand men are unemployed, and where no better remedy for pauperism can be found than universal pensions, which only make more paupers. Russia, an ignorant nation, whose ruling class is composed of men without morals and without ideals—thieves and drunkards and vain braggarts. There remains America, and at first glance it might seem that here is the nation to be entrusted with the great work. But, after all, it is a nation of money-grubbers, ruled by a money-trust, where wealth is worshipped as no other nation worships rank; a nation without culture, without experience in world-politics, without self-control, loudly vain, inept, wasteful, childish—a nation, in other words, at the awkward age between youth and manhood."

[Pg 265]

"Let us now turn to Germany. I speak only what is within the knowledge of all intelligent men when I say that in manufacture, in agriculture, in the administration of government, in science, in literature, in music, in general culture, Germany is first among nations. Some may quarrel with her military policy, but none can question her progress or her achievements. All other nations come to Germany to learn. This is not exaggeration; it is calm statement of fact. I firmly believe that to-day, intellectually, morally, materially, Germany is the first nation in the world. And it is altogether fitting that she should be chosen as the leader of the world and arbiter of the affairs of all nations."

Vard had risen from his seat during this discourse, which was delivered with emphasis and conviction, and paced nervously up and down the cabin, his face drawn, a deep line between his brows. And Pachmann watched him curiously. So did the Prince watch him, wondering what he would reply. He did not leave them long in doubt.

[Pg 266]

"In answer to you, Admiral Pachmann," he said, speaking slowly and carefully, as though weighing every word, "I can only say this: I do not dispute Germany's great achievements; no man can do that. It is probably true that in science, in learning, in general culture, and in efficiency, she is, as you say, first among nations. Her people are a great people—but it is not them you represent. You represent an hereditary monarch, the only one in western Europe who still speaks of the divine right of Kings—a man who would be an absolute autocrat, if he dared. Supporting him is a powerful circle of hereditary nobles, whose interest it is to increase in every possible way the prestige and power of the throne. At their command, ready to do their bidding, is a magnificent army and a great navy. Did your Emperor possess my secret, he could at once declare war against Europe; he could conquer Europe, and every German Prince would be a King. My whole purpose would be warped and debased. Instead of universal brotherhood, we should have a single ruling house, imposing its will on millions of conquered peoples. Instead of love, we should have world-wide hate. And I say to you plainly, sir, that, rather than that such a thing should come to pass, I will destroy my invention and leave the world as it is."

Pachmann had listened intently, nodding his head from time to time, or puckering his brows in dissent.

[Pg 267]

"Have you yourself no ambition?" he asked. "Is there nothing in the way of honour or position which you desire for yourself or for your daughter?"

An ugly sneer curled the inventor's lips.

"Bribery—I expected that!" he said. "No, there is nothing—nothing but the consciousness that it was I who ended war!"

"And your refusal of my first proposal is absolute?"

"Absolute. I consider it insulting."

"You will not modify the terms of your proposal?"

"Not in any essential detail."

"And if Germany refuses, you go to France?"

"That is my intention."

"Very well," and the Admiral rose, too. "The situation is, then, quite clear to us; there is no longer any shadow of uncertainty. It is for us to assent or to refuse. Our answer will be ready for you in a very short time."

Vard bowed, his face very pale, and stepped to the door. He paused with his hand on the knob.

"Remember one thing," he said; "it will be better for Germany to lead than to follow; your Emperor will find the head of the procession much more to his taste than the tail of it. And it will be for him either the one or the other! Good night!" and he opened the door and was gone. [Pg 268]

Pachmann stood with clenched fists and flushed face staring at the spot where Vard had stood.

"Fool! fool!" he muttered. "That he should think he could defy and threaten—and still escape! A great fool, is he not, my Prince?"

The Prince awoke, as from a dream.

"Great, at least!" he said.

[Pg 269]

CHAPTER XX

THE PRINCE SEEKS DIVERSION

In spite of his protestations and the confident manner he assumed when with the Prince, Pachmann was, as a matter of fact, exceedingly disturbed. It was true that for an individual as humble as Ignace Vard to hope to stand against the might of the German Empire was absurd in the extreme; but perhaps Vard was not alone. Perhaps back of him there was some person or some power at which even Germany would pause.

Two incidents had been distinctly disquieting: the wireless from Lépine and the assault on Schroeder. The thing which filled Pachmann with dismay was not so much these incidents themselves as the degree of knowledge they indicated. Why did Lépine think Vard was on the boat? How had he connected the inventor with the disaster at Toulon? How had the person who assaulted Schroeder known of the conference in the Captain's cabin? How much had he heard of that conference? What use would he make of what he had heard? In a word, did France suspect what had happened to *La Liberté*, and, if so, how much did she know?

A hundred times Pachmann asked himself these questions, and a hundred times tried to find some answer to them other than the obvious answer. He tried to persuade himself that Lépine had not connected Vard with the Toulon disaster, but was searching for him for some other reason; he tried to make himself believe that the assault on Schroeder was merely the result of a seaman's quarrel; he told himself over and over again that France could *not* suspect, that it was impossible she should suspect. But he could not convince himself. Always he came back to the obvious fact that, if Vard was wanted at all, it could only be for the affair at Toulon, and that the man who had taken Schroeder's place at the door of the Captain's cabin could only have done so because he wanted to hear what was passing on the other side of it. [Pg 270]

Always, with sinking heart, Pachmann came back to this point; and at such moments he wondered whether, after all, the Emperor would not do well to lay aside his personal ambition, to consent to Vard's proposal and assume the leadership of this great world-movement, in all good faith. Surely that would be glory enough! Better, as Vard had said, to lead than to follow; better to stand proudly forth at the head of the movement than to be whipped into place in the rear. What humiliation!

And suppose Vard should manage to escape; suppose he should really get into touch with France! Pachmann, closing his eyes, could see a great fortress leaping into the air; could hear the thunder of the explosion which destroyed a dreadnought! It was a dangerous game he was playing, and yet, to accede to Vard's proposal meant the loss of Alsace-Lorraine, meant the eventual abasement of the Hohenzollerns, the rise of socialism. No, he could not consent; he had not the power to consent; he had his instructions, precise and clear, from the Emperor himself. At any cost, that power must be his, and his alone! [Pg 271]

At any cost! Pachmann drew a deep breath. He knew now what the cost must be. Well, when the moment came, he should not hesitate!

Sunday morning found Pachmann beside the assistant purser in the library of the second-cabin, beginning the inquiry there. It was even more drastic than it had been in the first, and the victims emerged from it heated, angry, and with the fixed determination never again to travel by a German boat. Neither the Captain nor the purser could vouch for any of the undistinguished people here, and so each one of them was most thoroughly examined. Even those with passports

did not escape. Pachmann examined all such documents minutely, compared the written description point by point with the appearance of the passenger, and asked many questions to satisfy himself that the person presenting it was really the one to whom it belonged. Yet, in spite of all this, passenger after passenger came through the ordeal successfully.

[Pg 272]

As the list was called alphabetically, it was soon the turn of M. Chevrial. He approached the table with confidence, produced his passport, and sat down to await such questions as might be asked him. Pachmann glanced at the Frenchman and his eyes narrowed with anger, for this impudent person appeared to be amused at the proceedings! Then he picked up the passport and studied it carefully. It had been issued by the French government two months previously, as a renewal of a former passport, to André Chevrial, wine-merchant, of 18 Rue des Chantiers, Paris; whose appearance and physical characteristics were described in detail. Pachmann compared the items of the description point by point with the man who sat smiling so shamelessly before him, answering the purser's questions in an ironical voice. The very fact that the man was so typically French and so plainly amused created in Pachmann's mind a flair of suspicion which dilated his nostrils and narrowed his eyes. But the passport was in perfect order, and Chevrial's answers came without hesitation.

"You are a wine-merchant?"

"Yes."

"How long have you been in that business?"

"More years than I care to remember."

[Pg 273]

"That is not an answer."

"Let us say twenty years, then."

"Always at Paris?"

"The time before that did not count."

"Then you have not been always at Paris?"

"Heavens, no! First at Bordeaux; but for ten years at Paris."

"You are well-known there?"

"Ask my neighbours in the Rue des Chantiers; or cross the street to the wine-market and ask any one there if he knows André Chevrial! Well known? But yes!"

"Is this your first visit to America?"

"Oh, no; nor my second. But it is my first trip on a boat of Germany, and will be my last. On the French boats, my compatriots know me. They do not annoy me with all these questions."

It was Pachmann who asked the next one.

"How does it happen that you travel this time by a German boat?"

Chevrial shrugged his shoulders.

"Because there was no French one. It is necessary that I be in New York on Wednesday. There was no other boat that would arrive in time. Had there been, I would have taken it."

"So you do not like German boats?"

"I like nothing German," said Chevrial, calmly. "Least of all, this inquisition, which, it seems to me, demands some explanation."

[Pg 274]

"It is for the immigration bureau," the purser hastened to explain. "The American laws are very strict."

"The laws do not concern me. I am not an immigrant. I am merely one who goes on business and who returns. My papers are in order, are they not?"

The purser was forced to confess that they were.

"Then," said Chevrial, returning them to his pocket, "if there are any further questions to be answered, I will wait until I get to the pier at New York to answer them. I shall at least have the pleasure of talking to an American!" and he got up and left the library.

Pachmann was furious; but he had no excuse for holding the fellow, nor for examining his baggage. In search of such excuse, he despatched a wireless to the agent of his government at Brussels, directing him to secure at once all the information available about André Chevrial, 18 Rue des Chantiers, Paris; and that evening a very polite gentleman called at the house in question. It was a tall, hideous house, with a cabaret on the first floor. To its proprietor the visitor addressed himself. But yes, the proprietor knew M. Chevrial, a merchant of wine, who had honoured his house for many years by occupying an apartment on the third floor. His present whereabouts? Ah, the proprietor could not say; M. Chevrial made many journeys in the interests of his business; he was absent at the present time. It was the season of his annual trip to America; perhaps he was now on his way thither. He had left no address; but if monsieur wished to write a letter, it would be sent forward as soon as an address was received.

[Pg 275]

The visitor declined to write a letter, but left his card—or, at least, a card—to be given to M. Chevrial upon his return. Then he took his leave. And the proprietor stuck the card in the frame of the clouded mirror back of the bar, chuckling to himself.

A report of all which Pachmann duly received by radio next day.

The Prince, meanwhile, was finding the voyage wearisome. He was not a difficult person to amuse, and he was very expert in the art of killing time; he had done little else since he emerged from the nursery; but here on shipboard he possessed none of the implements with which he usually carried on that slaughter. He could sit in the smoking-room with a tall stein before him, he could stroll about the deck and stare at the sea, which he did not care for; but there was no one to talk to. His subjects of conversation were limited, and all of them were associated more or less with his princely character; here, where, for the first time in his life, he found himself divested of that princely character, he was completely at a loss. The trouble was that he had no sense of humour. So he found it impossible to gossip with plebeian unknowns, or engage in card-games with irreverent middle-class artisans and drummers. He could not even carry on a flirtation with any of the pretty girls! He had attempted it with one of them; but, after a very few minutes, she had left him with her chin in the air, and an exclamation which sounded singularly like "Beast!" What is gallantry in a Prince, is impertinence or worse in a less-privileged person!

[Pg 276]

Remember, our Prince was merely a good-natured, thick-headed, young man, who had always been compelled to take himself seriously, whose life had been ordered for him from day to day to its minutest detail; who had never been called upon to use his wits in earnest. There had always been some one to do his thinking for him; there had always been the routine of drill and study to fill a certain portion of every day; and there had always been the fearful delight of escaping from his father's eye and roaming the streets of Berlin in quest of adventure. But here on shipboard, the day was twenty-four empty hours long, and even Pachmann had deserted him, to spend his time asking the passengers interminable questions, whose purpose the Prince could not in the least understand.

[Pg 277]

So, on this Sunday morning, having attended the services in the dining-saloon for want of something else to do, and kept awake with great difficulty, having smoked innumerable cigarettes, having snubbed an American whose manner was distinctly fresh, having tramped up and down the decks, and looked into the library to find Pachmann still asking questions, questions, the Prince made a sudden daring resolution, walked quickly forward, ascended to the first-class promenade, and looked about for Ignace Vard. With the inventor, at least, he need wear no disguise, and he simply must talk to somebody. Besides, the inventor's talk gave him a good feeling at the heart—the feeling that he might really some day do something worth while! Pachmann would disapprove, of course; but who was Pachmann? A younger son of the inferior nobility! He must remind Pachmann of that, some day, for he seemed to have forgotten it since the Emperor had taken him up!

He found the object of his search leaning against the rail, far forward, staring ahead at the path the ship was taking. Vard greeted him with evident pleasure.

"You have come to arrange for the final conference?" he asked.

The Prince shook his head.

"I know no more of that than you," he said.

[Pg 278]

"But I was assured that your decision would be made at once. My plans depend upon your answer. This is Sunday. On Tuesday we reach New York."

"I know nothing," repeated the Prince. "I have not spoken with the Admiral to-day—indeed, I have scarcely spoken to him for three days. On Friday and Saturday and again to-day, he has spent every moment in an examination of the passengers."

"Why does he do that?" asked Vard quickly.

"I do not know."

Vard glanced at the Prince, and his face softened a little.

"So you have been left to amuse yourself," he said, "and, not succeeding very well, have come to me? Is that it?"

"Yes," said the Prince; "I must talk to some one, and I find that I cannot talk with people who do not know who I am. The men offend me, the women I offend."

This time there was genuine friendliness in Vard's face.

"Poor fellow!" he laughed. "Well, I have never acted as court jester, but I am willing to try. Come with me."

He led the way back along the deck and opened a door.

"This is my room," he said. "Come in. You should feel more at home here than I do, for it is an imperial suite."

[Pg 279]

The Prince assented gravely, entered, and the inventor, his eyes dancing, closed the door.

"Sit down," he said. "You may smoke," and he proceeded to roll himself a cigarette. "This is your first visit to America? Yes? The first thing you will notice is that not many Americans smoke cigarettes. Until quite recently, the cigarette was believed to be in some mysterious way debauching; no one but degenerates were supposed to use them. Even yet that is the prevailing opinion outside a few of the large cities."

"Most curious," commented the Prince, and blew a smoke-ring toward the ceiling.

"Outside of New York, which is fairly cosmopolitan, there is the same prejudice against wine or beer, or any fermented or distilled spirit. No public man, no teacher in a public school or

university, no physician, no professional man—no man, in a word, who depends upon public opinion, public approval, for a livelihood—would dare sit at a table on the sidewalk and drink a glass of beer or a liqueur. He might do it once, and escape with the reputation of an eccentric; but to do it twice would be to brand himself as not trustworthy."

"Astonishing!" said the Prince. "Do you speak seriously?"

"Very seriously. Some of the states have even enacted laws that no alcoholic beverage of any kind may be sold within their borders."

[Pg 280]

"But," stammered the Prince, staring, "do you call that liberty? No country of Europe would dare enact such a law!"

"No; it is not liberty; it is government by the majority. The wonderful thing, the astonishing thing, the inspiring thing about it is that in this, and in all other questions, the minority accepts its defeat without grumbling and makes the best of it. That is the great lesson which the United States has for the remainder of the world. And, to preserve itself, it need keep no class in subjection, need draft no man for service in its armies—for it is a government founded on the consent of the governed."

He was silent a moment, considering, perhaps, how to use most wisely this opportunity.

"Let us apply that principle to the other countries of the world," he went on, at last. "Let us suppose that the people of each country were asked to choose freely for themselves their form of government. How many of the present governments would stand that test? Do you think the government of Germany would?"

"No," said the Prince; "I suppose not. Our people are all socialists, so my father says. But they are not fit to govern."

"Whose fault is that? Have you tried to make them fit? Besides, their fitness or unfitness has nothing to do with it. It is their country; let them grow fit by experience. But I believe they *are* fit. How many of your great men have come from humble life?"

[Pg 281]

"Oh, a great many, I dare say!" answered the Prince, impatiently. "But a body needs a head. It must be governed by a head, not by a stomach!"

"Ah," said Vard, "but, as a matter of fact, every body is governed by its stomach. Not till the stomach is satisfied does the head get a chance. And, to govern wisely, the head must be a part of the body, not something distinct from it. How is it to govern wisely, if it is not always in close touch with the body, aware of its every need? It is only when the head is distinct from the body that it lets the body starve and wastes its substance on vain and unnecessary things."

"I suppose," said the Prince with a smile, "that you refer to our army and navy."

"To the army and navy of every nation. Could the people choose, how many battleships would Germany build next year?"

The Prince shrugged his shoulders helplessly.

"How can I answer such questions? I do not know. But I do know that I have been born in a certain position, and that I must maintain it."

"Why?" Vard demanded.

[Pg 282]

"For the sake of my honour, and the honour of my house," answered the Prince, simply.

"Honour!" cried Vard. "What do Princes know of honour? Is it honourable to live on the sweat and suffering of others, and to make them no return? Is it honourable to be supported by the toil of women and children, whose men you have taken for your army? Is it honourable...."

He stopped suddenly, for the door had opened and a girl came in. She stared first at one man and then at the other, evidently astonished by the few words she had heard. Then she turned to withdraw. But Vard stopped her.

"Don't go, my dear," he said. "Allow me to present you to a Prince of the House of Hohenzollern! Prince, this is my daughter, Kasia."

[Pg 283]

CHAPTER XXI

ON THE EDUCATION OF PRINCES

The Prince sprang to his feet and bowed low over the hand which Kasia, after an instant's startled hesitation, had extended. Her father watched the scene with an amused face.

"You arrived most opportunely, my dear," he said. "The Prince, being bored, as is the way with Princes, came to me, asking to be amused. I started out to amuse him by describing certain strange customs of America, which he is about to visit for the first time; but I was soon on my hobby again, and instead of amusing him...."

"You were abusing him!" said Kasia, laughing. "At least, it sounded so to me!"

"Oh, not at all!" the Prince hastened to assure her. "I found what he was saying most interesting."

But Vard, with that quick change of mood characteristic of his temperament, had already decided that it was not worth while attempting to rear any seed from this barren soil. The Prince's intentions were good enough, but they would come to nothing—his father would see to that!

"Nevertheless," said Vard, "I am not an amusing companion. I am too much of a preacher, and no one likes to be shouted at. I would suggest, Kasia, that you take His Highness for a tour of the deck."

[Pg 284]

The Prince's face brightened wonderfully.

"That would indeed be kind!" he said.

Kasia looked at him with a little smile. Perhaps the opportunity of talking familiarly with royalty piqued her, good democrat as she was; and then he was not a bad-looking fellow. One could see that he was not brilliant, but he at least looked clean and honest.

"If you really wish it," she agreed.

For answer, the Prince sprang to the door.

"One moment," Vard interposed. "You will remember, Kasia, that the Prince is incognito, and that, under no circumstances, must you betray to any spectator or listener who he is."

"I will remember, father," said Kasia, and followed the Prince out upon the deck.

Wherefore it presently came to pass that Dan Webster, staring gloomily down from the after boat-deck upon the flitting beauties of the first-class promenade, beheld the lady of his dreams strolling beside a well-set-up young fellow, whose face seemed vaguely familiar, and in whose conversation she was evidently deeply interested—so interested that she finally climbed with him to a seat on the upper deck; and when they sat down, Dan saw that the young fellow sat very close indeed. He stared incredulously for a moment longer, and then turned angrily away, to bump violently into M. Chevrial, who was also staring.

[Pg 285]

"What the...." Dan began, and then stopped himself. What right had this Frenchman to stare? But then, for that matter, what right had he?

Chevrial was the first to recover himself. He glanced at Dan's disturbed countenance, and smiled as he read his thought.

"I was surprised to see a passenger of the second-class so calmly enjoying the privileges of the forward deck," he explained. "If any one was to enjoy those privileges, I should have expected it to be you."

"So he *is* second-class! I thought he looked somehow familiar. I remember, now."

"He is undoubtedly the same young German we have seen so frequently pacing this deck," said Chevrial. "I fancy he is lonely and desires amusement. But, at the same time, I fear that you lack enterprise, M. Webster. That is not like an American."

Dan flushed, and started to stalk away, but Chevrial laid a hand upon his arm.

"No, do not be angry with me," he said. "I beg your pardon. It will please you to know that that young man yonder is one of the very few persons on this boat with whom Miss Vard may talk unconstrainedly. No doubt that is why she appears so glad to see him."

[Pg 286]

With which cryptic utterance, M. Chevrial went below, and left Dan to bitter meditation.

Kasia, meanwhile, was enjoying herself immensely.

"Now," she said, leaning back in the seat, after a glance around to assure herself that there was no one within hearing, "please tell me what it is like to be a Prince. Don't you get frightfully lonesome, sometimes?"

"That was my complaint to-day, when I sought your father."

"Yes—but always, always to stand apart from other men and women, so that they never dare be quite open with you; quite frank with you; always a little in awe of you."

"Not many people I know are in awe of me," said the Prince. "Most of them consider me something of a fool—they do not say so, but I can read it in their faces. My father thinks me a total fool, and does not hesitate to say so."

"He must be a terrible man!"

"He is," agreed the Prince, with conviction.

Kasia looked at him to see if he was in earnest; then turned away her head for an instant, until she could control her lips.

"How does it happen that you speak English so well?" she asked.

"My father required it. It is the result of many weary hours, I assure you. However," added the Prince, "I ought not to complain, since it has secured for me the present hour."

It was the first time Kasia had ever been made the mark for a royal compliment, and she flushed a little in spite of herself.

"It is nice of you to say so!" she murmured. "So you have had your bad times, too?"

"Bad times, Miss Vard! Why, the life that I have led has been a dog's life. There were so many things that I must know—that we all must know—so many things we must not do. I have often gazed from the windows of the palace and envied the boys in the gutter!"

"Not really!"

"Oh, not really, of course. I would not change. What I envied them was their liberty, their freedom to come and go as it pleased them."

"But since you are of age?"

"Even yet, each moment must be accounted for. I am now a lieutenant in the navy, and am supposed to employ each hour profitably. My father is a very great man; there are few things that he does not know; and he expects his sons to know as much. Even of pictures, which bore me; even of music, which distresses me. Everything is arranged. At such a time, I am to be with my ship; again, I am to attend the opera; again, I am to be present at the opening of a museum; again, I must listen to a long address which I do not understand. I may not even choose my own wife. All that is arranged."

"But no doubt," Kasia suggested, amused at his forlorn aspect, "your father will choose more wisely than you would."

"I do not know," said the Prince disconsolately. "I fear that he will consider birth and position of more importance than youth and beauty. Besides, there are some things a man likes to do for himself. My poor sister, now...."

He stopped, for, under the stimulus of Miss Vard's sympathy, he found himself about to betray a family secret.

"Yes, I can understand that," said Kasia, with more tenderness than she had yet shown. "You don't mind my talking frankly to you?"

"I love to be talked frankly to," protested the Prince.

This was very far from the truth, only the Prince didn't know it. What he really loved was flattery disguised as frankness. In this, he resembled most other human beings.

"Well, then," said Kasia, "if you don't like it, if you find it intolerable, why don't you cut and run?"

"Cut and run?"

"Yes; go away by yourself, be a free man, and marry the woman you love. For of course there is such a woman?"

"Oh, yes," and the Prince thought of the blue-eyed daughter of the shopkeeper in the Friedrichstrasse, just off Unter den Linden; however, he had never thought of marriage in connection with her. "But suppose I should do that," he added, "how should I live?"

"How do other men live? By work!"

"But that would be a disgrace!"

"Disgrace! It isn't half so disgraceful as to live by the work of other men."

"Your father said something of the same sort to me. But I fear that neither of you understands. A Prince cannot do such things."

Kasia threw up her hands.

"So we come back to the beginning of the circle!" she cried.

"Besides, my father would not permit it," added the Prince.

"Aren't you of age?"

"Yes—but he is the head of the family. He would have me brought home—from the end of the world, if necessary—and then I should be confined. Even my elder brother is sometimes confined—separated from his wife, from his children, permitted to see no one."

"Poor Prince!" said Kasia. "So you are a slave, like the rest of us—rather worse than the rest of us, indeed! Is there *nothing* you can do?"

"Very few things," said the Prince, beginning really to pity himself. "You see, there is always my family to consider—nothing must be done to injure its position or to make it less popular. Even my father very often may not say what he thinks or do what he wishes."

"So he is a slave, too!"

"Yes, in a way. And it grows worse and worse. Often, in private, he laments the old days when a King was really a King, who was venerated and whose word was law. He grows very angry that at each election there are more socialists. He says that the only hope for the country is in a great war: it is for that he prepares."

"How would a great war help?"

"Oh, in face of the common danger, our people would forget their differences, for they all love their Fatherland; they would fight shoulder to shoulder. And then, when it was over, they would all be mad with joy over the victory, and there would be new provinces to add to Germany, and an immense tax levied on our enemy to pay the expenses of the war, so that our own people would not have to bear that burden. It would all be just as it was after the war with France, when every German was filled with patriotism, and when Germany for the first time became one country. Our house would again be well-beloved, its authority unquestioned."

[Pg 291]

"But suppose you are defeated?"

"We shall not be defeated," said the Prince, calmly. "There is no nation in the world which Germany could not defeat—except, perhaps, the United States. But we shall not go to war with the United States. England will be our foe, and you will see her tumble to pieces like a house of cards. She is but an empty shell."

Kasia sat for a moment considering all this. If this was really what was in the Kaiser's mind—and she could scarcely doubt it—it was foolish to suppose that he would consent to disarmament.

"What you have told me is not very promising for universal peace," she said, at last.

"There can be no universal peace until we have humiliated England," replied the Prince. "That is the belief of all good Germans. The conflict must come soon, and we strain every nerve to prepare for it. I betray no secret when I tell you this. All Europe knows it. England struggles also to prepare, but we are always far ahead. When we are quite ready, we shall strike. Then, after we have won, after we have established Germany as the first nation of Europe, we shall be ready for peace. But we must have one more great victory. The welfare of our house demands it."

[Pg 292]

As he spoke, his eyes rested on the top of the companion-way leading from the lower deck, and he started violently, for a face had appeared there—a face which looked at him sternly, almost threateningly. It was the face of Pachmann. Without a word, it disappeared. The Prince turned nervously to his companion.

"Pardon me, Miss Vard," he said, "but I must go. And do not think too seriously of my chatter. I am not admitted to councils of state; I know only what every one knows. We Germans, we have our dreams; but perhaps they are only that."

He arose, opened his lips to say something more, then changed his mind, bowed, and hurried away. Kasia stared after him. She had not seen that silent summons. But he did not look back.

An hour later, Pachmann, with a countenance distinctly troubled, sought out Ignace Vard, who was reading in his room.

"The Prince has been talking to your daughter," he said.

Vard looked at him in surprise.

"I sent them out together," he explained. "I thought perhaps Kasia would amuse him—and be amused."

[Pg 293]

"Has she told you nothing?"

Again Vard glanced at him.

"No. Has she reason for complaint?"

"I did not mean that. I dare say he behaved decently enough. But he spouted a lot of childish nonsense about German hopes and German ambitions, and I feared your daughter might take him seriously. He is nothing but an ignorant young fool."

Vard laid aside his book and looked Pachmann full in the face.

"The truth comes sometimes from the mouths of fools," he said. "When am I to have my answer?"

"To be quite candid," answered Pachmann, readily, "I am afraid to give it to you on board this boat. I chose this boat because I believed we should be safe here. But there are spies on board; one of our conferences has been overheard—perhaps both of them," and he told of the assault upon Schroeder. "Then again, we must not be seen too much together. I might be recognised; and you are already suspected of having caused the destruction of *La Liberté*."

"How can that be?" Vard demanded, in a tone which showed that he was genuinely startled.

For answer, Pachmann took from his pocket-book a paper, unfolded it and handed it to Vard. It was the wireless from Lépine.

[Pg 294]

"That was received last Thursday," he said. "I suppose you know who Lépine is. By great good fortune, I intercepted it, and sent an answer denying that you were on board. It was for that reason you were removed to the first-class and your name kept off the passenger list. But how can he have suspected you?"

Vard shook his head slowly. He was a little pale, and the hand which held the message trembled.

"I cannot guess," he said.

"You have told no one?"

"Told!" flashed Vard. "Do you not see that, unless my great plan succeeds, that action will have been an infamous one? To kill three hundred men in order to assure peace to the world—that may be justified—that may even be heroic; but to kill them wantonly, to kill them and then to fail—that would drive me mad!" He looked at Pachmann, his eyes suddenly inflamed. "And let me tell you this," he added, in a voice of concentrated passion, "if I find that you have deceived me, if I find that you have betrayed me, Germany shall suffer a reprisal that will make you shudder! I swear it!"

Pachmann's eyes were also suffused. In that moment, he literally saw red.

"You threaten!" he cried hoarsely. "You dare to threaten!"

[Pg 295]

"I warn!" said Vard. "And you will do well to heed the warning! You are playing with fire—take care that it does not consume you!"

Pachmann conquered his emotion by a supreme effort.

"It is foolish to talk in that way," he said. "It is foolish to speak of deception and betrayal. There is no question of either. But we must move cautiously. We must evade these spies. Even you can see that!"

"Here is my last word," said Vard, more calmly. "We shall reach New York on Tuesday. I will await your answer for twenty-four hours after we have landed. If I have not then received it, I shall consider myself free to act as I think best."

A gleam of triumph flashed in Pachmann's eyes.

"I accept your condition," he said, and with a little ironical bow, rose and left the cabin.

[Pg 296]

CHAPTER XXII

THE EVENTS OF MONDAY

Kasia did not see the Prince again. That ingenuous young man had spent a most uncomfortable half hour with the doughty Admiral, whose language had been both lucid and emphatic, and who had opened the discussion, and spiked the Prince's guns at the very start, as it were, by producing the paper sealed with the Imperial seal.

"I would call your attention especially to this clause," said Pachmann, and placed his finger upon the words, "all members of my family." "It was not placed there by accident, I assure you. You understand its meaning?"

The Prince nodded sullenly, as he handed the paper back.

"Your father," Pachmann continued, replacing it in his pocket, "foresaw that some difficulty such as this might arise. As you know, his confidence in you is not great."

The Prince flushed and opened his lips angrily; but closed them again without speaking.

Pachmann smiled unpleasantly.

"I can guess what you wish to say," he said. "You would remind me that you are a Hohenzollern, a Prince of the blood, a scion of the house to which I, a petty member of the inferior nobility, owe allegiance. That I do not permit myself to forget. But in this affair, by virtue of this paper, I stand in place of your royal father. He would not hesitate to rebuke you, and neither shall I. What was it you were saying to Miss Vard?"

[Pg 297]

And the Prince, after a moment's inward struggle, repeated the conversation, while Pachmann listened frowningly.

"You have been most indiscreet," he said severely, when the Prince had finished. "How much harm you have done I cannot say—but I must hasten to undo it. I do not understand you. You know how important this affair is—you are a good German!—and yet you go about talking in this fashion! It is enough to drive one mad! If your father learned of it, I fear he would think it necessary to punish you with great severity. I shall not report it—but on one condition: you must give me your word to discuss affairs of state with no one, to make no chance acquaintances, and to see this girl or her father only in my presence."

And so deeply grounded was the habit of obedience, so profound his respect even for his father's signature, that the Prince promised. Besides, he had no wish to spend a year or more in some second-rate fortress; and he resolved to watch himself most warily, until this annoying business was at an end and he was back again in Berlin.

[Pg 298]

So Kasia saw him no more. She had a little struggle with herself before she finally decided that

it was her duty to outline the Prince's confessions to her father, and she was deeply relieved when he waved them aside as of no importance.

"Every one knows," he said, "that Germany dreams of nothing but humiliating England; that is no secret—it has been the talk of Europe for ten years past. But it is one of those dreams which never come true—or go by contraries!"

By noon of Monday, Pachmann had completed his scrutiny of the passengers, and sought an interview with the Captain.

"I have discovered nothing," he said; "absolutely nothing. At one time, I thought that I had the man, but I caused his story to be investigated, and found that it was true. There remains only one thing to be done. At what hour shall we land?"

"That will depend upon the delay at quarantine. Two of our steerage passengers are ill. We may not be able to dock before evening."

Pachmann considered this for a moment.

"In the first place," he went on, at last, following out his thought, "you must secure for me two landing-tickets—one for Vard and one for his daughter. The immigration officers must not see them. There must be no evidence that they ever reached New York."

[Pg 299]

Hausmann's face clouded.

"That is a very serious offence," he pointed out.

"We must take the risk."

"What will you do about their baggage?"

"I will have it claimed by some one from the consulate."

The Captain hesitated yet a moment.

"I will secure the tickets," he agreed, finally. "A considerable outlay will be necessary."

"You will be reimbursed. Furthermore," Pachmann added, "I will myself explain to the Emperor how greatly you have assisted us."

Hausmann bowed coldly.

"Is there anything else?" he asked.

"You have watched the wireless?"

"Yes."

"It must be watched even more closely. No message in cipher, nor any that is at all questionable, must be sent or delivered. If there are complaints afterwards, the failure can be explained as an oversight."

Again Hausmann bowed.

"And finally," said Pachmann, "I have here a message, which I would ask you to have sent at once."

It was in cipher and a long one, and it took half an hour to transmit, for the wireless man at the Cape Cod station was required to repeat it for verification. Then it was hurried on by telegraph to New York, and finally delivered at the German consulate, where the chief of the German secret service, to whom it was addressed, read it with great care.

[Pg 300]

Miss Vard, meanwhile, was finding the hours long. The Prince had furnished a slight *divertissement* the day before; but to-day there was no such relief in sight, and she found herself singularly restless. This was, in part, a reflection of her father's mood, for she had never known him so nervous and irritable. The lines in his face had deepened, his eyes were brighter than ever, and he waved her impatiently away whenever she ventured to address him. Plainly, a crisis was at hand, and, as she saw how her father was affected, she awaited it with foreboding.

She tried to read and gave it up, for she could not fix her attention on the page; she sat for a long time looking at the sea, and then turned her eyes away, for its restlessness increased her own; she went for a walk about the deck, but it seemed to her in every pair of eyes turned upon her there was suspicion and aversion. How glad she was that the voyage was almost ended! It had started happily enough, and then, quite suddenly, it had become wearisome and hateful.

[Pg 301]

It was inevitable that, at this point, her thoughts should fly to Dan. What a nice boy he was! She would see him to-morrow night—she had promised him that! And before that? Would it be too undignified for her to steal up again to that bench on the after boat-deck—would it—would it precipitate matters? She did not want to do that and yet....

"Good afternoon," said a voice, and some one fell into step beside her, and she looked up and saw that it was Dan. For an instant, she fancied it was only the visualisation of her own thoughts; then she winked the mists away.

"This is nice of you," she said. "I was just wishing for—some one. I was dreadfully bored."

"You were a thousand miles away. I passed you twice and you didn't even see me. If it hadn't been for my newspaper training, I'd have made off to my den."

"I'm very glad you didn't. I really wanted to talk to you."

"Suppose we go up to the boat-deck," said Dan, "where you...."

He stopped.

"Where I what?"

Dan led the way up the ladder without replying; but a gleam of understanding penetrated Miss Vard's mind when she saw him go straight to the bench where she and the Prince had sat. [Pg 302]

"It was this way," Dan explained, sitting down beside her. "I happened to be staring down at the forward promenade, yesterday afternoon, when I saw you walking with a tall young fellow, who seemed exceedingly interested in you. Naturally, I was a little curious, as he happened to be a second-class passenger like myself...."

"Second-class!" broke in Kasia, and stopped herself.

"Did you think him a millionaire?" queried Dan, a little bitterly.

"No," answered Kasia, quietly; "I thought him just what he is—an ingenuous young German, not very brilliant, perhaps, but clean and honest. I passed a very pleasant half hour with him."

Dan's face was a little pale, but he looked at her manfully and squared his shoulders.

"I deserved that!" he said. "Thank you, Miss Vard. But it *was* very lonely, last night!"

Kasia's look softened.

"Yes," she agreed; "it was."

"You felt it, too?" asked Dan, his face lighting up again.

"Certainly I felt it. I haven't dared make any friends among the first-class passengers, and a person can't read *all* the time! One likes to talk occasionally, no matter with whom." [Pg 303]

"Why not slip over to second-class to-night," Dan suggested, "and sit on the bench. The moon is very beautiful."

But Kasia shook her head, smiling.

"I shall have to admire it alone," she said. "We must not be seen so much together—it is not wise for us to sit here. Suppose some one, seeing us together, should take it into his mind to search your baggage, and should find that little package...."

"He wouldn't find it," Dan broke in. "During the day, I carry it in my pocket. At night, I sleep with it under my pillow."

Kasia gave him a quick glance.

"That is splendid!" she said, quickly. "And you don't even wish to know what it is?"

"Not unless you wish to tell me. There is one danger, though. If the customs inspector should happen to run across it, he will want to know what it is."

"Tell him it is an electrical device."

"And if he opens it?"

"That will do no harm. All he will find is a small metal box, filled with tiny wires coiled about each other."

Dan breathed more freely.

"That simplifies things," he said. "From what you said when you gave it to me, I was afraid I might have to knock him down, snatch the package, and make a break for it." [Pg 304]

"No," and Kasia smiled. "It would appear of value only to some one who knew what it was. The customs inspector doesn't count."

"And to-morrow evening, say at eight o'clock, I shall bring it up to you."

"Very well. I shall expect you. And now you must go."

Dan rose obediently.

"It will be a long twenty-four hours," he said. "But I feel more cheerful than I did. By the way," he added, turning back, "there's one thing I forgot to tell you. If that other young fellow shows up again, you needn't be afraid to talk to him. Chevrial says he's about the only one on the ship you are safe to talk freely with!"

"Chevrial!" she repeated, staring; "Chevrial said that!"

"Yes," and Dan laughed. "He seems to be the wise guy, all right!" and without suspecting her emotion, he turned and left her. But for a long time Kasia sat there, unmoving, trying to understand.

Dan's evening was not so lonely as he had expected, for, as he sat on the bench on the boat-deck, staring out across the water and thinking of the morrow, Chevrial joined him. [Pg 305]

"I do not intrude?" the Frenchman asked.

"Not at all. Sit down, won't you?"

Chevrial sat down, and for some moments there was silence.

"Our voyage nears an end, M. Webster," Chevrial said at last. "To-morrow you will be home again. Perhaps I may see you in New York."

"Where will you stay?"

"I have some friends in the wine-trade with whom I usually stay. The little money I pay them is welcome to them, and I am more comfortable than at an hotel. I do not know their exact address—they have moved since I was last here; but they are to meet me at the pier."

"Whenever you have a leisure evening," said Dan, "call up the *Record* office and ask for me, and we will have dinner together."

"Thank you. I shall remember. And I should like you to meet my friends. I do not know if you are a connoisseur of wine, but if you are, they possess a few bottles of a vintage that will delight you."

"I'm far from being a connoisseur," Dan laughed; "but I accept the invitation with thanks."

Chevrial's face was bright.

"And when next you come to Paris," he added, "I hope you will let me know. There is my card. A letter to that address will always reach me—we have no telephone, alas! There are some things I should delight to show you—things which the average visitor does not see."

[Pg 306]

"You are very kind," said Dan, taking the card; "and I shall not forget; though I don't expect to get abroad again very soon. You see, I have to collect a reserve fund, first; and the cost of living is high!"

"Whenever it is; and the more soon, the better I shall be pleased."

"How long will you be in New York?"

"A week—ten days, perhaps. Then I go to Boston, and to Montreal and Quebec, and thence home again. I am glad I shall not have to use a German boat. I do not like German boats—nor anything German, for the matter of that! Which reminds me of a most peculiar circumstance. You may have wondered at my remark with reference to that young man who was strolling with Miss Vard?"

"That she could talk to him without fear? Yes, I have wondered just what you meant by it."

"I may be mistaken—but I should like your judgment. In the library, among the other books, is one which describes the life of the Kaiser and his family—it is put there, I suppose, for all good Germans to read. It is illustrated by many photographs. In looking at the photographs, one of them impressed me as curiously familiar; if I should happen to be correct, it would make a most startling article for your newspaper. But I wish you to judge for yourself. You will find the book lying on the table in the library, and the photograph in question is on page sixty-eight. If you will look at it, and then return here, I should consider it a favour."

[Pg 307]

Considerably astonished, Dan descended to the library, found the book, and turned to page sixty-eight. Yes, there was a photograph of the Emperor, with the Empress and Princess Victoria; another of the Crown Prince, with his wife and children; another of the Princes—Eitel-Frederick, August, Oscar, Adalbert....

And Dan, looking at it, felt his eyeballs bulge, for he found himself gazing at the face of Kasia Vard's companion.

He told himself he was mistaken; closed his eyes for an instant and then looked again. There was certainly a marvellous resemblance. If it should really be the same—Dan's head whirled at thought of the story it would make!

He closed the book, at last, climbed slowly back to the boat-deck and sat down again beside M. Chevrial.

"Well?" asked the latter. "What do you think of it?"

"If they are not the same man, they are remarkably alike," said Dan.

[Pg 308]

"I believe they are the same."

"But it seems too grotesque. Why should a Hohenzollern travel second-class, dressed in a shabby walking-suit, and without attendants?"

"There is a middle-aged German with him, who is, no doubt, his tutor, or guardian, or jailer—whichever you may please to call it."

"His jailer?"

Chevrial smiled.

"The Emperor is a father of the old school, and punishes his sons occasionally by imprisonment or banishment under guard. I fancy that is the case here. Before I left Paris, I heard rumours of indiscretions on the Prince's part with a young lady in Berlin, which had made his father very angry. This journey, perhaps, is a penance. At least, it is worth investigating."

"It certainly is," agreed Dan warmly, and fell silent, pondering how best to prove or disprove this extraordinary story. It was decidedly of the sort the *Record* liked; if he could only verify it, his return to the office would be in the nature of a triumph! But to prove it! Well, there were ways!

A low exclamation from his companion brought him out of his thoughts.

"Behold!" said Chevrial; and, far away to the right, Dan caught the gleam of a light.

"A ship?" he asked.

"No, no; it is the lighthouse on what you call the Island of Fire. It is America welcoming you, my friend."

And Dan, with a queer lump in his throat, took off his cap.

"America!" he repeated, and Kasia Vard's words leaped into his mind. "The land of freedom!"

"Yes," agreed his companion, softly; "you do well to be proud of her! She is at least more free than any other!"

CHAPTER XXIII

THE LANDING

When Dan Webster awoke, next morning, his first thought was that something was wrong, and it was a moment before he realised what it was. The screw had stopped. Instead of quivering with the steady, pulse-like vibration to which, during the past week, he had grown accustomed, the ship lay dead and motionless. He got on deck as quickly as he could, and found that they were anchored in the shelter of Sandy Hook, with a boat from quarantine alongside. Already the deck was thronged with excited passengers; many of the women, in their eagerness to go ashore, had put on their hats and veils and even their gloves. But word got about that there was some sickness in the steerage, and that it would probably be some hours before they could proceed.

Dan took a long look at the familiar land; then he hurried below to breakfast. He had planned his campaign before he went to sleep the previous night, and he was eager to begin it. Breakfast, therefore, did not take him long, and he was soon searching the decks for the man who, possibly, was a son of the Kaiser, but, much more probably, merely a young German who made the most of a chance resemblance.

Dan possessed the aplomb which only years of work on a great paper can give a man; he had wormed interviews from many reluctant and exalted personages; he had asked questions which the other man was certain to resent, often quite justly; he had drilled himself to believe that, when he was on the trail, all mankind was fair game, and that any device which would drag the truth from them was justified—the truth, the truth, that was the end and the justification of newspaper methods! Nevertheless, his heart beat a little faster when, at last, he perceived the object of his search leaning against the rail at the rear of the upper promenade and gazing out to sea.

"I've got buck-fever," he told himself. "It's because I'm out of training." And then he wondered if the Prince was thinking of Germany, and of the lady-love from whom he had been torn.

Nobody else, apparently, had any thought for Germany or for the open sea. Every one had crowded to the side-rails to stare at the land or at the smudge of smoke which marked Long Island, and the stern of the ship was deserted. Telling himself that he would never have a better chance, and that he must finish with the affair before the ship-reporters came aboard, Dan braced himself, approached the solitary and somewhat pathetic figure, removed his cap and bowed respectfully. The Prince, abruptly wakened from his day-dreams, looked up with a start, and met Dan's smiling eyes with an astonished stare.

"I see Your Highness does not remember me," said Dan, good-humouredly. "That is not remarkable, but I was conceited enough to think it just possible that you might."

"No," said the Prince, finding his tongue, "I fear I do not...." He stopped abruptly. "For whom do you take me?" he demanded.

"Surely I am not mistaken!" and Dan looked at him more closely. "No—it is really Your Highness! I cannot be deceived!"

The Prince met his gaze and shook his head, and tried to laugh. But he was not a good liar—his father had long since recognised his unfitness for any diplomatic mission.

"I see it is useless for me to dissemble," he said, in a low tone. "But I am here strictly incognito, and I beg that you will not betray me. Where have we met?"

Dan's heart leaped with exultation. And then a little feeling of shame seized him. It was too bad to have to betray the fellow—but duty demanded it! Perhaps, however, it could be done in a way that would not be offensive. He opened his lips to explain, when a stocky figure suddenly thrust itself between them, and Dan found himself gazing into a pair of irate eyes.

"What is this?" demanded the newcomer, though his voice, too, was carefully lowered. "Who are you, sir?"

Dan felt his good resolutions ooze away at the other's brutal manner.

"I am a reporter," he said.

"What is your business?"

"Gathering news."

"Your business here, I mean?"

"I was just interviewing the Prince," explained Dan, blandly. "The *Record* would be very glad to have his opinion of the Moroccan situation, of the Italian war, of the triple entente, or of anything else he cares to talk about. Perhaps he could find a theme in the destruction of *La Liberté*."

He spoke at random, and was surprised to see how fixedly the other man regarded him, with eyes in which apprehension seemed to have taken the place of anger.

"One moment," said Pachmann, for it was he, and he turned and spoke a few rapid words of German to the Prince, who reddened and nodded sullenly. Dan judged from the sound of the Admiral's subsequent remarks that he was swearing; but he preserved a pleasant countenance, the more easily since, happening to glance up, he saw Chevrial leaning over the rail of the boat-deck just above them and regarding the scene with an amused smile. At last, having relieved his feelings, the Admiral fell silent and pulled absently at the place where his moustache had been.

[Pg 314]

"When does your paper appear?" Pachmann asked, at last.

"To-morrow morning."

"You would not wish to use the interview before that time?"

"No."

Pachmann breathed a sigh of relief, and his face cleared.

"Then we are prepared to make a bargain with you," he said. "It is most important that the Prince's incognito be strictly preserved until to-night. If you will give me your word of honour to say nothing of this to any one until eight o'clock this evening, I, in return, give you my word of honour that the Prince, at that hour, will grant you an interview which I am sure you will find of interest. Do you agree?"

Dan reflected rapidly that he had nothing to lose by such an agreement; that eight o'clock would release him from his promise in ample time to write his story; and the interview *might* really be important.

[Pg 315]

"Yes," he said; "I agree; but on one condition."

"What is that?" demanded Pachmann, impatiently.

"That the interview be exclusive."

"Exclusive?" echoed Pachmann. "I do not understand."

"I mean by that that no one else is to get the interview but me," Dan explained.

A sardonic smile flitted across Pachmann's lips.

"I agree to the condition," he said. "And you on your part agree to say no word to any one; you are not to mention the appointment which I will make with you."

"I understand," said Dan. "But, interview or no interview, I am to be released from the promise at eight o'clock."

"Yes. Very well, then. I accept your word of honour, and I give you mine. At seven o'clock to-night, you will call at the German consulate and ask for Admiral Pachmann. I shall be in waiting to conduct you to the Prince."

"I thank you," said Dan, and walked away, treading on air. Then another consideration occurred to him. All this was going to interfere with his evening with Kasia. He must see her and explain that he would be late. But an official stopped him at the gangway and explained that, under quarantine regulations, each class must keep to its own quarters until the boat had docked.

[Pg 316]

The delay was less than had been feared, for the illness in the steerage turned out to be well-defined typhoid; so, at the end of two hours, the big ship began to move slowly up the harbour, with the passengers hanging over the rails, for the first glimpse of the great city. There was the green shore of Long Island; and then the hills of Staten Island; and then, there to the left, loomed the Statue of Liberty, her torch held high. Dan took off his cap, his eyes moist; and then, as he glanced at the faces of his neighbours, he saw that they were all gazing raptly at the majestic figure, just as he had been. Most of them, no doubt, had seen it many times before; some of them, perhaps, had committed the sacrilege of climbing up into the head and scribbling their names there; they had glanced at her carelessly enough outward-bound for Europe; but now she had for all of them new meaning,—she typified the spirit of their Fatherland, she welcomed them home.

And finally the wonderful skyline of New York towered far ahead, the web-like structure of the Brooklyn bridge spanning the river to the right; little clouds of steam crowning with white the summits of the towering buildings, and a million windows flashing back the sunlight. There is nothing else in the whole world like it, and the thousand passengers on the upper decks coming

[Pg 317]

home, and the thousand men and women crowded on the lower deck, seeking fortune in a strange land—all alike gazed and marvelled and were glad.

Then, with a battalion of tugs pushing and pulling and straining and panting, the ship swung in toward her dock, and soon she was near enough for those on board to see the faces of the waiting crowd, and there were cries of greeting and wavings of handkerchiefs, and the shedding of happy tears—for it is good to get home! And at last the great hawsers were flung out and made fast, and the voyage was ended.

At this moment, as at all others, the first-cabin passengers had the precedence, and filed slowly down one gangplank, their landing-tickets in their hands, while at another the stewards proceeded to yank off the hand-baggage. Dan, leaning over the rail, watched the long line of passengers surging slowly forward, and finally he saw Kasia and her father. He would see them on the pier, of course, for it would take them some time to get their baggage through, and he could explain to Kasia about the other engagement. He followed them with his eyes—and then, with a gasp of astonishment, he perceived just behind them, also moving slowly down the gangplank, the Prince and the man who had called himself Admiral Pachmann. [Pg 318]

But those men could have nothing to do with Kasia! It was just an accident that they happened to be behind her. And then he grasped the rail and strained forward, scarcely able to believe his eyes. For Pachmann had spoken to Vard, who nodded and walked hurriedly on with him, while Kasia, with a mocking smile, tucked her hand within the Prince's arm and fell into step beside him. Along the pier they hastened to the entrance gates, passed through, and were lost in the crowd outside.

Dan stood staring after them for yet a moment; then, with the careful step of a man who knows himself to be intoxicated, he climbed painfully to the boat-deck, dropped upon a bench there, and took his head in his hands.

There, half an hour later, a steward found him.

"Beg pardon, sir," he said. "Are you ill?"

Dan looked up dazedly.

"No," he said. "Why?"

"The passengers are all off, sir. If you have any luggage, you'd better be having it examined, sir."

"Thank you," said Dan, and got to his feet, descended to the lower deck, surrendered his landing ticket, and went unsteadily down the gangplank.

The pier was littered with baggage and crowded with distracted men and women watching the inspectors diving remorselessly among their tenderest possessions. Each was absorbed in his own affairs, and none of them noticed Dan's slow progress toward the little office of the chief-inspector. After a short wait, an inspector was told off to look through his baggage, and, with Dan's declaration in his hand, led the way to the letter "W," where his two suit-cases were soon found. Dan unlocked them, and stood aside while the inspector knelt and examined their contents. He was through in ten minutes. [Pg 319]

"Nothing here," he said, and rose. Then his eyes ran Dan up and down. "I see you have a small parcel in your coat-pocket. May I see it?"

Without a word, Dan handed him the parcel. The inspector turned it over and examined the seals.

"What's in it?" he asked.

"A little electrical device," Dan answered.

"Well, I'll have to open it—it might be diamonds, for all I know."

"Go ahead," said Dan, and the inspector broke the seals, unwrapped the paper, and disclosed a small pasteboard box. He lifted the lid, glanced inside, and then looked at Dan.

"What is this? A joke?" he demanded.

"I don't understand," Dan stammered.

"You said it was an electrical device."

"That's what it is." [Pg 320]

"Either you're crazy or I am," said the man; "and I don't think it's me," and he thrust the box under Dan's nose.

And Dan's eyes nearly leaped from his head, for the box contained a cake of soap, cut neatly to fit it, into which had been pressed a number of nickel coins. [Pg 321]

CHAPTER XXIV

PACHMANN SCORES

Dan Webster never had any definite recollection of how he got to his rooms. Somebody must have carried his bags to a cab and put them and him inside it, and he must have given the cabby the number of the apartment-house where his rooms were, for after a certain time he found himself in a cab which had stopped in front of it, with Marshall, the doorman, staring in at him.

"I think he's drunk, that's what I think," said the cabby, who had got down, suspecting that his services would be needed. "He ought to be put to bed and left to sleep it off."

"I don't understand it," said Marshall. "I never saw him like this before. Paris must surely be an awful place!"

The cabby chuckled, and together they got Dan out and into the elevator; but when the doorman had paid and dismissed the cabby, and tried to follow his advice, he met with unexpected resistance.

"Go away, Marshall, and leave me alone," said Dan. "I heard what that fellow said; but I'm not drunk—though no doubt I look it. Just go away and shut the door. I'll thank you another time. There's a good fellow!"

[Pg 322]

And in the end, Marshall went doubtfully away.

Dan went to work at himself immediately with mechanical thoroughness. He filled his tub with cold water, undressed and plunged into it, dipping his head under half a dozen times. Then he rubbed down with the roughest towel he could find, gave himself a vigorous massage from head to feet, took a sharp turn with a pair of dumb-bells, got into fresh clothes, and began to feel more like himself.

"There," he said; "that's better. Now let's see if this thing is real, or only a nightmare."

He went to his coat, got out the pasteboard box, placed it on a table, sat down before it, and carefully removed the lid.

No, it was not a nightmare. There was the cake of soap—pink, scented soap—weighted with the nickel coins. Poising the box in his hand, he understood why the coins had been added. Without them, the box would have been too light. He pulled one of the coins out and looked at it. It was a German piece of twenty pfennigs, such as any one on the ship might have used. He put it carefully back, and lay down on his bed to reason the thing out.

How had the substitution been made? How *could* it have been made? Every day the box had been in his pocket; every night it had been beneath his pillow. There was only one explanation—the change must have been made while he was asleep. Some one had entered the stateroom, slipped out the other box with a cautious hand and substituted this one. Whoever it was must have been familiar with the weight of the other box and with the way it was wrapped and sealed. But how was that possible? No one could have seen Miss Vard give it to him; no one could have known that he had it.

[Pg 323]

And then Dan sat suddenly erect. Chevrial might have known. Chevrial might have seen him slip it into his pocket as he dressed. Yes, Chevrial might have done it. Who was Chevrial? How should a wine-merchant know so much about spies and diplomacy and German princes? There had always been about him an air of power, of reserve force. Yes, and an air of mystery—the air of one who knows a great many things he does not choose to tell.

Chevrial was undoubtedly a spy himself.

And, as he found this answer, Dan wondered that it had not occurred to him long before. For it furnished the clue upon which Chevrial's words and hints and looks and warnings were strung together as on a thread!

There could be no doubt about it: Chevrial was a spy, engaged in some desperate plot—no ordinary plot, for a Prince and Admiral of the German Empire were also engaged in it, and heaven alone knew how many others!

[Pg 324]

There was one thing to be done at once. He must go to Kasia Vard and confess that he had been outwitted. And he trembled as he thought what the loss of that little box would mean to her! Why had he been so dense, why had he not suspected....

Telling himself that self-accusations would do no good, he finished dressing hurriedly, let himself out, and ran downstairs without waiting to call the elevator. At the front door he met Marshall, whose face brightened at sight of him.

"So you're all right again, sir?" he said. "I'm glad of that!"

"Yes," and Dan slipped a bill into his hand. "I had a little shock that sort of upset me. Many thanks for looking after me, Marshall. I'll not forget it."

"That's all right, sir. Thank you, sir. Hope you had a good time?"

"Splendid. Come up and see me to-morrow. I brought a little memento for you from that awful place called Paris!" and leaving Marshall staring, he ran down the steps to the street, sought the nearest subway station, and twenty minutes later mounted the steps of the house on West Sixty-

fourth Street, whose address Kasia had given him—a quiet house in a quiet neighbourhood. His finger was trembling as he touched the bell. How should he ever face her!

[Pg 325]

A negro boy answered the ring.

"I wish to see Miss Vard at once," said Dan, and produced a card.

"Miss Vard is not here, sir."

"Not here? Has she gone out?"

"No, sir; she's been to Europe and ain't got back yet."

Dan steadied himself against the wall, for he felt a little dizzy again.

"I know. But she must be back! Her boat docked three or four hours ago."

"We was expectin' her to-day, sir—her and her father; but they ain't got here yet."

Dan looked at the boy for a moment; then he gave him a silver dollar.

"Are you sure?" he asked.

"Yes, sir; I'm sure," and Dan could see that he was telling the truth.

"Have you a 'phone?"

"Oh, yes, sir."

"What's its number?"

The boy told him and Dan jotted it down.

"Will you give the card to Miss Vard as soon as she arrives?" he asked.

"Yes, sir, I'll do that."

Dan wrote a hasty line on the card, asking Kasia to call him at once, and added his telephone number. Then he turned wearily away, and went back to his rooms. There was nothing to do but wait. And he found waiting most trying of all. The minutes dragged miserably, each of them weighted with self-accusation, but the afternoon shadows began to lengthen and still his telephone had not rung. Finally he called for Kasia's number and asked for her. A voice which he recognised as that of the negro boy answered that she had not yet returned.

[Pg 326]

"It's those Germans!" Dan muttered to himself. "It's those damned Germans! They've got her into it, somehow!"

And then suddenly he remembered his appointment, and snatched out his watch. It was nearly six o'clock.

"I'll drag it out of them!" he said. "I'll drag it out of them! And if Chevrial's there...."

He stopped. Chevrial and the Germans could not be in collusion—such an alliance was unthinkable. But how else to explain it....

Dan gave it up; but a good dinner at a near-by restaurant restored him something of his self-confidence. After all, this was America. Europe might be honeycombed with intrigue and over-run with spies, but they would find their occupation gone on this side of the water! And he himself would explode a bomb in the morning's *Record* that would shake them up a little! So it was a fairly confident and self-controlled young man who mounted the steps of the German consulate at five minutes to seven. A flunkey in livery opened the door to his ring.

[Pg 327]

"I have an appointment with Admiral Pachmann," said Dan, with a sudden cold fear at his heart that he would be laughed at; but instead he was shown at once into a little ante-chamber.

"Sit here a moment, sir," said the footman, and hastened away, closing the door behind him. But it opened almost at once, and Pachmann himself entered. Dan drew a deep breath of relief; it was all right then!

Pachmann fairly radiated good-humour. All his roughness of the morning had disappeared, and he greeted Dan beamingly.

"I am most glad to see you," he said, in such a tone that Dan almost believed him. "You are prompt—but that, I am given to understand, is an American virtue. However, I am prompt, also. The car is waiting."

"The car?" Dan echoed.

"You will understand," Pachmann explained, "that, since the Prince is incognito, it is impossible for him to remain at the consulate—that would at once betray him. I was uncertain, this morning, as to our arrangements, or I should have directed you to the proper address. However, it is but a step," and he opened the door.

[Pg 328]

Dan followed him along a handsome hall to the carriage entrance, where, at the foot of the steps, stood a limousine. As soon as they appeared, the driver, who had been standing at the hood, bent and cranked his motor and then sprang to the door and opened it.

"Enter, my dear sir," said Pachmann, and followed him into the car. The door slammed, the driver sprang to his seat, and they were off. In the semi-darkness, Dan fancied he heard a repressed chuckle, and a vague uneasiness stole upon him. But he shook it off. What had he to fear?

"You will remember," said Pachmann finally, "that this interview is not a thing which we desire,

but to which we consent because we must. You placed us, this morning, in a very awkward position. You newspaper men of America have a method all your own. The manner in which you entrapped the Prince compels my admiration. How did you know that it was he?"

"There was a book on the ship with a history and portraits of the royal family," Dan explained. "I happened to be looking it over and recognised the likeness at once."

"So?" said Pachmann, and there was a note of surprise in his voice, which told Dan definitely that, whatever Chevrial's plot might be, this German was not in it. "You have sharp eyes. But the likeness may have been merely a chance one. It must have seemed most strange to you that a Prince of the Empire should travel alone as a passenger of the second class."

"It did. That was why I approached him as I did."

"It was most clever. We admit it. Ah, here we are."

The car had stopped, and Pachmann opened the door. As Dan alighted, he glanced up and down the street, but did not recognise it. It was a street of close-built apartment-houses and private dwellings like any one of hundreds in New York. Pachmann crossed the pavement, mounted the steps and touched the bell. The door was opened instantly by a tall servant in livery.

If Dan had expected it to reveal a regal magnificence, he was disappointed. The hall into which he stepped was simply, even meagrely furnished. Without pausing, Pachmann mounted the stair, and led the way into the front room on the upper floor. It was a large room, lighted only by the glow of a wood fire. A man was sitting in front of it, and sprang up at their entrance. Pachmann, at the door, switched on the electrics.

"My dear Prince," he said, "I have brought the young gentleman for the interview which we promised him."

And Dan, as he saw the other's face, breathed a sigh of relief. Yes, it was the Prince. For a moment in the car, he had feared that he was being tricked. Pachmann had undoubtedly chuckled!

The Prince bowed coldly. His face was very gloomy—in striking contrast to Pachmann's, which was beaming more than ever with good-humour.

"I feel that an apology is due Your Highness," said Dan, "for the way in which I sought to entrap you this morning. Please believe that I was about to promise to do what I could to respect your incognito when this gentleman intervened. In my article for to-morrow, I shall try to say nothing that can offend you."

"I thank you," said the Prince gravely.

"All this is wasting time," broke in Pachmann, impatiently. "Proceed with your questions, my young sir."

"What is the purpose of Your Highness's visit to America?" asked Dan.

The Prince hesitated and glanced at Pachmann.

"Perhaps it would be best for the explanation to come from me," said the latter smoothly, but with a sardonic smile upon his face. "The Prince travels in search of health. He is of a most studious disposition—sits up with his books far into the night—becomes so absorbed in them that he forgets to go to bed, even to eat. So the Emperor, in fear that he would injure his health—you can see by looking at him he is most delicate—decreed a trip around the world, made incognito in the simplest fashion, during which he was not so much as to look inside a book. This accounts for the fact that never once on the voyage over did you see him with a book in his hand. That is the whole mystery, my young sir."

Dan, glancing at the Prince, saw that he was red with anger; but he could not repress a smile at the absurdity of Pachmann's explanation. The Prince was evidently as strong as an ox, and had anything but the appearance of a student.

"You may have heard some idle tales," went on Pachmann, rubbing his hands with pleasure, "of a love affair—of a bar-maid, perhaps. Berlin is always full of such gossip, and you American journalists hear it all. But believe me, it is merely gossip; the truth is as I have told you."

The Prince had wheeled upon Pachmann, his eyes blazing.

"It is too much!" he cried, in German. "You insult me, and you shall answer for it. I warn you!" and he strode to the door.

"Farewell, my Prince!" said Pachmann, and waited, with a sneer on his lips, until the Prince's heavy footsteps died away down the hall. Then he turned back to Dan. "Behold that Princes have rages just as other men," he said.

"I don't blame him!" said Dan. "I wonder he didn't knock you down."

"So?" and Pachmann's eyes took an ugly gleam. "I fear the interview is at an end."

"I have another question to ask," said Dan quietly. "Where are Mr. Vard and his daughter?"

Pachmann's eyes narrowed to mere slits and his face became positively venomous.

"I was expecting that question," he sneered. "What do you know of Vard and his daughter?"

"They are friends of mine. I saw them leave the pier with you. They have not yet reached their apartment. Where are they?"

"I cannot tell you."

"You mean you will not?"

"Put it that way, if it pleases you."

A storm of rage was hammering in Dan's brain.

"I would advise you to tell me," he said, tensely.

"You threaten?"

"Yes," and Dan took a step toward the Admiral. "I would advise you to tell me."

Pachmann did not stir. He glanced with ironic eyes from Dan's white face to his working fingers. Then he threw back his head and laughed.

"But this is better fortune than I deserve!" he mocked. "I did not know, I did not suspect ... even when the girl told me!" Then his mood changed, his lips curled, his eyes flashed fire. "What a fool!" he sneered. "What a fool! You thrust yourself upon us—you walk into our trap—you are wholly in our power—and yet you think to frighten me with your grand air and your twitching hands! Bah! To me you are merely a speck of dust, to be blown aside—so! Now, more than ever! As an ignorant young fool, who knew no better, I might perhaps in time have let you go. But now...."

[Pg 333]

The anger had ebbed from Dan's brain, although his attitude had not relaxed. Staring into Pachmann's leering face, he realised that he must think and act quickly. The first thing was to escape; with a deep breath he braced himself and sprang for the door—to plunge straight into the outstretched arms of a man on guard there.

There was a moment's struggle; then Dan felt his feet kicked from under him, and fell with a crash that shook the house. In an instant two men were sitting on him, holding him down.

Then Pachmann came and looked down at him, his lips twitching with triumph.

"Young fool!" he sneered. "Young fool!" And then, in German, to the two men, "Take him away! In yonder!" and he pointed toward a door at the rear of the hall.

[Pg 334]

CHAPTER XXV

THE TRAP

To Kasia Vard the day had been one of manifold excitements. Like Dan, she had awakened to find the boat motionless, and had run to the window to gaze entranced at the green slopes of Sandy Hook. Home! Home! She fairly sang the words as she dressed and rushed on deck. From that instant, every moment was charged with emotion, culminating as she leaned against the rail and gazed with misty eyes at Bartholdi's masterpiece. She remembered how, ten years before, her father, with tears streaming down his cheeks, had lifted her in his arms for her first sight of the majestic Goddess, and had explained to her, in a voice broken by emotion, why this statue stood here, at the entrance of this great harbour, holding her torch high in the air.

The ship swept on, and Kasia, with a sigh of joy, turned her eyes forward for the first sight of New York.

It was at that moment her father joined her. One glance at his face, and she had placed her hand within his arm, walked back with him to their suite, entered and closed the door.

"Now tell me," she said. "What has happened?"

[Pg 335]

"I have just seen Pachmann," answered her father hoarsely. "He has arranged for the final conference as soon as we land. It will be at the consulate. There is yet one danger," and he dropped his voice. "Pachmann has discovered that there are spies on board—French spies. They suspect something—how much we do not know. But it is necessary for us to evade them. We will leave the pier as soon as we land with Pachmann and the Prince. Pachmann will have a car waiting—he has made all arrangements. Here is your landing-ticket."

Kasia took it and slipped it inside her glove.

"Very well," she said. "But the baggage?"

"We cannot wait for that—it would be too dangerous. I will return for it as soon as the conference is over." His eyes were burning with excitement, his lips twitching with nervousness. "I am glad that the hour is at hand," he added. "I feel that I could not endure a longer delay—these hours of suspense are dangerous for me."

Kasia laid a calming hand upon his arm.

"I know, father," she said. "You must not permit yourself to dwell upon it so. Let us go on deck again and watch the landing."

"No; we are to wait here," said her father. "These last moments we must not be seen," and he sat gnawing feverishly at his fingers. [Pg 336]

The long minutes drifted by. They could hear the rush of feet and chatter of voices on the deck outside, then excited cries of recognition and greeting, as the boat swung into the dock, and finally the clatter of the gangplank as it was run into place. Almost at once there came a tap at the door. Vard sprang to open it and found Pachmann and the Prince outside.

"You are ready?" asked the former.

"Yes," and Kasia and her father stepped out upon the deck.

"You have your landing-checks? Good. Then we will start."

They joined the long line moving down the gangplank.

"This way," said Pachmann, the instant they reached the pier, and led Vard hurriedly toward the entrance.

Kasia, left with the Prince, glanced into his moody and downcast face.

"So we are permitted to have another chat," she said, smiling at his woebegone appearance, and tucked her hand under his arm. "You look as though you needed some advice. What is wrong?"

He glanced at her, then looked away, and answered with a shake of the head.

Just beyond the entrance stood a handsome limousine, its motor throbbing. Pachmann hurried them all into it, stepped round for a word with the driver, then himself jumped in and slammed the door. The car started with a jerk, backed out of the pier-shed, and headed away northward through the streets of Hoboken. This way and that it turned and doubled, while Pachmann gazed anxiously through the little window in the back. No one spoke, but they all watched Pachmann's face. At last they were in the open country, with a smooth road ahead. The driver opened his throttle, pushed up his spark, and in a moment they were whirling along at forty miles an hour. Pachmann looked back for yet a moment; then he turned with a sigh of relief and sank back into his seat. [Pg 337]

"We have evaded them," he said. "But we will take no chances."

On and on went the car, climbing to the top of the Palisades and threading the Jersey woods; mile after mile along woodland roads, past country estates, through little villages, on and on. At last, on a long stretch of lonely road, they stopped, and the chauffeur climbed down, detached the licence numbers at front and rear, and strapped on another set. Then onward again, back toward the river, and finally, at the Fort Lee ferry, down to the water's edge. The boat was about to start when the car ran on board; in another minute it was moving out into the stream. No one else had come on board, nor was there any sign of pursuers on the bank. [Pg 338]

Leaving the ferry, on the other side, the car at once plunged into a tangle of by-streets, and Pachmann half drew the curtains. Then, turning southward along Riverside Drive, it joined the endless procession of cars there, in which it became at once only an indistinguishable unit. Finally it turned eastward along a quiet street, swung sharply around one corner and then around another, and stopped.

"Here we are," said Pachmann, threw open the door, and jumped out.

The Prince followed, and, without looking back, walked straight across the sidewalk and up the steps of the house opposite. Pachmann, with a smile on his lips, waited to assist Miss Vard to alight.

"But this is not the consulate!" she protested, looking first at the house and then up and down the street. She had never seen the consulate, but she knew it would not be in such a house nor in such a street. Besides, there was no flag above the door.

"No, it is not the consulate," said Pachmann smoothly, and turned to Vard. "I found, at the last moment, that there was a reception at the consulate to-day which would make our conference there impossible. I managed to procure this house, where one of our secretaries lives, and where we will be secure against interruption. But if you prefer the consulate, we can, of course, wait until to-morrow—" [Pg 339]

"No, no," Vard broke in. "Let us get it finished at once—there has been too much delay."

"I agree with you," said Pachmann. "I, also, am anxious to get the affair settled," and he led the way into the house. "If you will wait here, Miss Vard," he added, and pulled aside the hangings before a door opening from the hall. "We will not be long."

Kasia stepped through the doorway, and the curtain dropped behind her. She heard the footsteps of her companions mounting the stair to the upper story; then all was still. She glanced about the room; it was a rather small one, furnished as a sitting-room, with furniture both cheap and scant. There were two windows, side by side, which opened upon a little court or area-way closed in by high walls, topped by an ugly and formidable iron chevaux-de-frise, which would be equally effective in preventing any one getting in or getting out.

She soon exhausted the interest of this limited prospect, and, turning back to the room, spent a

long half-hour wandering about it, looking at this and that, endeavouring to keep her thoughts occupied. She was vaguely uneasy, a feeling of oppression weighed upon her, and from moment to moment she caught herself listening for some sound, but the house was absolutely still. Finally she drew a chair to one of the windows, and sitting down, stared out again into the little court. It was dark and damp and well-like and apparently never swept, for its pavement was littered with rubbish. Again she caught herself listening, her head half-turned. But she heard no sound. It must be past the middle of the afternoon; she should be getting home to set their rooms in order, for to-night Dan was coming....

[Pg 340]

And again she was listening, rigid, breathless in her chair. There was no sound; but suddenly, with nerves a-quiver, she sprang to her feet, crossed the room and swept back the hangings at the door. She was surprised to find that the door itself had been closed. She turned the knob, but the door did not open; she shook it, but it held fast. And then she realised that it was locked.

It was a moment before she understood. Then, very quietly, she crossed the room to another door and tried it. She had expected it to be locked also, but to her surprise it opened. Beyond it was a bedroom, also with a window opening on the walled court, and beyond the bedroom was a windowless bathroom. There were no other doors.

She returned to the outer room and again tried the door, testing it cautiously but firmly with her whole strength. Yes; there could be no doubt of it—she was locked in. She went to one of the windows, raised the sash and looked out. It was at least a twelve-foot drop to the flagged pavement of the court. That might be managed with the help of the bed-clothes, but there remained the high wall and the threatening iron spikes. Below her, she could see that a small door opened from the court into the basement of the house, but it had no other exit.

[Pg 341]

She found the fresh air welcome, and sat down, at last, before the open window. She was much calmer than she had been; now that she was face to face with danger, the feeling of oppression vanished and her courage rose. She was a Pole, she had been trained in a hard school, she was not afraid. No, she repeated passionately to herself, she was not afraid; and how she hated that smooth-tongued German, with the cold eyes and smiling lips! Treacherous! Treacherous!

"If you will come this way," said Pachmann, and Vard tramped after him up the stair to a room on the second floor.

The Prince was already there, standing at the window, hands in pockets, staring moodily out.

"Be seated, Mr. Vard," said Pachmann. "My dear Prince, will you not sit down?"

The Prince flung himself into a chair.

"And now, Mr. Vard," went on Pachmann, sitting down very deliberately face to face with the inventor, "our answer is ready for you."

[Pg 342]

"Very well; let me have it," snapped Vard, twitching with impatience.

"We refuse to accept your conditions."

For an instant there was silence, then Vard leaped to his feet, his face livid.

"So you have been playing with me!" he cried. "Well, I suspected it! And you shall pay! Oh, you shall pay!" and he turned blindly to the door.

"One moment!" called Pachmann, and his voice had in it a ring of command which Vard had never heard before. "Sit down. I have still something to say."

"I do not care to hear it."

"That is nothing to me. You *shall* hear it!"

With a glance of contempt, Vard strode to the door and turned the knob; but it did not open. He wrenched at it madly, but it held fast. In two strides he confronted Pachmann.

"What is the meaning of this?" he demanded.

"The meaning," replied the Admiral sternly, "is that you are a prisoner here until I choose to release you. Now will you sit down?"

Vard stood for a moment, his face deadly white, his hands claspings and unclaspings convulsively, staring down into Pachmann's leering eyes; then he went slowly back to his chair.

[Pg 343]

"That is right," said the German. "It will be best to take this calmly. In the first place, I want you to realise that you are wholly in my power. Nothing that occurs in this house will ever be known to the outside world. If you should fail to reappear, there will be no one to trace you. You will remember that we have your daughter also. And I say to you in all seriousness, and as emphatically as I can, that neither your life nor your daughter's life will cause me to turn aside or even to hesitate. I would kill you with my own hands, and then your daughter—yes, and a thousand like you, if need be—rather than that this chance should be lost to Germany. I say to you, then, that either you will consent to my proposal, or both you and your daughter will suffer the utmost consequence."

Vard's eyes had never left the speaker's face, nor had any colour come back into his own. But at the last words he laughed contemptuously.

"It is useless," he sneered. "I am not one to be frightened."

"I am not trying to frighten you—I warn you."

"Your warning is useless. I reply to you in all seriousness that neither my life, nor my daughter's life—no, nor the lives of a thousand like us!—would persuade me to put this power in your hands. But you dare not kill me. In this brain, and there alone, is the great secret."

[Pg 344]

"You forget," Pachmann reminded him, "that in your baggage is a complete machine. We do not really need you."

At the words, Vard burst into a shout of mad laughter. Pachmann watched him, and his face fell into haggard lines.

"So that is it!" jeered the inventor, when he had got his breath. "So that is the great plot! Well, Pachmann, to that I answer, 'Checkmate!' Go, get the baggage! You are welcome to all you find there!"

"You mean the machine is not there?" demanded Pachmann, thickly.

"Just that!"

"Where is it then?"

Gazing into his adversary's bloodshot eyes, Vard had another burst of strangling laughter.

"I have already told you," he said. "In this brain—there alone—there alone!" His face was red now, strangely red, and his words were queerly jumbled.

Pachmann sat looking at him for a moment, then he rose.

"We shall soon see if you are speaking the truth," he said. "Whether you are or not makes no difference. If there is no machine in your baggage, you shall construct for us another."

[Pg 345]

"Oh, shall I!" screamed Vard, also springing to his feet. "Shall I! How good of you, that permission!"

"You shall construct another!" repeated Pachmann, between clenched teeth. "Oh, you will be glad to consent, once I turn the screw! Come, Prince."

He tapped at the door, and there came from outside the scrape of a sliding bolt. Then, standing aside for the Prince to pass, he looked once at Vard, and turned to cross the threshold.

[Pg 346]

CHAPTER XXVI

THE TURN OF THE SCREW

It was a moment later that Kasia Vard, still sitting at the window staring out into the court, searching desperately through her brain for some plan of escape, was brought quivering to her feet by a shrill scream, followed by the sound of a terrible struggle on the floor above. There was a heavy tramping to and fro, the thud of falling furniture, a dull crash that shook the house—and then silence. It was over in a moment, but she stood rigid for a moment longer, her hands against her heart, then she flew to the door and wrenched at the knob.

The door did not yield. Panting with excitement, she snatched up a chair and drove it with all her strength against the lower panel. The chair flew to pieces in her hands, but the door held firm. And then, as she looked about for another weapon, she heard the sound of a sliding bolt, the door swung open, and Pachmann entered. He looked at her and at the broken chair, and smiled slightly.

"I come to reassure you, Miss Vard," he said, "since I suppose you must have heard the noise of our little combat. No one was injured; but your father, after a burst of rage at finding himself in our hands, during which we found it most difficult to control him, has had what appears to be an epileptic seizure. Is he subject to epilepsy?"

[Pg 347]

"I have known him to have two attacks," said Kasia, in a low voice, with a shuddering remembrance of the desperate crisis at which each had come.

"There is nothing to be done, I think, except to loosen his clothing and bathe his head and wrists?"

"No—that is all." Mechanically her hands were smoothing her disordered hair.

"And there is, of course, no danger. Nevertheless, you may wish to go to him."

"I do wish it."

"Then come with me," and he led the way up the stair. "Your father is in there," he said, pointing to an inner room. "I will bring some water."

Kasia, with white face, passed into the inner room. Her father had been placed on a bed, and lay on his back, his eyes rolled up, breathing heavily. His hands were tightly clenched, but already the spasm was passing and the muscles relaxing. Almost at once, Pachmann appeared at the door, handed her a basin of water and then withdrew.

Under her ministrations, the breathing of the unconscious man grew softer and softer, the hands unclosed, the eyelids drooped, and finally his head fell over on one side and he slept. Kasia, watching him for a few moments, assured herself that all was well, then turned out the light, returned to the outer room and closed the door.

[Pg 348]

Pachmann was sitting at the window, staring idly out at the deepening shadows. He arose at once at the sound of her entrance.

"Miss Vard," he said, "there is something I wish to say to you. Will you not sit down?" and he placed a chair for her. "What I have to say is most serious, and whatever your feeling of ill-usage may be, I hope you will try to look at the matter also a little from my side. The situation is this: Your father, as you doubtless know, is the inventor of a mechanism which will make the nation possessing it mistress of the world. That nation must be Germany. Apart from my ambition for my country and my love of her, I believe that she is the nation best fitted to possess it. At any cost, it must be hers—no cost can be too great; a hundred lives, a thousand lives, millions of treasure—all these would be sacrificed gladly, without hesitation. You understand?"

"Yes," said Kasia. "I think I understand."

"It is your father's dream, as I suppose you also know," Pachmann continued, "to bring about a world-wide peace by causing all nations to strike hands together in a sort of universal brotherhood. He demands that, to enter this brotherhood, Germany relinquish her share of Poland and restore Elsass and Lorraine to France. He requires, too, the virtual abdication of our ruling house. To such conditions Germany cannot consent. Rather than that, we should prefer a hundred times the present status. For Germany has nothing to fear from the future.

[Pg 349]

"Now, Miss Vard, let me say at once that I regard your father's dream as a dream and nothing more. It cannot be realised. There is only one way in which world-peace can be secured—let your father consent to place this power in our hands, and there will be no more war—or, at most, only one very short and decisive war. If your father is in earnest, if he is not mad, he will consent to this proposal. I need hardly add that, if he does consent, he has only to name his own reward—Germany will pay it gladly. Wealth, position, the suzerainty of a nation—all this Germany is prepared to grant."

"You have placed this before him?" Kasia asked.

"Yes; it was placed before him at much greater length at our second conference."

"And he refused?"

"He refused; but we cannot take that refusal."

"Why do you tell me all this?"

"I tell you this, Miss Vard," answered Pachmann earnestly, "because I wish you to understand that in what may seem to you treachery and persecution, I am but fighting for my country. For her, I hesitate at nothing. Then, too, I wish you to know what our position is. If you will think of it, I believe you will find it an honourable position, and one which will bring peace to the world, and quickly. I hope that, after full consideration, you will decide to speak to your father. Perhaps to you he might listen."

[Pg 350]

"No, he would not listen," said Kasia, calmly; "and I shall not speak; or, if I do, it will be to urge him to continue to defy you. Do you imagine that any threat, any torture, could compel him to place the world at the mercy of your Kaiser? You do not know him, Mr. Pachmann."

"That is your final answer?" Pachmann asked.

"Yes."

He rose.

"Then I shall have to request you to return to the room below."

"One moment, Mr. Pachmann," said Kasia. "I wonder if you realise how dangerous is this game you are playing? You are not in Germany; you cannot kidnap two people here in New York, even by the Emperor's order, without some inquiry being made."

"Who will make it? No one knows that you were on the *Ottilie*; your room was empty, your names were not among the list of passengers; to all inquiries the reply will be made that you did not cross with the boat. No one knows that you are in New York."

"You are mistaken," retorted Kasia, her cheeks flushed. "One man knows. I am to meet him this evening."

[Pg 351]

"Ah! but when he finds you not at home, when he inquires of our company, he will conclude that you missed the boat."

"He will know better, because he crossed with us."

Pachmann stared at her, his brows contracted; then a slow smile broke across his lips.

"I remember now," he said. "I did, on one occasion, observe you talking to a young man. No doubt it is to him you refer."

"Yes—and he has a power at his disposal which even you may fear."

Pachmann chuckled.

"The power of the press, is it not?" he asked. "Be at rest, Miss Vard. He will not use it against us. He will walk into our net at seven o'clock this evening! You may be sure that now he will not be permitted to escape!"

In spite of herself, Kasia turned pale. Herself and her father she was prepared to sacrifice—they had played for a great stake and had been outwitted. But Dan! That he, too, should be drawn into the whirlpool and sucked down and destroyed! She turned faint at the thought. Then she pulled herself up sharply, for Pachmann's gimlet eyes were upon her, glittering with comprehension, reading her face, while on his own there was an expression of infernal triumph. She shivered as she looked at him.

[Pg 352]

"Have you anything else to say, Miss Vard?" he asked, with a leer.

"No," said Kasia, and turned to the door, anxious to hide her face, to escape from him, to be alone with her thoughts.

"Then please come with me."

She stepped first to the inner door and glanced at her father. He was sleeping peacefully. Then she followed Pachmann down the stair. At the door of her room he paused.

"By the way, Miss Vard," he said, still leering, "it is useless for you to fatigue yourself by endeavouring to break this door. It is strengthened on the outside by a sheet of steel—behold." He swung the door for her to see, then held it open for her. "I will have your dinner sent in to you," he added, and Kasia heard the bolts shot into place again.

Half an hour later, a bearded giant in livery brought in a tray containing a very appetizing meal, set it on the table, and retired. Kasia realised suddenly that she was very hungry, for she had had nothing to eat since breakfast. There was certainly nothing to be gained by starving herself—that, she told herself with a shiver, might come later!—so she washed hands and face at the basin in the bathroom, straightened her hair, and at last sat down to the meal with a calmness which surprised even herself. She ate deliberately and well, and when, at last, she pushed her cup away, it was with a sense of renewed strength and courage.

[Pg 353]

Once more she examined the room minutely, but there was no exit save by the steel-lined door. The windows remained, but they opened into that well-like court, with walls surmounted by bristling iron. Yet she was strong and agile; perhaps ... perhaps....

She snapped out the light, went to the open window and peered out. It was very dark in the shadow of those walls, but she remembered precisely how it looked; she remembered the door opening into the basement, just beneath the window. If it should, by any chance, be unlocked. But that was foolish to expect. Perhaps it would be possible to twist a rope from the bed-clothes and throw it up over the chevaux-de-frise; but even then there would be a long hand-over-hand climb to accomplish; and the barbed and pointed spikes had looked very formidable. In any event, she had the whole night before her; she must not act hastily; she must wait and watch; perhaps some other means would present itself; perhaps Dan....

And then the pain of recollection stabbed through her. Dan could do nothing; Dan was to be himself entrapped; and yet, how could that be? Perhaps Pachmann was lying—and yet he had not seemed to be lying. He had spoken confidently, triumphantly, gloatingly.

[Pg 354]

She sat erect, listening, then stole to the door and placed one ear against it. There were steps in the hall outside, steps which passed, which mounted the stair....

Perhaps that was Dan; yes, it must be after seven o'clock....

She forced herself to sit again at the window, but her hands were trembling. She stared out into the shadows of the little court and tried to think. But thinking was so difficult; there was a dull ache at the back of her eyes, and her throat felt dry and swollen. One thought ran through her mind, over and over: Dan must not be sacrificed, Dan must not suffer; even if Germany must triumph....

Then, suddenly, from overhead, came the sound of a sharp scuffle and a heavy fall. She fancied she could hear voices raised in anger. The slam of a door echoed through the house. A moment later came a series of savage blows, of rending crashes, as though the house itself was being torn to pieces;—and then silence.

Kasia stood as though turned to stone, listening, listening. Was it Dan? Was it her father? What was happening in that room upstairs? What did that sudden silence mean? Her imagination pictured frightful things....

[Pg 355]

And then, from overhead, she heard the pacing of swift feet, up and down, up and down; back and forth a hundred times, as though driven by some raging spirit, scourging, scourging. And then again silence.

Horrible as the sounds had been, the silence frightened her still more; it was filled with menace, it was charged with terror. Movement, sound—those meant life, at least; silence might mean anything—might mean death!

She could endure it no longer. She ran wildly into the other room and flung herself face-downward on the bed, covering her ears, burying her eyes in the pillow....

But the terror passed; and at last she rolled over and stared up into the darkness and tried

again to think. She must, must, must escape! Once free, once in the street, she could summon aid, could raise the town, could storm the house! But to escape! She pressed her hands to her aching temples.

And then a sound from the outer room brought her upright; she listened with bated breath, pressing her hands against her breast to still the beating of her heart. There it was again, stealthy, scraping....

Slowly, cautiously, she stole to the door of the bedroom; the noise again; and the sound of heavy breathing. And then her heart leaped suffocatingly; for there against the grey light of the window was silhouetted the figure of a man. In frantic terror, she sprang for the switch, found it after an instant's frenzied groping, and turned on the lights. The sudden flare blinded her; then her straining eyes saw who stood there.

[Pg 356]

"Dan!" she cried. "Dan!"

He was standing on the window-sill, steadying himself by a knotted sheet secured somewhere overhead; and at the sound of her voice, he reeled and nearly fell. Then, with a face like ivory, he stooped and peered in under the raised sash, rubbed his eyes, looked a second time, and with a low cry, sprang into the room.

"Kasia!"

She was in his arms, close, oh! close to his heart.

"Oh, Dan, Dan!" she sobbed. "I'm so glad—so glad!"

And she kissed him with trembling lips.

[Pg 357]

CHAPTER XXVII

THE VOICE AT THE DOOR

It was nearly nine o'clock when Pachmann sat down to dinner that evening, but he did so in an exceedingly pleasant frame of mind. He felt that he had done a good day's work. In the first place, he had eluded the spies; in the second place, he had enticed all the flies into the web, where they were now securely entangled. There was just one way in which they could regain their freedom; and that they would, in the end, accept that way, the Admiral did not doubt.

Protests were natural, at first; inevitable, indeed, until their indignation at the trick played upon them had subsided somewhat; it was also inevitable that there should be some heroics, some talk of honour, self-sacrifice, and such tom-foolery. But these vapourings would soon come to an end; a few hours of sober reflection would work wonders in dissipating them. And if there was need, why, it would always be possible to apply the screw—the screw of hunger, the screw of solitary confinement, the screw of sleeplessness, of fear, of anxiety—and to turn it gently, gently. Oh, victory was certain now!

So Pachmann rubbed his hands together, mentally, at least, and enjoyed his dinner immensely. It was a good dinner, but it did not seem to appeal to Pachmann's table-companion. That was the Prince, summoned from his room where he had sulkily immured himself, and obeying from force of habit; but, strangely enough, his appetite, which was of a magnitude and reliability characteristic of the Hohenzollerns, had evidently failed him now. He trifled gloomily with the food, and drank more wine than was good for him without any perceptible resultant lightening of spirit.

[Pg 358]

Plainly something was seriously wrong, but if the Prince expected the Admiral to make any anxious inquiries about his health, or to express regret for the scene of an hour before, he was disappointed. Beyond cocking an amused eye at him, now and again, the Admiral took no notice of him. So it was the Prince who had to open the conversation, which he did as soon as the servants had withdrawn.

"Admiral Pachmann," he began, with heavy dignity, "I did not like the way in which this evening you spoke of me. It appeared to me almost insulting."

"Insulting, Your Highness!" protested the Admiral. "You astonish me. I imagined myself speaking most respectfully."

"It was insulting," repeated the Prince doggedly.

"Surely you misunderstood me!" said the Admiral, with deep concern. "Let me see—what was it I said? I do not remember the exact words, but it was to the effect, was it not, that your health was threatened by over-study and that the Emperor had instructed you to take a vacation?"

[Pg 359]

"There was more than that."

"I emphatically denied that there was any truth in that absurd rumour about the bar-maid."

"She was not a bar-maid."

The Admiral laughed.

"Was she not? Then I was misinformed. But that is a detail."

"In addition to which," pursued the Prince, rather red in the face with the knowledge that he was getting the worst of it, "I do not consider that you are behaving honourably in this matter."

"In what way?"

"You brought Miss Vard and her father here, promising to give them an answer."

"And I gave them an answer, did I not?"

"Yes—and then proceeded to imprison them."

"I have no recollection of having promised not to do so."

"But they trusted you."

"The more fools they!"

"They must be released," said the Prince, firmly. "I command it!"

Pachmann selected a cigar from the tray on the table with great care. Then he lighted it, took a slow puff or two, and looked at the Prince. [Pg 360]

"Ah, you command it!" he said, thoughtfully.

"Yes," repeated the Prince, "I command it!"

"How I wish," sighed the Admiral, "that my heart was as young as yours, my Prince! I would give much to bring that about! But, alas, it has long since grown indifferent to red lips and bright eyes; this old heart of mine has been hardened by forty years of service; it is capable, now, of only one passion—but that is a fierce one."

"And what is that?" the Prince inquired.

"The passion for my country and for my King!" said the Admiral, and saluted. "My house is not a great one, as you have had occasion to remind me; but it is loyal! Its motto is, 'I love and I obey.' We are proud of that motto, and we have never been false to it. As for myself, I love my country as I have loved no woman; for her I would give my life, my honour, and rejoice to do it! For my King, as you have seen, I hesitate at nothing! Prince, sooner or later you must learn your lesson—and the longer you defer it the more bitter it will be."

"To what lesson do you refer?" asked the Prince, impressed in spite of himself, as he gazed at the glowing face opposite him.

"The lesson that never, never must red lips or bright eyes make you false to your country or to your house, even in thought. You command that I release these people at the moment when I touch success. And why? Because you have been impressed with a girl's face." [Pg 361]

"It is a lie!" shouted the Prince, and started to his feet.

The Admiral did not stir, only looked at him; but there was in his eyes a frigid anger which turned the Prince cold.

"I beg your pardon, Admiral," he stammered. "It may be, in part at least, the truth. But it is not the whole truth. Putting the girl aside, I still think you should release them. One should not behave dishonourably, even to one's enemies."

"They are not my enemies, they are my country's," retorted the Admiral, quickly; "and I would point out to you that one can never behave dishonourably in serving one's country. In that service, there are no questions of right and wrong; there is only one question—our country's glory. Any good soldier could tell you that! But perhaps you consider it murder to kill a man in battle, or theft to take the enemy's supplies?"

"No," said the Prince, flushing at the mordant irony; "but that is different—that is war. In time of peace—"

"There is no time of peace," broke in the Admiral, impatiently. "Only fools believe so. Every thinking man knows that it is war, war, every day of every week. We manœuvre for advantage, we build secret defences, we perfect plans of attack, we prepare night and day for the onset—just as we are preparing at this moment. For what purpose do you imagine that Germany maintains this house, with its grated windows and steel-lined doors and heavy bolts, as of a prison? For just such purposes as this! For the detention of her enemies. And it has been used many times—many, many times! And now," he added, in a voice as hard as steel, "as a reparation for your insult, I will ask you to return at once to the consulate, to go to your apartment there, and to remain in it until I see you in the morning. If you are wise, you will employ the night in pondering carefully what I have said to you." [Pg 362]

White with humiliation, the Prince bowed, and stalked from the room. A moment later, the slam of the front door denoted that he had left the house. Pachmann sat for a moment longer, his lips curled in a sardonic smile. Then he touched a bell. A burly fellow in livery answered it.

"Arm yourself," said Pachmann, "and bring your comrade."

The man was back again in a moment, bringing another giant with him. Each had, strapped about his waist, an ammunition-belt from which depended in its holster a heavy revolver. They saluted and stood at attention, while the Admiral looked them over.

[Pg 363]

"You will stand guard in the lower hall to-night," he said, at last; "turn and turn about, one sleeping on the floor at the stair-foot and with the hall fully lighted. Under no pretext, will you permit any one to enter the house or leave it. In case of any disturbance, of any suspicious circumstance, however slight, you will summon me at once. You have revolvers—do not hesitate to use them in case of need—even against a woman. You understand? Good! Has there some baggage come?"

"Two pieces, sir."

"Clear the table and bring them up to me." He leaned back and finished his cigar, while the men clumsily cleared the table and placed two battered suit-cases upon it.

"The servants who prepared the dinner have departed?" the Admiral asked.

"They departed some time ago, sir."

"You are sure that all doors and windows are secured?"

"We have just made the round, sir."

"And the young lady?"

"We have heard nothing from her, sir."

"The young man?"

"I glanced in at him, sir, some time ago. He was lying on his bed, with his eyes closed, but I do not think he slept."

[Pg 364]

"Did he have dinner?"

"We had no orders to that effect, sir."

"Good; let him go hungry. You will serve him no food until I order it. That is all."

They saluted and withdrew.

Pachmann turned to a leisurely examination of the suit-cases. They were unlocked, and he soon found the queer box with sides of glass lined with tin-foil. He snatched it up eagerly, but after a glance at it, his face fell.

"So he was telling the truth!" he muttered. "Well, so much the worse for him!"

Nevertheless he examined the box attentively, with minute concentration, noting the arrangement of the interior plates, the scheme of wiring—each detail. Then, with it in his hand, he left the room, saw that his men were on guard, mounted to the upper story, unbolted a door there and entered. Closing the door carefully behind him, he switched on the lights, placed the box on the table, and entered the room beyond. Here, too, he turned on the lights, and stood for a moment contemplating the occupant of the bed, who returned his gaze steadily, with glittering eyes.

"You are awake, then, my dear Vard?" said the Admiral, at last.

"As you see."

"You are feeling better, I trust?"

[Pg 365]

"I am quite well."

"You have had dinner?"

"I cared for none."

"I wish to talk with you for a few minutes."

"It would be a waste of time."

Pachmann paused to look again at the glittering eyes, and the thought flashed through his mind, as it had done more than once before, that he had to do with a madman. An inspired genius, perhaps, but mad, nevertheless. Pachmann knew that there was about madness a certain childishness, and he determined to humour it.

"For you, perhaps, it would be waste of time," he said, approaching the bed and sitting down; "but not for me. My life-work has been the study of electrical energy as applied to war, and I fancied myself fairly well informed, when, suddenly, you come and prove to me that I know nothing. That morning, ten days since, when I stood on the quay at Toulon and saw a great battleship reduced to a twisted wreck, I realised my ignorance, and my heart glowed with admiration for you, my master."

"Yes, I am your master," and Vard raised himself upon one elbow. "Even here, your prisoner, I am still your master."

"I admit it. And I have a proposal to make to you."

"I have no confidence in your proposals."

[Pg 366]

"Yet listen to this one. Place this power at the Emperor's service, and he will name you ruler of any nation you choose—of this one, if it pleases you—and leave you to govern it as seems best to you, without interference of any kind. Think, my friend, what a destiny—free to embody your own

ideas in the government of what is in some ways the greatest nation on earth; free to make a paradise here, if you can. And if you succeed, your dream comes true, for all the other nations of the world will follow."

Vard gazed at the speaker with wistful eyes.

"It *could* come true," he said. "It *could* come true; it could not fail. But you are too blind, too selfish, too narrow. You are only a German."

"And you?"

"I am a Pole—that is to say a citizen of no country and of every country."

"But you love that country, even though it does not exist?"

"Aye—more than you love yours."

Pachmann was silent a moment, thinking deeply.

"Listen, my friend," he said, at last. "I desire to meet you; I will come along the road toward you as far as I am able."

"Yes?"

"I agree to reconstitute Poland. You shall have a country again, and shall be its ruler, if you choose." [Pg 367]

The eyes of the inventor glowed for an instant, and then the glow faded and he shook his head.

"You have betrayed me once," he said; "you would betray me again. I will never place this power in the hands of your Emperor. He has already shown how he would use it."

"You refer to *La Liberté*?"

"Yes."

"I alone am responsible for *La Liberté*. It was I who chose that test—not the Emperor."

"You!" said Vard hoarsely, and a slow flush mounted to his cheeks. "You!"

"Yes, I!" and Pachmann cast at the other a mocking and triumphant look. "It was I who compelled your consent; it was I who arranged the details; it was I who assumed the whole burden. For I was determined that even the first test should be of benefit to Germany—and it was! However you may wish it, you cannot restore *La Liberté*!"

Vard was staring at the speaker with hollow eyes, his face convulsed.

"Did not the Kaiser know?" he questioned.

"No one knew but Von Tirpitz, and he was panic-stricken. He is old and timid—but I convinced him—I won him over—he could not resist me. Even then, his heart failed him at the last, and he tried to stop me. Luckily, his telegram was delayed—or I should have been compelled to disobey my superior officer. Oh, I admit that it was rash of me," Pachmann added, his face glowing; "I admit that I was risking everything—life, honour, everything; but success excuses rashness—and I succeeded!" [Pg 368]

"Yes," agreed the inventor, slowly, "you succeeded!"

"After that," went on Pachmann, "it was too late to turn back, even had any one wished to do so. Now it is for me to finish this affair."

"How do you propose to finish it?"

Pachmann shrugged his shoulders.

"You are in my hands," he said, "you and your daughter. Heretofore I have been lenient with you, I have been good-natured; I hoped that we might reach some agreement, and I have tried to meet you half-way. But my good nature is at an end; I withdraw all my offers. I demand that you place your secret at Germany's disposal."

"And if I refuse?"

"I shall turn the screw!" answered Pachmann, and there was cold menace in his eyes and in his voice.

Vard had raised himself to a sitting posture. Now he swung his feet off the bed.

"I too have a demand to make," he said, his voice a mere whisper. "My patience also is at an end. I demand my freedom and that of my daughter." [Pg 369]

"What do you offer in exchange?"

"I offer nothing in exchange!" said Vard, and rose slowly to his feet. "I intend to offer my services to France!"

Pachmann looked at him—at his bent and wasted figure, his shaking hands, his trembling knees—a mocking light in his eyes.

"My dear friend," he sneered, "you are mad—quite mad! I have suspected it from the first!"

"You are *not* mad, M. Vard," said a pleasant voice at the threshold. "And you have your freedom. France accepts your services!"

CHAPTER XXVIII

CROCHARD, THE INVINCIBLE!

Pachmann jerked round with an oath. At the first glance, he thought it was the Prince who stood there, though it had not been the Prince's voice. A second glance undeceived him. There was, it is true, a certain puzzling resemblance to the Prince, but this man was more strongly built, more graceful—and the Prince could never smile like that! And then, with a little bow, the newcomer removed the broad-brimmed hat which shadowed his face, and, with a sudden feeling of sickness, Pachmann recognised him.

But the Admiral was a brave man, with a nerve not easily shaken; besides, the odds were all in his favour! Yet he realised the need for all his resource, all his self control. At the end of a moment, he rose slowly, almost carelessly.

"Who are you, sir?" he demanded.

"Do you not know me?" laughed the stranger. "Surely, yes! I saw your eyes penetrate this slight disguise. I crossed with you on the *Ottolie*, Admiral, as André Chevrial. I believe you even did me the honour to convince yourself that that was really my name. I am, however, better known in Paris as Crochard, L'Invincible!"

[Pg 371]

"Ah," said Pachmann, with a tightening of the brows, "a spy, then?"

"No, Admiral; a patriot like yourself."

"And your business here?"

"I have already stated it: to accept for France the services of this incomparable man."

Something flashed in Pachmann's hand, but even as he jerked up his arm, there was a soft impact, and a revolver clattered to the floor. Crochard sprang for it, seized it, and slipped it into his pocket.

"I was expecting that," he said, still smiling. "Now we can talk more at our ease," and he came into the bedroom, closed the door, placed a chair against it, and sat down. "Pray be seated, M. Vard," he added courteously to the inventor. "And you, Admiral."

Pachmann, white with pain, was nursing a numbed and nerveless hand. He sat down slowly, his eyes on the face of his antagonist.

"You should admire this weapon, Admiral," Crochard went on, extending for his inspection what looked like an ordinary revolver. "It is a most useful toy, of my own invention—or, perhaps, I would better say adapted by me from an invention of that ingenious *Sieur Hyacinthe*, who was pistol-maker to the Great Louis. Should you ever visit Paris, I should be charmed to show you the original at the *Carnavalet*. This embodies some improvements of my own. It can, as you have seen, discharge, almost noiselessly, a disabling ball; it can also, not quite so noiselessly, discharge a bullet which will penetrate your body, and which no bone will stop or turn aside. Should you open your mouth to shout, I can, still with this little implement, fling into your face a liquid which will strike you senseless before your shout can come, or a poison a single breath of which means death. And I assure you, my dear Admiral, that I shall hesitate no more than you to use any of these Agencies which may be necessary."

[Pg 372]

Pachmann listened, glowering; but, he told himself, he was not yet defeated; and he sat rubbing his hand and measuring his adversary.

"What do you imagine to be the exact nature of the services of which you speak?" he asked, at last.

"Their nature? Why, their nature will be of the same sort as those already offered to your Emperor."

"Yes?"

"The position of leader in the movement for world-wide disarmament," said Crochard, and smiled as Pachmann's lips whitened. "Ah, my dear Admiral, your Emperor is too selfish, too ambitious—he has, as an English poet puts it, that ambition which overleaps itself. He should have accepted the arrangement which M. Vard proposed. That would have been glory enough. But no; he must dream of being a greater than Napoleon, of world-empire; and in consequence he will lose that which he already has. But I foresaw it; I foresaw it from the moment M. Vard stipulated that *Alsace-Lorraine* must be returned to France. I knew that your Emperor was not great enough—that he has too small a soul—to consent to that restitution!"

[Pg 373]

Pachmann raised his head slowly.

"So it was you who listened at the door, that night?" he said.

"Yes, it was I. And it was I who discovered that you and a companion whom I will not name waited for sunrise, one Monday morning, on the quay at Toulon. For that, France must have revenge."

Crochard's eyes were gleaming now, and there was no smile upon his lips. Instead there was in his face a deadly earnestness, a fierce hatred, before which Pachmann shrank a little.

"She shall have it!" cried a voice from the bed, where Vard had been bending forward, drinking in every word. "She shall have it!"

"You hear?" said Crochard, and then he smiled again. "Ah, my dear Admiral, it was a mistake to insist upon that test! It could have been made, just as well, upon some old hulk of your own—and then France would have had nothing for which to exact vengeance! I pity you; for it is you and you alone, who have brought this retribution to your country. From first to last, you have behaved like a fool in this affair. It was you who betrayed her!"

[Pg 374]

"I?" stammered Pachmann. "I? In what way? By what means?"

"By means of the hundred-franc note with which you paid your reckoning at Toulon. That was careless, Admiral; it was not like you. You should have carried gold, not paper—that would have told no secrets. But bank notes are numbered. And then, when you gave our friend here a packet of similar notes—I do not see how you could expect to escape, after that!"

Pachmann struck his forehead heavily with his open hand.

"So it was that!" he groaned. "So it was that! Yes, I was a fool!"

There was pity in the gaze which Crochard bent upon him. He could guess what this good German suffered at that moment.

"That was not your fault," he said, "so much as that of the person who supplied you with those notes, after getting them directly from the Bank of France. But, at this end of the journey, how clumsy you were! All that haste, all that circling—and for nothing!"

"You followed us, then?"

"Why no!" laughed Crochard. "I had no need to follow you. I had only to be at your consulate at seven o'clock."

[Pg 375]

Pachmann could only stare.

"The appointment was made on the open deck," said Crochard; "I was expecting it, and my ears are sharp! Well I was there at that hour, as well as M. Webster—and you led me straight here! That was careless! That was clumsy! After that, you deserved to fail!"

"How did you enter here?" asked Pachmann, hoarsely. "My men—are they—"

"They are on guard below, no doubt. But their eyes are not so keen as yours nor their ears so sharp—and then my imitation of the Prince's voice and manner was very good. I admit I kept my face somewhat in the shadow. They passed me without question."

Pachmann, with sudden intentness, scanned the other's garments.

"Yes, they, at least, are genuine," laughed Crochard. "The Prince was most indignant at having to remove them. My heart bled for him—but there was no other way. Beyond a little tightness across the shoulders, and a little looseness about the waist, they do very well."

"The Prince is a prisoner?" Pachmann asked.

"A hostage—to be released when I give the word. You should warn him to choose his cabs more carefully—never, in a strange city, to take the first that offers!"

[Pg 376]

"Then," said Pachmann, his face livid, "you have confederates—you are not alone!"

"I have friends," Crochard assented, "who were happy to oblige me by taking charge of the Prince. More than that I did not ask of them."

"You mean," asked Pachmann, almost in a whisper, "that you are alone here?"

"Quite alone, my dear Admiral," Crochard assured him, and smiled pleasantly.

Pachmann regarded the speaker for another moment; then he drew a deep breath, and a little colour crept back into his cheeks.

"M. Crochard," he said, "or whatever may be your name, I admire your dexterity and your daring. I wish Germany possessed a few such men as you. Nothing, I suppose would tempt you—no wealth, no position?"

"I am a Frenchman, monsieur," answered Crochard, quietly.

Pachmann sighed.

"I see I must abandon that project. I am sorry. For, let me warn you, all your dexterity, all your daring, cannot get you alive out of this house. If the Prince is a hostage for your safety, then he must be sacrificed. So far as my own life is concerned, it is nothing. I have two men below who, at a shout from me, or at the report of the shot which kills me, will shoot you down as you attempt to descend the stair. That is my order. There is from this house but one way out—the door by which you entered. You may kill me—I shall welcome that!—but you yourself will infallibly be killed a moment later."

[Pg 377]

"That may be," said Crochard lightly, "but I am not so sure of it. At any rate, if M. Vard is ready, I am prepared to make the trial."

"I am ready!" cried the inventor, and sprang to his feet.

Crochard rose and moved the chair from before the door. Pachmann, with a steady eye, measured the distance between himself and the Frenchman.

But Vard, his eyes blazing, stepped in front of the Admiral.

"So this is your reward!" he sneered. "You, who would have betrayed me, who would have made me infamous, shall yourself be infamous! Now it is France's turn—for her I will produce a new instrument—"

"That is not necessary, M. Vard," broke in Crochard. "There need not be even that small delay. I have the old one here," and he tapped the pocket of his coat.

"The old one!" echoed Vard. "But Kasia destroyed it!"

"It was not destroyed. I will explain. Are you quite ready? Then pass out before me and await me in the outer room."

[Pg 378]

Still staring, Vard opened the door. Then he sprang to the table with a glad cry, and caught up the box which stood there.

"It is complete again!" he cried. "It is—"

With a hoarse shout, Pachmann leaped at Crochard's throat. But, in midair, a spatter of liquid broke against his face, and his body hurtled onward to the floor.

And then, from the floor below, came an answering shout, a shot, the clatter of heavy feet....

With shining eyes, Crochard dropped on one knee beside his adversary, and bent for a moment above the body. Then he sprang to his feet and switched off the light.

"Stand here!" he said, snatched the inventor to one side, and stood facing the outer door.

But it did not open. No further sound reached them.

"Cowards!" muttered Crochard. "They wait in ambush! Well, let us see," and, stealing to the door, he opened it softly, softly, bracing his knee against it.

Still there was no sound.

Cautiously he peered out. The hall was empty.

Noiselessly he crawled to the stair-head and looked down. He could see no one. But where were Pachmann's men—hiding somewhere in the hall below, waiting for him to appear....

[Pg 379]

He drew back with a little exclamation, for from somewhere below came the groan of a man in pain.

For a moment Crochard sat with bewildered face, trying to understand. Then he sprang to his feet and went rapidly from door to door in the upper hall. All of them were armed with heavy outside bolts, but only one was fastened. He drew the bolts and opened the door a crack.

"Is any one here?" he asked.

There was no response, and, feeling for the switch, he turned on the lights and looked in. The room was empty. But in an instant his eye had seen three details—the shattered furniture, the disordered bed, the open window.

At the window, the corner of a sheet was tied securely to a hinge of the heavy shutter, which had been pried open. Crochard touched it thoughtfully and nodded. Then he peered down into the well-like court on which the window opened. But he could see no movement there.

He retraced his steps to the hall, and again peered cautiously from the stair-head, and again heard that dismal groaning.

"Come," he murmured; "there is not much to fear from that fellow!" and he resolutely descended, eyes alert, pistol in hand. Halfway down, he stopped in amazement, for the front door swung wide open. But at last he finished the descent and looked about him.

[Pg 380]

Against the wall back of the stairs sat a burly figure, one hand pressed to his shoulder. A red stream oozed between his fingers, and his dull eyes showed that he was only half-conscious. He was groaning spasmodically with each breath. Across from him was an open door, and looking cautiously through it, Crochard perceived on the floor of the room beyond a second burly figure, motionless on its back.

"Upon my word!" he commented. "That young fellow does his work well! A charming exploit! But we must not be found here!" And without waiting to see more, he sprang back up the stair. Vard was standing where he had left him, his beloved box clasped tightly against his breast, his eyes staring straight before him, vacant and expressionless.

"Come," said Crochard, and took his hand. "The way is clear. But we must hasten."

Vard went with him down the stair; but at the foot he paused.

"And Kasia?" he asked.

"She is safe. Come. We will go to her."

[Pg 381]

Obediently as a child, the white-haired man followed his companion out into the night.

CHAPTER XXIX

THE ESCAPE

That evening remains in Dan Webster's memory as the most crowded and most glorious of his life. Its supreme moment was when Kasia Vard gave herself into his arms and raised her lips to his in confession and surrender, and it left them both dazzled and breathless; but at last they were able to speak coherently.

"So you are a prisoner, too?" Dan asked.

"Yes."

"I suspected it. How splendid that I have found you!"

"It was silly of me to be frightened—I might have known it was you!"

"How could you have known?"

"Admiral Pachmann told me he had set a trap for you."

Dan glanced about the room quickly.

"They must not know I am here," he said, lowering his voice.

Kasia sprang to the switch and snapped out the lights. Then she took him by the hand and led him to a couch in one corner of the room.

"If we sit here," she said, "and speak very low, no one can hear us."

[Pg 383]

They sat down, but some moments passed before the conversation was resumed.

"Now we must be sensible," she said, drawing away from him. "They may go into your room at any moment, or come in here."

"That's true," Dan agreed. And then he remembered. "Kasia," he said, hoarsely, "some one stole the box, after all!"

He heard her quick gasp of dismay.

"Not Pachmann!" she cried.

"No, not Pachmann; I don't know who it could have been, unless it was that fellow Chevrial," and he rapidly told her the whole story. "I know I was an awful chump to let Chevrial put it over me like that," he concluded. "Once we're out of here, I'm going to scour New York for him."

"Don't take it so to heart!" she protested, pressing his hand. "It wasn't any fault of yours; and besides it doesn't matter so much, since it wasn't Pachmann. Perhaps we can get it back—if we can't, why father will make another! Come," she added, rising, "the first thing is to escape. Can we get over the wall?"

"It looked pretty formidable; but I don't see what else we can do. We can't fight our way out—I haven't anything to fight with."

"No; that is too dangerous," agreed Kasia, quickly. "There's a regular giant of a man on guard out there."

[Pg 384]

"Two of them," said Dan. "I was an infant in their hands. Did you hear me smashing things? There isn't much of the furniture left in that room upstairs—and it did me good!"

"I did some smashing myself," laughed Kasia; "there are the pieces of a chair over there by the wall."

Dan laughed in sympathy, with a heart surprisingly light. After all, it was impossible to be either worried or frightened with her there beside him!

"I'll go down and reconnoitre the wall," he said. "How far is the pavement below your window?"

"Ten or twelve feet."

"I'll need more rope."

"My bed-clothes!" she cried. "We can make a rope from them."

She ran into the bedroom, drew the blind at the window, and then turned on the light.

"No one can see us in here," she said, and began to strip the covers from the bed. "Come in and shut the door, and they can't hear us either."

Dan paused an instant at the threshold; then, ashamed of his hesitation, he entered and closed

the door.

"We can make a perfectly lovely rope of these," went on Kasia, her face shining. "I happen to know how—we teach plaiting in our kindergarten on the East side. First we must tear them into strips."

At this Dan helped her, and then the plaiting began. In twenty minutes as many feet of rough but serviceable rope was done.

"Suppose I take a look around the court," Dan suggested, "while you finish the plaiting. We'll need a lot of rope, if we have to go over the wall, but perhaps there's some other way out."

She went with him to the window, watched him as he tied the rope to the shutter-hinge, tested it to make sure that it was safe, and kissed him before he swung himself off. Then she leaned far over the sill and looked down into his upturned face, all her love in her eyes. A moment he hung there, gazing raptly up at her, then slipped down into the darkness; and Kasia, with brimming heart, returned to her task.

A very few minutes sufficed for Dan to convince himself that the only way of escape from the court lay over the wall. He found the door opening into the basement of the house, but it was a strong one and securely bolted, as a pressure of the shoulder proved; and there was no other entrance. The wall itself was not encouraging, for it was at least twelve feet high, and at the top was that formidable iron defence. It might be possible to throw their rope over one of the barbed points, pull himself up, and draw Kasia up after him. Men had accomplished far more difficult things than that to gain freedom!

He groped for the rope, found it, and mounted hand-over-hand to the window-sill, threw his arm over it, drew himself up—and hung there, paralysed, staring at what lay within.

Through the open door of the bedroom poured a stream of light, and beyond, on the bed, sat Kasia, her head bent, her fingers busy with the strips of cloth; and in the darkness of the outer room, peering in at her, was dimly outlined a huge and threatening figure. Dan could see the profile of the bearded face, half-turned away from him; could guess at the leer upon it, the evil light in its eyes. Then slowly, slowly, it drew closer to the bedroom door....

With teeth set and heart flaming, Dan drew himself quickly upon the sill, stepped lightly into the room, and crouched in the shadow of the table. Had the giant heard? He peeped out cautiously. No, he was still intent upon the working girl. But a weapon—he must have a weapon—and Dan's agonised glance, sweeping the room, fell upon the débris of the broken chair. Quickly he crept to it, and his fingers closed about one of the heavy legs.

Then, as he turned to seek the shelter of the table, Kasia glanced up and saw that bearded face. Terror froze the smile upon her lips; terror drained the strength from her limbs; terror strangled the cry in her throat....

"Dan—Dan—Dan!"

And Dan, flaming with such rage as he had never known before, sprang upright, sprang forward, and rising on tiptoe to get the whole weight of his body into it, brought his club whirring down upon that shaggy head.

Like a log the man fell, with a crash that echoed through the house, and instantly from the hallway came a hoarse shout, the rush of heavy feet....

In that instant, Dan was possessed by a curious clairvoyance; he could see Kasia, he could see his victim, he could see the room behind him, he could see the hall with the other guard running along it; he knew somehow that there was a pistol in the belt of the man who lay at his feet, and, without conscious will of his own, his hand found it and jerked it out.

That other figure had reached the threshold, and Dan was conscious of his red face and staring eyes and open mouth. He was conscious of a hairy hand closing on a pistol-butt, and, again without willing it, he jerked his own hand up and fired....

And the next moment, with one arm about Kasia, he threw back the bolts of the front door, flung it open, and fled down the steps into the street.

That was all Dan ever remembered of those fierce instants. They appeared to him afterwards as a series of tableaux, each standing distinctly by itself, unconnected with the past or with the future, and he felt himself to be, not an actor in them, but a puppet moved by wires. It was as though his brain had leaped from one mountain-top to another, across intervening valleys buried in fog.

But the instant his feet touched the pavement, the instant the fight was won, his will asserted itself and his brain began again to work connectedly. And the first thing he remembered doing was holding up his hand and staring at it, astonished that it did not hold a pistol. He had no recollection of having dropped it.

"We must get help!" Kasia panted. "My father is there!"

"The Prince and Pachmann are there, too," said Dan; "perhaps others." He looked up and down the street. "I wonder where we are? There's the elevated. Come along!"

Together they sped to the nearest corner. It proved to be Ninth Avenue, and there, in the shadow of the elevated, they found a policeman on duty.

It is true that Dan was not as coherent as he might have been and that the story he told sounded like a pipe-dream; but the policeman was undeniably slow of comprehension. At first he

smiled good-naturedly.

"Aw, youse run along home now," he said. "I'm onto youse!"

[Pg 389]

"But, look here," Dan protested, "this is serious. I'm not drunk—I'm just excited and scared. Now listen. There's a man held prisoner back yonder by a lot of Germans, and I shot one of them and knocked another down—and we've got to get him free...."

"Tut, tut!" said the officer, and then he looked at Dan closely, and then he looked at Kasia, and then he took off his helmet and scratched his head. "See here, now," he said, finally, "I'll call headquarters, if you say so—but if you are stringin' me...."

"I'm not stringing you!" Dan cried. "And for heaven's sake be quick! Every minute we waste...."

The passers-by had begun to stop and stare curiously, and the thought flashed through Dan's mind that he might collect a posse....

But the patrolman had made up his mind.

"Come along with me," he said, and led the way into the rear room of the corner drugstore and telephoned to his station for instructions. He enlarged somewhat upon the perils of the expedition, as Dan had recounted them, and when he came out of the booth, it was with a distinctly relieved air.

"The sergeant says for us to wait here," he said, "and he'll rush some detectives up right away."

[Pg 390]

"But we can't stay here!" Dan cried. "We've got to get back!"

"When the sergeant tells me to do a thing, I do it," said the officer composedly. "So I'm goin' to stay right here."

Dan glared at him for a moment, and started to speak his mind, but thought better of it.

"Any objection to my waiting in front of the house?" he asked.

The officer pondered a moment.

"No, I guess not. Right down this street, you said?"

"Yes; I didn't notice the number, but it's about half-way of the block. I'll be waiting."

"All right. Skip along."

"I'm going too," said Kasia.

Dan started to object—the danger was not over yet—but she was already at the door.

"Take the other side of the street," he called.

She nodded, crossed the street, and sped along in the shadow. In a moment they were opposite the house. Nothing apparently had changed there. The front door stood open as they had left it, with the light from the hall streaming out over the steps. The hall, so far as they could see, was empty. There was no one on the stairs.

Dan gazed at all this; then he shivered a little; he did not understand the emptiness and silence; and he was suffering with the reaction from those crowded moments.

[Pg 391]

"I don't like it," he said. "Where's Pachmann?"

"Perhaps he's not there."

Dan stood staring a moment longer, then swung round at her.

"I'm going to see," he said. "It was foolish to run away like that. I'm ashamed of myself. Wait for me here."

He crossed the street and mounted the steps. As he stepped into the hall, a groan arrested him. In a moment, he perceived the man whom he had shot lying, half conscious, against the wall. In the room beyond, the other man was sitting up, rubbing his head and staring stupidly about him. Dan took one look at him, then closed the door and bolted it.

"And *that's* all right!" he said, and turned to find Kasia at his elbow. He glared at her sternly. "I thought I told you to wait outside!"

"With you in danger! What do you take me for?"

Dan took one look into the shining eyes, then put his arm about her, dragged her to him, and kissed her fiercely.

"Refreshment for the heroic warrior on the field of battle," he explained, before she could protest. "I don't think there's much danger; but just the same you'll stay well in the rear, like a good girl! If Pachmann's upstairs, we'll surely hear from him. He's certain to be annoyed!"

[Pg 392]

"Can't we do something for this poor fellow?" she asked, her eyes large with pity for the groaning man.

"The police will call an ambulance," said Dan. "There's nothing we can do." On the floor beside the wounded man lay his revolver, and Dan stooped and picked it up. "Now, remember, Gunga Din!" he added, "your place is fifty paces right flank rear!"

He started up the stair, cautiously at first, but more boldly as no sound came from the upper floor. At the stair-head he hesitated. The upper hall was empty, but just opposite him an open door disclosed a dark room beyond. Still there was no sound, and, after a moment, he stepped to the door and peered inside.

"That was where they put my father," said Kasia. "He was lying on the bed in there."

Before he could stop her, she brushed past him and sped across the room. Then with a frightened cry, she started back. Dan was by her side in an instant.

"Look!" she gasped, and pointed at the floor.

Dan saw a dim shape stretched across the inner threshold; then he perceived that it was the body of a man. Pushing Kasia before him, he returned to the outer door, fumbled for the switch and turned it. Yes, it was the body of a man, lying on its face, its arms thrown above its head. A strange odour greeted him as he bent above it—an odour which made him curiously dizzy—but he managed to turn the body over.

"Why, it's Pachmann!" he cried, and stared down at him with starting eyes.

It was not a pleasant sight. The Admiral's face was distorted with rage, his lips curled savagely away from his teeth, his eyes were only half-closed, his hands were clenched—and with it all, he was breathing slowly and regularly, as though asleep.

"He isn't dead, anyway," said Dan, and rubbed his eyes, for strange clouds floated before them. "And he doesn't seem to be hurt," he added, looking again. "I wonder what happened to him—he isn't a pretty sight, is he? And where's your father?"

"He's not here," said Kasia, and following her gesture, Dan saw that the bed was empty.

Together they hastened back to the hall and looked into the other rooms. They were all empty.

"Well, it beats me!" said Dan, at last, and stared down into the girl's frightened face. "Your father isn't here, that's sure. It looks like he either gave Pachmann his quietus with a solar plexus, or else Pachmann just fell over on his face and went to sleep. Anyway, your father seems to have escaped. But where's the Prince? Did they elope together?"

"Why didn't father stop and look for me?" demanded Kasia.

And then a light broke over Dan's face.

"He did—and found you gone. Don't you see," he went on, excitedly, "it must have been while we were fussing with that thick-headed cop. And probably, when he didn't find you, he hurried on home...."

But Kasia had already started for the stairs.

Dan paused for a last look at the recumbent figure. Suppose the man should die—suppose something had happened to the Prince—there would be the German Empire to be reckoned with, and the reckoning would be a serious one—serious for himself, for Kasia, above all for Vard! Very thoughtfully he turned away, followed Kasia down the stair, passed along the hall and through the open door. On the top step he paused and looked up and down the street. The police were not yet in sight.

With a little smile, Dan turned and pulled the door shut. Then he ran down the steps after his companion.

"Let's go the other way," he said, as she turned toward Ninth Avenue. "We may as well keep out of this. We can get the Subway just below here."

And in another moment, they had turned the corner.

Wherefore it happened that, when the patrolman, in company with three detectives, who had been torn away from a game of pinocle and who were consequently in no very pleasant humour, reached the centre of the block, some minutes later, there was no one in sight.

"He said he'd wait for us," said the patrolman, helplessly.

The detectives looked about them, but there was no evidence of anything unusual about any of the houses.

"Which side of the street was it on?" one of them asked.

"He didn't say," answered the patrolman.

"Well, what *did* he say?"

"Blamed if I know, exactly. He was so worked up—with his eyes stickin' out, and his jaw shakin', and the girl hangin' on to his arm—but it was something about kidnappin', and shootin' a man, and there bein' another prisoner to rescue...."

He stopped, for there was frank incredulity in the three pairs of eyes fastened upon him.

"He was stringin' you," said one of the detectives, at last.

"Or else he had a jag," said another.

"Dope, more likely," suggested the third. "Look here, Hennessey, don't you ever git us up here again with no such cock-and-bull story! Come on, boys!"

They left Hennessey rubbing his head helplessly and staring at the houses, one after another. He wasn't at all convinced that the strange youth had been "stringing" him—his excitement had too evidently been genuine; but if he was on the square, why had he run away?

"Oh, hell!" said Hennessey, finally, and returned to his post at the corner.

And it was about that time that the 'phone at the German consulate rang, and a pleasant voice advised that a physician be sent at once to the house just off Ninth Avenue, as his services were badly needed there.

[Pg 397]

CHAPTER XXX

COUNCIL OF WAR

When Paris opened her eyes on the morning of Thursday, the twelfth of October, it was to rejoice at one of those soft and beautiful days of autumn which make of every house a dungeon to be escaped at the first possible moment. Even as early as nine o'clock, a perceptible tide had set in toward the Bois de Boulogne, or, rather, innumerable little tides, which converged at the Place de la Concorde and rolled on along the Champs-Élysées in one mighty torrent.

Against this torrent, a sturdy and energetic figure fought its way across the square; a figure carefully arrayed in black morning-coat and grey trousers, and looking alertly about with a pair of very bright eyes magnified by heavy glasses. The haughtiest of the carriage-crowd felt honoured by his bow, for it was none other than that great diplomat, Théophile Delcassé, Minister of Marine.

M. Delcassé was not in the habit of being abroad so early; it was a full hour before his usual time; but he had an appointment to keep which he regarded as most important, so he strode rapidly across the square, entered the handsome building to the north of it, and mounted to the first floor, where, on the corner overlooking the square on one side and the Rue Royale on the other, he had his office.

[Pg 398]

Early as it was, he found awaiting him the man whom he wished to see—a thin wisp of a man, with straggling white beard and a shock of white hair and a face no wider than one's hand, but lighted by the keenest eyes in the world—in a word, Louis Jean Baptiste Lépine, Prefect of Police, to whom full justice has not been done in this story—nor in any other. M. Lépine had not found the hour early; to him, all hours were the same, for he was a man who slept only when he found the time, which was often not at all.

"Good morning, my dear Prefect," said Delcassé, drawing off his gloves. "I trust I have not kept you waiting?"

"I but just arrived," Lépine assured him; "and I know of no better place to pass one's idle moments than at this window of yours."

Beyond it stretched the great square, with its obelisk and circle of statues, its pavilions and balustrades; beautiful now, and peaceful, but peopled with ghastly memories—for it was here the Revolution set up its guillotine, and it was here that some four thousand men and women, high and low, looked their last upon this earth, mounted the scaffold and passed under the knife. Surely, if any spot on earth be haunted, it is this!

[Pg 399]

Something of this, perhaps, was in the minds of these two men, as they stood for a moment looking down into the square, for their faces were very thoughtful; then Delcassé's eyes travelled from one to another of the heroic figures representing the great towns of France—Lyons, Marseilles, Brest, Rouen, Bordeaux, Nantes, Lille—and came to rest upon the last one, Strasbourg, hung with black and piled with mourning garlands, in memory of the lost Alsace. Every morning, before he turned to the day's work, M. Delcassé, standing at this window, gazed at that statue, while he registered anew the vow that those garlands should one day be replaced by wreaths of victory! That vow was his orison.

His lips moved silently as he made it now, then he turned to his desk.

"Be seated, my dear Lépine," he said. "I have much to discuss with you, as you may guess. First about *La Liberté*. My Board of Inquiry will be ready to report by Saturday. It has decided that the explosion was caused by the spontaneous combustion of the 'B' powder, as was the case with the *Jena*."

"That theory will do as well as any other," said Lépine, curtly. "But you and I know that it is not the true one."

Delcassé looked at him quickly.

"Have you any news?" he asked.

[Pg 400]

"None," answered Lépine, with a frown. "The man we sought has vanished as completely as though the earth had swallowed him. I have found no trace of him since he left the office of the Messrs. Cook, with two passages for America in his pocket. I cannot understand it."

"Have the tickets been returned?"

"They have not been returned, and the Messrs. Cook, making inquiry at my suggestion, have a report from the steamship company that they have not been used."

Delcassé turned this over in his mind.

"Perhaps the man and his daughter have met with some accident."

"We should have heard of it," Lépine objected. "I have scrutinised every report—viewed every body which at all resembled him."

"Then," said Delcassé, "he has been suppressed, as one who knew too much."

"My own opinion is," said the Prefect, "that he has sought refuge in Germany, until he can prepare for another demonstration against France."

The Minister moved uneasily in his chair.

"I have thought of that," he said, "and I am doing everything I can to render such an attempt impossible—but it is a hard task—one can never be sure. There is another thing I wished to ask you. Where is Crochard?"

[Pg 401]

"I do not know, sir. I have not seen him since that morning at Toulon when we parted outside the Hotel du Nord."

"Then he, too, has disappeared?"

"Yes, sir, completely."

"Has it never occurred to you, Lépine, to connect these two disappearances?"

"Yes, I did connect them. You will remember in the note he left for me he stated that he hoped soon to have some good news for us. But when more than two weeks elapse and we hear nothing, I am forced to conclude that he, too, has been baffled."

"Yes, it was for me a hope, also—almost my only one," said Delcassé. "I did not believe that he could fail. And if he has failed, do you know what it means for France, Lépine? It means destruction. Oh, I have spent sleepless nights, I have racked my brain! Germany's attitude is that of a nation which desires war and which is ready to provoke it. You know, of course, how strained the situation is?"

"About Morocco?"

"Yes. It has come to this: France and Germany are like two duellists, face to face, sword in hand. Either they must fight, or one must retreat—and with dishonour!"

"France cannot retreat," murmured Lépine.

[Pg 402]

"I have said the same thing a hundred times; and yet, at the bottom of my heart, I know we cannot fight—not while this cloud of uncertainty hangs over us. To fight, with this power in the hands of Germany, would mean more than defeat—it would mean annihilation. There would be other statues to be draped with black!"

Delcassé's face was livid; he removed his glasses and polished them with a shaking hand, and, for the first time, Lépine saw his bloodshot eyes. Delcassé noticed his glance, and laughed grimly.

"Only to you, Lépine, do I dare to show them," he said. "Before others, I must crush this fear in my heart, bite it back from my lips; I must appear unconcerned, confident of the issue. Only to you may I speak freely. That is one reason I called you here. I felt that I *must* speak with some one. Lépine, I foresee for France a great humiliation."

Lépine looked at his companion with real concern.

"You exaggerate," he said. "You have been brooding over it too long."

Delcassé shook his head.

"I do not exaggerate. This thing is so terrible that it cannot be exaggerated. Even at this moment, Germany is preparing the blow. For the past week, she has been extraordinarily active. Her fleets have coaled hurriedly and put out to sea—for manœuvres, it is said; but this is not the season for manœuvres. Her shipyards have been cleared of all civilians, and a cordon of troops posted about each one. The garrison of every fortress along the frontier has been at least doubled, and the most rigid patrol established. The police regulations are being enforced with the greatest severity. Every city of the frontier swarms with spies; even here in Paris we are not safe from them—my desk was rifled two nights ago. I live in dread that any day, any hour, may bring the news of some fresh disaster!"

[Pg 403]

"And do our men learn nothing?"

"Nothing! Nothing! All they can tell me is that something is preparing, some blow, some surprise. Whatever the secret, it is well kept; so well that it can be known only to the Emperor and one or two of his ministers. We have tried every means, we have exhausted every resource, all in vain. We know, in part, what is being done; of the purpose back of it we know nothing. But we can guess—the purpose is war; it can be nothing else!"

Lépine sat silent and contemplated the rugged face opposite him—the face which told by its lined forehead, its worried eyes, its savage mouth, of the struggles, rebuffs, and disappointments of thirty years. Always, out of disaster, this man had risen unconquered. Upon his shoulders now

was placed the whole of this terrific burden. He alone, of the whole cabinet, was fit to bear it; beside him, the others were mere pigmies: Premier Caillaux, an amiable financier; Foreign Minister de Selves, a charming amateur of the fine arts; War Minister Messimy, an obscure army officer with a love for uniforms; Minister of Commerce Couyba, a minor poet, tainted with decadence—above all these, Delcassé loomed as a Gulliver among Lilliputians. But greatness has its penalties. While the Minister of Foreign Affairs spent his days in collecting plaques, and the Minister of War his in strutting about the boulevards, and the Minister of Commerce his in composing verses, Delcassé laboured to save his country—laboured as a colossus labours, sweating, panting, throwing every fibre of his being into the struggle—which was all the more trying, all the more terrific, because he felt that it must go against him!

"What would you suggest, Lépine?" Delcassé asked, at last. "Is there any source of information which you can try?"

Lépine shook his head doubtfully.

"It is not a question of expense," Delcassé went on, rapidly. "A million francs would not be too much to pay for definite information. We have spent that already! We have had a Prince babbling in his cups; we have had I know not how many admirals and generals and diplomats confiding in their suddenly complaisant mistresses; we have searched their hearts, shaken them inside out—but they know nothing. Such and such orders have been issued; they obey the orders, but they do not know their purpose. They all talk war, shout war—Germany seems mad for war—and the government encourages them. Their inspired journals assert over and over that Germany cannot recede—that its position is final—that hereafter it must be paramount in Morocco. And to-day—or to-morrow at the latest—France must send her ultimatum."

"What will it be?"

"God knows!" and Delcassé tugged at his ragged moustache. "If it were not for one thing, Lépine, I should not hesitate, I should not fear war. France is ready, and England is at least sympathetic. But there is *La Liberté*. What if Germany can treat our other battleships as she treated that one? Yes, and England's, too! And if our battleships, why not our forts, our arsenals ... Lépine," and Delcassé's lips were twitching, "I say to you frankly that, for the first time in my life, I have fear!" He fell a moment silent, playing nervously with a paper-knife he had snatched up from his desk. "What would you suggest?" he asked again.

And again Lépine shook his head.

"What *can* I suggest!" he protested. "Where you have failed, what is there I can do?"

The knife snapped in Delcassé's fingers, and he hurled the fragments to the floor.

"There is one thing you can do," he said. "Find Crochard and bring him to me."

Lépine arose instantly.

"I will do my best," he said, reaching for his hat. "If he is in France, rest assured...."

There was a tap at the door, and it opened softly.

"I am not to be disturbed!" snapped the Minister, and then he stopped, staring.

For there appeared on the threshold the immaculate figure, the charming and yet impressive countenance, for a sight of which the great Minister had been longing; and then his heart leaped suffocatingly, for with the first figure was a second—a man with white hair and flaming eyes and thin, eager face....

As Delcassé sprang to his feet, Crochard stepped forward.

"M. Delcassé," he said, "it gives me great pleasure to introduce to you a gentleman whom I know you will be most glad to meet—Ignace Vard."

CHAPTER XXXI

THE ALLIANCE ENDS

Delcassé's nostrils were distended and his eyes were glowing like those of a war-horse scenting battle as he invited his visitors to be seated. Only his iron self-control, tested on I know not how many hard-fought fields of diplomacy, enabled him to speak coherently; never had it been strained as at that moment.

He sat down at his desk, and glanced from one face to the other.

"I am indeed glad to meet M. Vard," he said, with a calmness that was no less than a triumph;

"and to see you again, M. Crochard. I had but this moment charged M. Lépine to bring you to me."

"Is it so serious as that?" asked Crochard, with a little smile.

"The situation could not well be more serious."

"You refer, I suppose, to the Moroccan situation."

"Yes. France must fight, or yield to Germany."

Again Crochard smiled.

"No, no," he protested; "it is Germany which will yield!"

[Pg 408]

Delcassé bounded in his chair, as his eye caught the glance which Crochard bent upon him.

"I knew it," he said, his face white as marble. "I guessed it—and yet I scarcely dared believe it. But the moment you entered, bringing M. Vard...."

"M. Vard is a very great inventor," said Crochard. "He offered his services to Germany, and she betrayed him; he now offers his services to France."

Delcassé glanced at the little man who sat there so still, so fragile, with eyes which gleamed so fiercely and lips that trembled with emotion; and he shivered a little at the thought that here was the man who had struck a terrible blow at France.

"I can see what you are thinking," Vard burst out. "You will pardon me, if I speak English? I am more familiar with it than with French. I see what you are thinking. You are thinking, 'Here is the miscreant, the scoundrel, who destroyed our battleship!' Well, it is true. I am a scoundrel—or I should be one if I permitted that deed to go unrevenged. I was betrayed, sir, as this gentleman has said. I offered to Germany the leadership among nations. But the Emperor is consumed with personal ambition—his one desire to exalt his house, to establish it more firmly. Instead of leading, he wished to conquer. I refused to be his tool. Thereupon I was deceived by a trick, I was imprisoned—I and my daughter also. We were threatened with I know not what—with starvation, with torture—but this gentleman rescued us, and I came here with him in order to place before France the same proposal I made to Germany."

[Pg 409]

Delcassé had listened closely; but he was plainly confused and astonished.

"Before going further," he suggested, "I should very much like to hear M. Crochard's story. There is much about this extraordinary affair which I do not understand—and I desire to understand everything. Will you not begin at the beginning, my friend?"

"It was very simple," said Crochard, and told briefly of the pursuit, of the encounters on the *Ottilie*, and of the final struggle in New York. "After our escape," he concluded, "we hastened to M. Vard's residence, where, as I anticipated, his daughter and that admirable M. Webster whom she loves, soon joined us. It was a most happy reunion, and in the end, M. Webster forgave me for the theft of the little box. Of our plans we said nothing, except that M. Vard was journeying back with me to Paris, and we were aboard the *Lusitania* when she sailed next morning. We arrived at Liverpool last night, and here we are!"

Lépine's face was shining with a great enthusiasm.

[Pg 410]

"Permit me to congratulate you, sir," he said. "It was finely done. I realise that the more deeply because I myself was completely baffled; and yet it should have occurred to me that the Captain of the *Ottilie* might wish to deceive me. My theory was, however, that the tickets had been purchased to throw me off the scent. M. Vard had, of course, as I supposed, sought refuge in Germany. Even yet I do not understand why he should have gone to America."

The remark was, in a way, addressed to the inventor, but he had fallen into revery and paid no heed to it.

"He is often like that," said Crochard, in rapid French. "I suspect that something is wrong here," and he touched his forehead. "The trip to America was, as I understand it, a matter of sentiment with him. He insisted that this great treaty, which was to bring about world-wide peace and the brotherhood of man, should be signed on American soil."

"He is really in earnest about that treaty?" asked Delcassé. "He is not a mercenary?"

"Mercenary? Far from it, sir. Why, M. Delcassé, he was asked to choose his own reward, and he refused. He is utterly in earnest—he asks nothing for himself. And I believe his idea practicable. I hope that you will consider it carefully, sir. The Emperor refused because of his conditions. One was the reconstitution of Poland—he is himself a Pole. The other was the restoration of Alsace-Lorraine to France. Pachmann did at last agree to give up Poland—and to make him King of it, if he chose!—but the other condition was too much for him. Besides, he thought the game was in his hands—he saw his Emperor ruler of the world! Permit me to outline for you the plan of this remarkable man."

[Pg 411]

And clearly but briefly, Crochard laid before the astonished Minister the plan for world-wide disarmament, for universal peace, for the freeing of subject peoples, for the restoration of conquered territory, and for the gradual establishment of representative government, to the exclusion of all hereditary rulers, great and small.

"And I see no reason," Crochard concluded, "why France should hesitate to give herself wholeheartedly to this plan. With all of these things she is in sympathy; 'Liberty, Equality, Fraternity' has been her watchword for a hundred years. Once we regain Alsace-Lorraine, we can

be well-content to lay down our arms. I believe that we can secure the support of the United States and perhaps of England. To the United States, a project so idealistic would be certain to appeal; and as for England, she is terrified at heart, she fears the future, she staggers under the burden of her great armaments—which yet are not great enough. Yes, we could win England!"

[Pg 412]

Delcassé had listened with gleaming eyes, all the dreamer within him afire at the splendid vision which Crochard's words evoked.

"You are right!" he cried, and sprang to his feet and approached the inventor, his hands outstretched. "M. Vard," he said, "on behalf of France, I accept your proposal!"

Vard was on his feet also, and his whole frame was shaking.

"You are sincere?" he stammered, peering into Delcassé's eyes. "You are in earnest? You are not deceiving me?"

"No!" said Delcassé, solemnly. "I am not deceiving you. I swear it, on my honour. France will be proud to take her place at the head of this great movement." And then he stopped, and a shadow flitted across his face. "There is but one condition," he added. "You must prove to us that this power really exists."

"I agree to that!" cried Vard, eagerly. "I agree to that—yes, yes, I even wish it. Any proof, any test—it shall be yours to choose. And remember—the Germans were not merciful!"

"I shall remember!" said Delcassé hoarsely, his face quivering; and he caught himself away and stood for a moment at the window, struggling for self-control. Through the square below all Paris poured, on its way to drive in the Bois, careless, happy, all unconscious of the crisis in its country's history which the moment marked. And then, by habit, Delcassé's eyes wandered to that great statue by Pradier, with the pile of mourning wreaths before it...

[Pg 413]

"I have chosen!" he said, in a choked voice. "The test shall be made at Strasbourg!"

The inventor bowed.

"If I may retire," he said, "I will begin my preparations at once. I shall need to work for a day, or perhaps two days, in some well-equipped wireless laboratory. All other arrangements I shall leave to you. It will be necessary to secure two stations in sight of the arsenal, and within five miles of it, where we can work without fear of being disturbed."

"I will attend to all that," agreed Delcassé, and touched a bell. "If General Marbeau is in his office," he added to his secretary, "please say that I wish to see him at once."

The door had closed behind the French Chief of Wireless and the white-haired enthusiast, and for a moment the three men who were left behind gazed at each other in silence.

"Do you believe in this power?" asked Delcassé, at last.

[Pg 414]

"There was *La Liberté*," Crochard reminded him.

"True," and the Minister fell silent again.

"To attack the fort at Strasbourg will not be easy," said Crochard, at last. "The Germans are no doubt already on their guard."

Delcassé smote his forehead with his open palm.

"That is it!" he cried. "Lépine, that is the explanation! It is not for war they prepare; it is in terror they withdraw their fleets into mid-ocean and throw cordons of soldiers about their forts! At this moment, in spite of their bold front, the Emperor and his ministers are trembling! For of course they know that Pachmann failed—and that we succeeded!"

"Undoubtedly," Crochard agreed. "Pachmann would notify the Emperor of his failure as soon as he regained consciousness!"

"Not a pleasant task," chuckled Delcassé. "He has my pity. What happened to the Prince?"

"The Prince was released next morning."

"You have friends, then, in New York?" asked Lépine, curiously.

"I have friends everywhere," answered Crochard quietly.

"When I think of the Kaiser trembling!" cried Delcassé. "Ah, what anguish must be his! I have tasted it, and I know!"

[Pg 415]

Crochard took from his coat a long pocket-book.

"This belonged to Admiral Pachmann," he said. "I paused long enough to secure it, because it contained a document which I was most anxious to possess. It will interest you, sir," and he drew out a black-sealed envelope and passed it to Delcassé.

The latter opened it, took out the stiff sheet of paper he found within, read it, re-read it, and then stared at Crochard stupefied.

"That is what one might call an imperial power of attorney," said Crochard, with a little laugh. "It is sufficiently comprehensive, is it not?"

"It is unbelievable!" cried Delcassé, and handed the paper to Lépine. "And this was really given by the Emperor to Pachmann?"

"I see no reason to doubt it. Though," Crochard added, with a smile, "I am of the opinion that

Pachmann put it to uses and went to lengths which the Emperor did not contemplate—perhaps would have forbidden."

Delcassé's eyes were glowing with an infernal joy.

"That does not matter," he said. "That was because his hand was forced. It is the Emperor who is responsible—it is a risk he took. If he chose his instrument badly, it is he who must suffer for it. You permit me to retain this paper?"

"Certainly. Use it as you think best for France!"

[Pg 416]

Delcassé was out of his chair, striding up and down the room.

"So the wheel has turned!" he cried. "You may not remember it, M. Crochard—to you it may have seemed a small thing—but six years ago, the Emperor caused me to be driven from the foreign office because I did and said certain things which displeased him. Such was his power even here in Paris! You will scarcely credit it, but so it was. And now it is my turn! With this in my hand, all things are possible! He must have been mad to put his hand to such a paper—but, after all, it does not astonish me. He is always doing mad things; he has no balance, no self-control. Ten years ago, with an imprudent telegram, he almost plunged his country into war with England—and at a moment, too, when it was wholly unprepared! Two years ago, a wild speech of his brought Germany to the brink of revolution. Last year, he nearly upset his empire by an indiscreet interview which was suppressed just in time. He is always in hot water, but heretofore his good fortune has been amazing. He has always succeeded in extricating himself. This time, it seems, he has tempted the gods once too often—the game is in our hands. Our ultimatum I will prepare to-day, and I will invite to my office the German ambassador, and I will hand him that ultimatum, and I will say certain things to him which have long been biting at my throat for utterance, and then I will give him a glimpse of this document, and finally I will send him away. Ah, there will be consternation at Berlin to-night!" Suddenly Delcassé stopped in front of Crochard's chair. "My friend," he said, in another tone, "you have saved France. You must name your own reward. I grant it, before you ask it."

[Pg 417]

"Well, yes," said Crochard, smiling, "I shall not refuse. At Toulon, on the quay opposite the spot where lies the wreck of *La Liberté*, a friend of mine conducts a café. It was he who noticed the two Germans—it was he who gave me my first clue. So he deserves a reward on his own account. He is an honest man, who has suffered unjustly. Four years ago he was condemned to prison for killing the betrayer of his daughter. He is called Samson. M. Lépine will no doubt recall the circumstances."

"I recall them very well," said Lépine. "Samson escaped the day after he was sentenced. I could find no trace of him, until I saw him at Toulon."

"But you did not arrest him!" said Crochard quickly.

"I promised to take no action until you and I had talked together."

"Thank you, M. Lépine," said Crochard warmly. "I have always respected you as a man of your word. It was I who assisted Samson to escape, since his punishment seemed to me undeserved; it was I who secured false papers for him and established him at Toulon. He has done well, but he dare not have his family with him. He loves his family, and without them he finds life sad. M. Delcassé, you have told me to name a reward—I ask that Samson may be pardoned."

[Pg 418]

"It is granted," said Delcassé, in a low voice; "but is there nothing else? Is there nothing I can do for you, my friend?"

Crochard had arisen and he and the great Minister stood face to face.

"Yes, there is something, sir," he said, "which you can do for me, and which will make me very proud. You are a great man, and I admire you. There are not many men to whom I raise my hat; but I salute you, sir, and I hope you will accept my hand!"

Delcassé's hand shot out and seized Crochard's and held it close.

"It is I who am honoured!" he said thickly.

But at the end of a moment, Crochard drew his hand away.

"Do not idealise me, sir," he said. "I am outside the law; you and I go different ways. If for once, M. Lépine and I have worked together, it was because France demanded it. We admire each other; we have found that we possess certain qualities in common. But now I have done my part; the rest is in your hands. So I say adieu; our alliance is over; we are enemies again—"

[Pg 419]

"Not enemies," broke in Delcassé, quickly. "Antagonists perhaps; but not enemies. I wish—"

"No, do not wish," said Crochard. "My life satisfies me. I have a certain work to do, and I am happy in doing it. But I accept your word—henceforth we are antagonists, not enemies. Adieu, sir."

The door closed, and Delcassé, dropping heavily into his chair, gazed mutely into Lépine's inscrutable eyes.

[Pg 420]

CHAPTER XXXII

STRASBOURG

A Mile or two back from the Rhine, on the banks of the Ill, stands the fair city of Strasbourg. Once she was proud as well as fair; but her pride has been trailed in the dust. For four centuries a free city, defending herself virgin-like against all comers, for two centuries more the happy capital of the loveliest of French provinces, she has borne for forty years the chain of the conqueror and bowed her head beneath the lash. But she is French still—French to the very core of her; and though her hands are bound, her soul is free!

The oldest part of the town has changed but little with the centuries. There are the narrow crooked streets, the tall half-timbered houses with their many-dormered roofs, and there is the grey Minster, which has looked down on the city through all her fortunes. To the north lie the newer quarters of the town, spick and span, and to the south are great arsenals and barracks, guarded by a mighty fortification.

For Strasbourg is now one of the great strongholds of the German Empire. Haunted by the fear that France may one day come pouring up from the south to regain her lost city, the engineers of the Kaiser have laboured with their every talent for her defence. Far-flung, a circle of fourteen forts girdles her round, and within them rampart follows rampart, culminating in the mighty citadel.

[Pg 421]

What hope can an army, however great, have of capturing such a place? In the mind of every German engineer there is but one adjective, and always one, associated with it—impregnable.

And yet, in this mid-month of October, there was in the air a feeling of uneasiness, impalpable, not to be defined or even spoken of—but present, ever-present. From far-distant posts of the Empire, troops had been hurried southward, until the usual garrison of fifteen thousand men had been more than doubled. Every rampart was manned, every wall had its sentry, and through the streets patrols moved constantly, their gaze directed at the house-tops. Their orders were to see that no one stretched a wire to any building; to arrest any one found doing so, and send him at once to Berlin, under guard.

The restaurants, the hotels, the cafés—every place where crowds assembled—swarmed with strangers, speaking French, it is true, but with an accent which, to acute ears, betrayed their origin and made one wonder at their pro-Gallic sentiments. The French and German residents of the town drew imperceptibly apart, grew a little more formal, ceased the exchange of friendly visits. No one knew what was about to happen, but every one felt that a crisis of some sort was at hand.

[Pg 422]

The commandant changed, in those days, from a bluff, self-confident and brave soldier to a shrunken craven, trembling at shadows. If he had known where the danger lay, or what it was, he would have met it valiantly enough; but he knew scarcely more than did his humblest soldier. He knew that the peril was very great; he knew that at any moment his magazines might blow up beneath his feet; he knew that what he had to guard against was the stringing of wires, the establishment of a wireless plant. Every stranger must be watched, his registration investigated, his baggage at all times kept under surveillance. A stranger carrying a bundle in the streets must always be followed. Every resident receiving a roomer, a boarder, or even a guest from another city must make immediate return to the police.

How many times had the commandant read these instructions! And always, at the last, he read twice over the paragraph at the bottom of the sheet, underlined in red:

"At all hours of the day or night, two operators will be on duty at every wireless station, their receivers at their ears, their instruments adjusted. Should they perceive any signal which they are unable to explain, especially a series of measured dashes, they will report the same immediately to the commandant, who will turn out his entire command and cause a thorough search to be made at once of all house-tops, hills and eminences of every sort within a radius of five miles. All wires whose use is not fully apparent will be torn down and all persons having access to such wires will be arrested and held for interrogation. **SHOULD THE SERIES OF SIGNALS BEGIN A SECOND TIME, ALL MAGAZINES WILL AT ONCE BE FLOODED.**"

[Pg 423]

This last sentence, printed in capitals to give it emphasis, the commandant at Strasbourg could not understand. To flood the magazines meant the loss of a million marks; besides, why should it be necessary? What possible danger could threaten those great ammunition store-houses, buried deep beneath walls of granite, protected from every conceivable mishap, and whose keys hung always above his desk? He was completely baffled; worse than that, he felt himself shaken and unnerved in face of this mysterious peril.

A copy of this order was sent to every fortress in Germany, and it is therefore not remarkable that, three days after it was issued, it should be in the hands of M. Delcassé. He read it with a lively pleasure. He was beginning to enjoy life again. He knew that the tone of his ultimatum had astonished the German ambassador; but he also knew that, while the German press still talked of

[Pg 424]

the national honour and of Germany's duty to Morocco, the inner circle about the Emperor was distinctly ill at ease. The Emperor himself had been invisible for some days, and was reported to be suffering with a severe cold.

After reading the order, Delcassé summoned Marbeau.

"How do your plans shape themselves?" he asked.

"Admirably, sir," answered the wireless chief. "We shall be ready to start to-morrow."

"When is the test to take place?"

"If everything goes well, one week from yesterday, at noon."

"You must use great care. The Germans are on their guard. Here is something that will interest you."

Marbeau took the order and read it carefully.

"If the magazines are flooded," Delcassé pointed out, "we can do nothing."

"It will be something to have occasioned the destruction of so much ammunition," Marbeau rejoined; "but we are not taking that chance. All our instruments will be tuned and tested before we start. The Germans will hear those signals but once."

A little tremour passed across Delcassé's face.

"You believe in this invention?" he asked. "You have investigated it?"

Marbeau shrugged his shoulders.

"I know nothing more of it than you do, sir. M. Vard tells me nothing, shows me nothing, persists in working alone. He is most jealous of it. But yes—I believe; when I remember the twenty-fifth of September, I cannot but believe!"

Delcassé was pacing to and fro, his hands behind him.

"Sometimes I doubt, Marbeau," he said. "Sometimes I doubt. The destruction of *La Liberté* may have been one of those strange coincidences which sometimes happen. And sometimes I hesitate; sometimes I draw back before the idea of this demonstration. For Morocco we no longer need it; I have in my possession a paper which will win that battle for us. But then, when I falter, the thought of France's future nerves me. So I stand aside and let the test proceed. But I warn you again, Marbeau, to be most careful. Do not neglect to provide a way of escape. Failure this time is of little consequence—we can always try again; but under no circumstances must this machine fall into the hands of Germany; and for you and for Vard it must be death before capture. He must not be taken alive."

"I understand, sir," said Marbeau, quietly.

"If you think Strasbourg too difficult, it is not too late to draw back. It was, perhaps, unwise for me to select it."

"The more difficult it is, the more will it dismay the enemy," Marbeau pointed out. "Let us try Strasbourg, at least. If we fail there, we can try again somewhere else."

"Well, I agree. Remember, you are not to spare expense."

"We have had to purchase two houses in order to be quite secure."

"Purchase a dozen, if you need them. The date, you say—"

"Is one week from yesterday."

"And the hour?"

"The hour of noon."

Delcassé turned to the day on his desk calendar, and wrote a large "12" upon it.

"Adieu, then, Marbeau," he said, and held out his hand. "My prayers go with you!"

Fronting on the Zurichstrasse, some half mile from the arsenal at Strasbourg, stands a great tobacco manufactory, covering two blocks and employing a thousand people. These men and women and children live for the most part in the crooked little streets of the neighbourhood, for the hours of work are long, and to walk back and forth from a distance not to be thought of. When a family has managed to scrape together a little capital, more often than not the head of it opens a tiny shop, while the younger members keep on working at the factory until the business has established itself. Then the family takes a step upward in social grade.

In a little room back of such a shop in the Hennenstrasse, on the morning of a day late in October, three men sat down to breakfast. It was a silent meal, for each of the three was preoccupied. They were roughly dressed in the blouses and coarse trousers of labourers, and their faces were covered with a week's stubble of beard. One was white-haired, old, and seemingly very feeble; but the other two were in the prime of life. At last the meal was finished, and the two younger men pushed back their chairs and looked at each other; then they looked at their companion, who, with vacant eyes, was staring at the opposite wall so intently that the other two involuntarily glanced around at it.

"It is time for you to go, Lieutenant," said one of the men, in a low voice. "Tell me again what you have to do, so that I may be sure there is no mistake."

"What I have to do is this, General," said the other: "from here, I go to the house we know of, taking a circuitous route, loitering on the way, and making certain that I am not followed. If I find myself followed, I will pass this shop, dropping my handkerchief in front of it and then turning back to pick it up. If I am not followed, I enter the other house, mount to the roof and make sure that everything is in order. At ten minutes to twelve, I hoist into place the two arms to which our wires are secured, stretching them tight by means of the winch which we have provided, and then I at once start the clockwork. I then descend, make my way to the tram-station, and take a third-class ticket to Colmar, where I will await you at Valentin's cabaret. If you do not arrive by sundown, I am to go on to Paris to make my report."

[Pg 428]

"That is right. You have your passport?"

"Yes."

"Let me see your watch."

They compared watches and found that they both showed twenty minutes past ten.

"Adieu, then," said the elder man; "and let there be no failure."

"Trust me, General!" and the Lieutenant saluted and went out through the shop.

"And now, M. Vard," said Marbeau, in a low tone, "the hour has come."

The old man nodded, and together they left the room. Marbeau stopped to secure the door, then followed Vard up to the first landing, where there was another heavy door, which the Frenchman also bolted; so with the next landing and the next. He smiled grimly as he thought of M. Delcassé's warning to leave open a road of escape! He had, indeed, provided such a road, but he carried it in his pocket.

[Pg 429]

At last they stood in a tiny room under the ridge of the roof. It was lighted by a single dormer, and, looking out through this, one could see over the house-tops, half a mile away, the grim wall of the arsenal. Before the dormer stood a table, to which was bolted a metal framework, supporting the box, with its sides of glass half-covered with tin-foil. It was mounted on a pivot, and from it two heavy wires ran to a key such as telegraphers use, and then down to a series of powerful batteries standing on the floor.

"You are sure it is all right?" asked Marbeau, almost in a whisper.

For answer, Vard closed a switch, opened the key and then depressed it slowly. There was a crackle of electricity, and a low humming like that of a giant top.

"No, no!" gasped Marbeau, and snatched the switch open.

The inventor smiled.

"There is no danger," he said, "until the other current is turned on."

Marbeau's face was livid and beaded with perspiration. He wiped it with a shaking hand.

"Nevertheless you startled me," he said. "The sound the machine makes has a frightful menace in it!" Then he looked at his watch. "It is now eleven."

[Pg 430]

Vard nodded, and bent again above his apparatus, touching it here and there with the touch of a lover—tightening a wire, examining a contact, testing the vibrator....

His usual pale face was flaming with excitement, and his eyes shone with a strange fire.

Marbeau glanced at him uneasily, then stared out at the grey wall of the arsenal. Upon its summit a sentry walked to and fro with the precision of a machine. High above him flapped the imperial flag of Germany, displaying its eagles and complacent motto. Marbeau, like every Frenchman, considered that flag an insult, for the lower arm of its cross bore the date "1870," and he stared out at it now, dreaming of the future, dreaming of the day when France should tear it down....

Vard touched him on the arm.

"I should like to see the plan of the fort again," he said.

Marbeau opened his shirt, and from a little oilskin bag produced a square of tracing-paper. He unfolded it and handed it to the inventor.

"This is the side toward us," he said. "There are the magazines, the main one being here in the centre."

With a nod of understanding, Vard carried the drawing to the window and compared it carefully with the stretch of wall, swinging his pivoted machine from side to side to be sure that its range was ample. Then he refolded the map and returned it to Marbeau.

[Pg 431]

"It must be almost the hour," he said.

With a start, Marbeau pulled out his watch. It showed fifteen minutes to twelve. Then, watch in hand, he stood gazing out at the bastion. Four minutes passed, five, six, seven....

Suddenly from the fort came the deep boom of an alarm gun. A minute later, a file of men appeared upon the summit of the bastion; a gate, away to the right, swung open and an armed battalion marched out at the double-quick.

"The signal!" gasped Marbeau. "It is the signal! Their wireless men have picked it up!"

Again the alarm gun boomed sullenly, and they could hear the faint, shrill calling of a bugle.

Then came the distant thunder of the answering guns from the forts about the town; from the streets rose excited voices, the clatter of running feet....

One minute—two—three—

"Now!" said Marbeau, snapped shut his watch and thrust it into his pocket.

Vard, his face twitching, closed the switch and touched the key. Again came the sharp crackle of flame, the deep hum of the vibrator. Marbeau, the marrow frozen in his bones but with the sweat pouring from his face, stared out—and then, close beside him, came a white burst of flame—the horrible odour of burning flesh—

[Pg 432]

He jerked around to see Vard fallen forward above the table, while about his hands played those livid tongues of fire....

Half an hour before midnight of that day, a man, roughly dressed, with a stubble of beard masking his face, appeared at the Ministry of Marine, was passed at once by the guard at the entrance and made his way quickly to the office of M. Delcassé. He tapped at the door, which was instantly opened by the Minister himself.

"Ah, Marbeau," he said, quietly. "Come in. We have failed, then?"

"Yes, we have failed," groaned Marbeau, and sank into a chair.

Delcassé touched him gently on the shoulder.

"Do not take it so much to heart," he said. "There was something wrong, perhaps. We can try again—"

"No, we cannot try again," and Marbeau's face was piteous.

"Vard is not captured!"

"No; he is dead."

"But his instrument—his invention?"

[Pg 433]

"Is destroyed, fused, burnt to a mere mass of metal," and Marbeau told the story of that last moment.

"But what happened? What occurred?" asked the Minister dazedly.

"I do not know—I was staring at the fort. He may have had a seizure and fallen across his instrument, or he may have broken the circuit in some way—displaced a wire, perhaps—and received the full shock himself. It was over in an instant. He was dead when I dragged him away."

For some time Delcassé walked thoughtfully up and down.

"You could not, by any possibility, reconstruct it?" he asked at last.

"I fear not, sir; he told me nothing. I do not even know the principle involved."

Again Delcassé paced back and forth; then he sat down before his desk, with a gesture of acquiescence.

"So that dream is ended," he said. "It was too great, no doubt, to be accomplished. God willed otherwise. But at least we are richer than we were. From time to time we will terrify these Germans with a little blast of wireless. That will be amusing, and it may cost them some ammunition. And in the struggle over Morocco France wins! That is assured! Good night, General. You need rest."

All the world knows now, of course, that France did win. On November fourth, the question of her supremacy in Morocco was settled once for all by the treaty signed at Berlin. When Europe learned the terms of that treaty, it was shaken with amazement. For Germany had receded, after swearing that she would never recede; had guaranteed to France a free hand in Morocco, with the right to establish a protectorate if she thought proper;—and in exchange for all this received a small strip of the French Congo! Yes, there was one other thing she received of which the treaty made no mention. When Herr von Kiderlen-Waechter had affixed his signature, Ambassador Cambon, who acted for France, gave him silently an envelope sealed with a black seal. He glanced at the signature of the paper it contained, and placed it carefully in his pocket. An hour afterwards, he handed it to his Emperor.

[Pg 434]

And two days later, Admiral Heinrich Pachmann, returning from an audience with the Emperor, went quietly to his quarters. At the usual hour, his aide, coming for orders, rapped at his door. There was no answer, and, opening the door, the aide glanced inside. Pachmann lay sprawled across the floor, a bullet in his heart. His stiff hand gripped a duelling-pistol—a handsome weapon, which bore, chased along its barrel, the motto of his house, "I love and I obey!"

Typographical errors corrected in the text:

Page 113 vizualise changed to visualize

Page 326 "of" added to "this side of the water?"

Page 364 Hohenzvollerns changed to Hohenzollerns

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE DESTROYER: A TALE OF
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