1925

The Story of a Fatal Peace

by Edgar Wallace, 1875-1932

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„You, will we Hate with a lasting Hate.
We will never forego our Hate.“
—The Hymn of Hate

Introduction

MY object in writing this story is to bring home to readers the inevitable consequence of ending the present war in any other way than by the complete subjugation of Germany, and the destruction of Prussian militarism. Despite the established proofs that Germany planned and willed the present war with the set object of conquest, there are many who are not alive to the probable results of an unfortunate peace. That there would be a terrible sequel in the lifetime of the present generation is certain.

We cannot hope to end wars unless we crush the only power in the world which aims at securing aggrandisement by force of arms. We may not always find ourselves so closely allied to three great military nations. It may not even be possible, however much the Powers forming the present entente sympathise with each other, to show a solid front and fight side by side in some future conflict.

The only way to secure permanent peace for Europe is to destroy the power, which for forty years has rattled its scabbard at its peace-loving neighbours, and to destroy that power now.

Edgar Wallace.

London, September, 1915.

Chapter I

"YOU don't really believe all that nonsense about another German war?"

The stout man asked the question almost irritably, as though the statement he challenged had been especially designed for his distress. The tall young man who sprawled on the grass did not answer immediately. He was chewing at a long grass stalk and gazing meditatively toward the blue waters of Bank Bay almost under his eyes, for he had chosen the edge of the cliff for comfort and for a reason which he was not at the moment prepared to admit.

He was a man of twenty-seven and looked older. His grey eyes, clear and grave, were directed absently to the streak of amber beach where one figure strolled in solitary state.

From the distance he was unable to identify the lonely girl who for an hour past had been enjoying what was apparently the gentlest and the most monotonous of exercises.

The elder man repeated the question and Grant Macrae turned with a start.

"Believe it? Of course I believe it, my dear Mr. Massey," he answered lazily. "I never say anything I don't believe."

Mr. Holman Massey wiped his forehead, for the day was hot and the climb up from Chadleigh Norton had been a distressing experience for one of his age and figure.

"This is one of the infernal sensations your confounded paper is always springing upon the public; I suppose you are trying its effect upon me?" he accused.

Grant Macrae laughed and rose to his feet. "We shall see," was all he said.

"I shan't see it in my lifetime, please God," said Mr. Massey shortly; "nor yours, either. My dear man, surely we have had enough of war to last us for a century--"

Grant turned to him abruptly. "Do you think that the peace we made ten years ago was a good one?" he asked.

Mr. Massey hesitated. In his heart of hearts he thought, on the contrary, that the peace had been a very bad one.

"We were sick of the war," he said; "we thought things were going well and then we found they were going rotten--dash it! we had to make peace."

"On terms," said Grant drill. "Good Lord! to think that I was only a kid at the time with no idea--"

He stopped himself in time. He had no desire to be dragged into a long argument--an argument which could not fail to end with irritation to himself; for Mr. Massey was one of those stolid, irascible Englishmen who made up the gaps of reasoned argument with spluttering denunciations of all who opposed his view or questioned his logic.

Grant's eyes went back to the beach below.

"I can tell you one thing, which isn't two," said Mr. Massey. He spoke with the emphasis and employed the crude figure which he invariably utilised when he desired to be unusually impressive. "My daughter isn't at all impressed by your point of view." He looked keenly to observe the effect of his words, and was a little disappointed to find that the young man was seemingly untouched at this news of Olga Massey's disapproval.

"Your daughter is a very intelligent young person," drawled Grant Macrae; "which is a little singular, remembering--"

He nearly said something very rude, and indeed was at that moment in no mood to finesse with this unimaginative man. But, suppressing a very natural inclination, he went on--

"Considering the tendency of present-day young womanhood. But I can assure you, my dear Mr. Massey, that, grieved as I am to find myself in opposition to Miss Massey, I still hold the views I have held for years and shall continue to hold until, in the near future, I receive, as I am afraid I shall receive, confirmation of all my misgivings."

Mr. Massey snorted. "I am going down to the village," he said, looking at his watch. "Come and dine to-night."

"I'm sorry," said the other, so quickly that, had Mr. Massey been a man who had had greater experience of men of the Grant Macrae type, he might have suspected a hasty improvisation. "I've got a lot of work to do to-night, and I'm looking forward to a solitary dinner and an unbroken evening."

Mr. Massey grunted.

"Who's that?" he asked suddenly, and pointed to the beach.

Grant smiled.

"That is precisely the question I have been asking myself for the last two hours," he said unblushingly.

"Is it a man or woman?" asked Mr. Massey, fixing his pince-nez.

Grant strained his eyes.

"It looks to me rather like a young girl, and I can't exactly place her. Anyway, she is not an inhabitant of Chadleigh Norton," he said, after a pause.

He might say this with assurance, because the people of that aristocratic village were very few and as familiar to him as the fingers of his hands.

Many people have taken and, it must be confessed, accepted the credit for discovering Chadleigh Norton. Situated on the wooded slope of a valley through which ran the tiny Chad, Chadleigh Norton had once been no more than a collection of insanitary and tumble-down cottages, rented by a small community of shepherds. Some genius--and Grant Macrae was generally regarded as being identified with that genius--had seen the possibilities of the place, had bought up every house, and had established an unique garden city, within a mile of the single line of rail which connected the little coast town of Burland and that great world, the centre of which is Piccadilly Circus.

There had come into being a new and a marvellous village.

At the far end of the one tree-planted avenue was the red Georgian house, with its big outhouses, of Sir John Venniman. Nobody knows, and it was a standing wonder to Chadleigh Norton, why this man, who had been the greatest chemist of his day and was now pursuing investigations into a branch of science foreign to that in which he had made his name famous, should have chosen this community, wholly frivolous and pleasure-seeking, to establish his new laboratories. Farther along "The Street," as it was called, was the severe stone bungalow of Holman Massey; whilst next door, and separated only by the thickly planted pines, was the more ornate establishment of Sir Max Graaf. Sir Max, who had spent many years in Africa, had endeavoured to reproduce the solid Dutch Colonial style of architecture, but stone-flagged stoeps, wedded to colonnaded piazza, and with a Gothic tower at one angle of the building moreover, had considerably interfered with his original plan.

Grant Macrae's comfortable cottage was not visible from the road, being hidden in the midst of a tangle of trees, and only from the lower slope of the valley was Casa Blanca, with its dazzling white facade, to be seen. Mortimer Brown, the only other "villager," lived at the southern extreme of the street in splendid aloofness--although he was, by all accounts, an American in point of nationality and a democrat in politics.

"She must be somebody staying with Graaf," said Mr. Massey, studying the figure on the beach intently; and then, with heavy jocularity: "By Jove! I know who it is, Macrae--it's a German spy!"

The joke, feeble as it was, afforded him the greatest gratification, and he chuckled all the way down the hill at his own humour. Grant was too preoccupied either to be amused or to resent this gentle jest at his expense. The national situation as he viewed it excited no sense of merriment. He was the editor, and held the larger number of the shares in the company which controlled the *Daily Megaphone*. A wealthy man, blessed with a greater share of this world's goods than usually falls to the lot of humanity, he had taken up the work on the newspaper which his father had founded, with a keener sense of

his responsibilities to the people than is usually found in a man of his class similarly circumstanced.

"I must tell that to Olga," smiled Mr. Massey, and pointed with his stick at two people at the foot of the hill path.

Olga Massey was a tall, fair, and eminently prepossessing girl. The radiance of womanhood, which shone in her clear blue eyes and shimmered in her glorious hair, was negatived by a hint of masculinity which her strong jaw and her firm mouth revealed. Even this disappeared when she flashed a dazzling smile at Macrae as they neared one another.

"Mr. Macrae has been looking for German submarines," she bantered, and Massey gurgled in his delight.

"Exactly what I was saying," he said. "We shall really have to muzzle old Macrae, Sir Max."

He addressed the stout man by the girl's side, and Max Graaf, clean-shaven and square built, a little red of face, becoming in a man who loves the fields and the open air, shot an inquiring glance at Grant.

"I don't think this eccentricity of yours is at all funny, you know," he said reprovingly.

"To which particular eccentricity are you referring?" asked Grant.

"This anti-German policy that you run in your paper," replied the other. "Surely to heaven we've had enough of that sort of business ten years ago. I've just been reading this morning's *Megaphone*. The leading article is little less than disgusting. What you do is to charge a Government which tried and failed, and honourably admitted its failure, with double dealing."

"In other words," said Grant coolly, "I am suggesting that the German Government, which, by trickery and bribery, procured men to support and speak in favour of a peace which left this country at the mercy of Germany, is going systematically to work to bring its plans to fruition, so that it will, as it must inevitably, attack this country with a minimum of danger to itself."

Sir Max frowned, and there was a hard light in his eye.

"I had hoped," lie said deliberately, "I had hoped, when I came to this village, that here we should be free from all sorts of controversies and that one would find peace in these pleasant surroundings--"

"Peace!" interrupted Grant Macrae bitterly, "always peace! You cannot always get the kind of peace you want, Sir Max."

"What do you mean?" asked the other sharply.

"Exactly what I say," said Grant; and with a little nod to Mr. Massey he raised his hat to the girl and, turning, strode through the plantation which hides the village to seaward, and disappeared.

Sir Max Graaf said nothing, but there was an unpleasant look in his cold blue eyes as he watched the vanishing figure. What he might have said at that moment will never be known, for Olga Massey, uttering an exclamation, pointed to the sky.

"Look!" she said.

The two men turned their gaze toward the clear blue, where, poised like a tiny bird, and the hum of its engine growing with every second to a dull, rattling roar, a white-winged aeroplane was circling, corkscrew fashion, preparatory to making a landing.

"That is young Ballin," said Sir Max with a smile.

"I thought he'd gone to town," said the girl in wonder.

Sir Max shook his head.

"He went to Koblenz yesterday," he said. "He is something of an enthusiast."

The monoplane came to the earth as lightly as a bird, ran for a hundred yards across the green, level golf-links which had been laid out on top of the cliff, and came to a stop before the party. A young man in brown overalls waved his hand gaily, and his mechanic seated behind him jumped out and assisted his employer to alight.

The newcomer was a tall, fair, good-looking young man, unmistakably Teutonic.

"And here we are from Koblenz," he said, without a trace of any foreign accent, "and I have done the journey in three hours."

"Wonderful child," smiled the girl.

The young man skinned his gloves and, unbuttoning the brown cover-all, revealed himself in the garb of civilisation.

"And what is happening in Koblenz?" asked Massey.

The young man smiled and shrugged his shoulders.

"It was a painful occasion," he said flippantly, "being no less than the final day of one of those Indemnity Weeks which have been such a feature of German life during the past ten years. Think of it," he went on thoughtfully, speaking half to himself, "for ten long years every town in Germany, in that 'potato-bread spirit' to which one of your statesmen referred, has been hoarding its every spare penny, has been working day and night at its industries for half salary, has been living without luxury, without strong drink, and without unnecessary rest, to one object."

There was something in his tone which caused Olga Massey to look at him a little curiously.

"What is that?" she asked.

The young man started as though he had been awakened from a reverie.

"To pay your infernal indemnity," he said lightly. "What else? If you and your Allies insist upon my unfortunate country handing over thousands of millions of marks, and if the Government has already exhausted its financial strength on the war, it is left to the people themselves to supply the deficiency."

He spoke without bitterness, without resentment, a little regretfully perhaps, of the terrible condition which had obtained in Germany since the end of the war. Ten years had passed and Germany was still poor, by her own confession. It was a point of honour that she should raise money to pay off her indemnities, and she had applied herself to this end with a vigour, with a courage, with a singleness of purpose beyond all praise. Yet she was poor. Her newspapers owned as much. Her Chancellor, speaking in the new subdued strain so foreign to the mouthpiece of a some time Prussian militarism, made no secret of her poverty.

Herr Ballin shook out his overall absent-mindedly and turned it inwards to fold, when something dropped from the pocket. The girl saw it first. It was a curious silver device, a skull and crossbones superimposed upon the letters 15. Following the direction of her eyes the young man saw it, stooped with a muttered oath, grasped it, and thrust it in his pocket. She saw he was flushed and a little angry and wondered why.

"A love token, Fräulein," said Carl Ballin lightly.

Chapter II

GRANT MACRAE settled down with the correspondence which he had brought from town. His post bag had been very heavy of late, for his attitude towards Germany had excited a more than ordinarily prolific correspondence. That the majority of the letters he received were abusive, and no small number of them threatening, did not in any way disturb his equanimity. No journalist takes up a cause, however good, but that he finds a vicious man or two who can spare the time to pour forth the vials of his wrath upon paper.

If Grant had consulted the material interests of his newspaper, he might well have let the matter go and drop a subject which irritated so many people. Had he listened to his advertising manager and his publisher, he would have certainly taken this course. But in his heart of hearts Grant Macrae knew that what he was doing was the right thing. Ten years had passed since the plenipotentiaries of the Powers had signed the Peace of Copenhagen. The appearance of new and unexpected forces in the field had brought about the collapse of Austria and the shortening of the German line in a last vain and desperate endeavour to save their cause. It had marked, too, the rapid retirement of the German in the West to the line of the Meuse. And then, with staggering suddenness, Germany had asked for terms, and instantly there had arisen in Great Britain at a thousand points eloquent men and women who pleaded for peace. "Let the war end," they cried. "Give us back our sons and our brothers. The German is crushed and beaten; he is humiliated before the world, and has ceased to be a power for evil."

And the German had been handsome in a way. He had yielded up the provinces of Alsace and Lorraine to France, he had accepted without dispute the Russian reoccupation of Galicia and German Poland, he had acquiesced in the transfer of the Trentino and the disputed territories on the Adriatic littoral to Italy, and he had shrugged his shoulders with good-humoured despair when Serbia had taken to herself the greater part of Bosnia, while Roumania had extended her border line into Transylvania.

There were only two points at issue: one was the existence of Germany's fleet, which had remained intact behind the guns of Wilhelmshaven and was, by reason of the building of new ships, more powerful now than ever it had been before; the other was the continuance of the Hohenzollern line on the throne of the United German States. Germany bargained frankly. The cause of war had disappeared. Belgium had been restored to its heroic king; a huge and immediate contribution, advanced by the Powers, had been paid to her; and the whole of the German Colonial Empire was now under the French and the British flags. What more could the British want? The British wanted--and desired this most earnestly--the surrender of the German fleet, and the end of all Germany's pretensions to sea-power. They desired, no less earnestly, the passing of the Hohenzollern dynasty.

At the first suggestion, supported though it was by the highest naval authorities of the land, there arose, as it seemed, a veritable shrieking multitude to protest against this unnecessary humiliation of a great race. "Germany has had her lesson; let her keep her fleet," said one orator. And that sentence, "She has had her lesson; let her keep her fleet," became a catch phrase in the pacifist circles of the world.

Great Britain hesitated, a little bewildered by this unexpected presentation of Germany's case. While she hesitated, the United States of America threw their weight into the balance. American journals which had been pro-German suddenly became flatteringly pro-English. The representatives of Germany, who for a year had been applauding the atrocities which Germany had committed on sea and land, and had been holding up the British to the hatred of the world, melted to a sudden mildness. The criers of peace were strengthened by the docility with which Germany had surrendered her colonies and by the readiness with which she had agreed to pay the enormous demands of the nations involved in the war.

"What shall we do?" asked a vacillating England! France shrugged her shoulders and said in so many words: "If you fight on to destroy the Navy we are with you." Russia, more interested in the destruction of a fleet which threatened her Baltic towns, was all for fighting. Then unsuspected advocates of peace had appeared in most surprising places. Members of the Government and Opposition alike who had been suspected of unnecessary antipathy against the Germans, stood up and boldly advocated an immediate peace, and demonstrated by the simple processes of arithmetic the impossibility of a German naval recovery and the innocuous character of the German fleet.

And the question of the Hohenzollern dynasty had most surprisingly and most mysteriously vanished.

And so peace was made, and there was a Cabinet resignation or two. A succession of hectic speeches, a wild and furious General Election, which brought the Opposition back in overwhelming numbers, pledged, vaguely enough, "to maintain Britain's naval supremacy," but in the main to conduct recuperative legislation.

In truth the country had been drained of its surplus resources. The enormous call which had been made upon its manhood and its treasure had disorganised its industries, and the fact that, for the moment at any rate, popular prejudice shut out one of the most important of Britain's markets, all helped to bring about a trade depression the like of which had never been seen in the history of the country.

And so peace had come, and in retaliation for the many crimes against humanity and against the world which Germany had committed in the course of the war, the Allied nations settled down to a tacit boycott of German products. At first the German had attempted to overcome this boycott by the establishment of branch houses in Switzerland; but he had found the handicap of supplying two profits, one to himself and one to his middleman, had struck at the very root of his commercial system. He hoped to re-establish his trade by the method which he had always adopted, of taking a small profit and underselling his competitors. The Swiss scheme was unworkable, and the German settled down, on the urgent advice of his economists, to work out his salvation in Germany. It is not surprising that the Allied boycott broke down. If you do not buy from the German, the German cannot buy from you. Two years after the conclusion of peace, conditions obtained which, if they were not normal, were rapidly approaching normality. The best drilled and the best disciplined nation of Europe was engaged in making good the enormous losses which Germany had suffered during the war. Germany was determined not only to pay off the indemnity in the quickest possible space of time, but to secure the surpluses which were required to reorganise her army and her navy. Four

years after the signing of the peace at Copenhagen, a test mobilisation brought to the colours 600,000 men in twenty-four hours. To say that every man, woman and child of reasoning age throughout the Empire was working day and night for the Fatherland is to be guilty of no exaggeration. The "potato-bread spirit" was abroad with a vengeance. After the Socialistic disturbances, which had been so ruthlessly suppressed, at the end of the war, parties had practically disappeared from the Reichstag, and even the powerful Trades Unions had come into line, and had permitted, even urged, substantial reductions in the wage rates. Men and women were working seventy hours a week at a 25 per cent. reduction of salary, and from their shrunken incomes were contributing large sums of money to indemnity funds, which had as their object the reduction of the National Debt.

The majority of people in England saw in this only an altogether admirable exemplification of the German spirit of thrift. The German was very thorough in all his methods. Something like a commercial entente had been established between Germany and Russia, and a commercial treaty with France. France might indeed settle down with a certain complacency to the enjoyment of the fruits of war. No longer was that group of statuary on the Place de la Concorde, representing the lost provinces, decorated with wreaths and flowers. The lost provinces had been regained.

Sometimes there crept an ugly note into the pleasant hum of industrial Germany. Once a party of English tourists in Strasbourg had been insulted, and one member struck by an excited Prussian officer, who had wildly threatened a day of reprisal both for England and for America. "That hornless cow," as this infuriated major of Jägers had called America, had been for a long time the object of German displeasure, in spite of the fact that the two countries maintained a huge volume of trade between one another. The sequel to this impassioned outbreak had been swift and tragic. The ruffled tourists complained to the local police station, reports of the event had been sent to Army Headquarters, and that night the Prussian officer had been seized, tried by court-martial under an article of the new military law, and had been shot before the hotel in which the horrified tourists were staying. This was evidence, if evidence was needed, of Germany's sincerity, said the enthusiastic pacifists.

Men like Grant Macrae read into this act a more sinister meaning.

Again:

An obscure East Prussian paper had published a venomously anti-British article, full of vague and ominous threats, and hinting mysteriously at a time which was not far distant when Germany would rise, phoenix-like, from her ashes and overwhelm "her hereditary enemy." The sequel here was almost as swift and infinitely more dramatic. The issue of the paper was confiscated, and by proclamation the readers were ordered, under pain of the severest penalty, to return the copies in their possession to the nearest police-station. The editor and the whole of his staff were seized, his plant dynamited--in their zeal the East Prussian police destroyed half the street in which the printing works stood--and the editor, brought before a court-martial, was sentenced to twenty years' solitary confinement in a fortress. A protest meeting against the severity of this sentence was broken up, the principal speaker sabred in the street, and a dozen other people were killed or wounded in the course of the riot which followed.

Grant Macrae had a copy of this historic number of the *Tilsiter Zeitung*. He had, too, the speech of the hapless major of Jägers and, further, the diatribe which was delivered by a member of the Right in the Reichstag, and which had been suppressed in the official records--and they were all curiously alike.

Each hinted of "a coming day," each threatened dire consequences, and each had contained the phrase, "the men of '15." Some reference to present-day Germany which he found in one of the letters he was so carefully perusing, caused him to open his cabinet and take out the typed copies of these statements to refresh his memory on the point, and he was leaning over his desk, head on hand, tracing the German script with the end of his pencil, when a gentle tap at the window made him sit upright. His study was at the back of the house, a big, plain room, two walls of which were covered by bookshelves; a big French window opened on to the lawn, and this ordinarily was protected by a roll shutter, which could be lowered or raised from the inside of the room. He remembered that he had not closed this shutter, and rose, pulling back the curtain from the window. In the darkness without he saw the figure of a girl. He turned the key of the French window, and, opening it, stepped out.

"I am so sorry to disturb you," said the gentle voice of his visitor.

Grant raised his eyebrows in wonder. He knew all the inhabitants of this exclusive little village, and this was evidently a stranger. Now strangers do not as a rule come to Chadleigh Norton. It lies off the main road, and offers nothing in the shape of accommodation to the tripper.

"Won't you come in?" he said courteously, and stepped back to allow her to enter.

In the light of the table-lamp he saw a girl a little above medium height, neatly dressed, with that expensive neatness which distinguishes the garb of the well-to-do. She was straight and, as far as he could see, well formed. But it was her face, with its pure pallor, and the dark eyes, which arrested his attention.

To say that she was pretty would have been short of the mark. She was nearly beautiful with her perfect oval face and her delicately-modelled mouth. Her hair was of a curious russet brown, which seemed red in the artificial light. Her eyebrows were delicately traced. Her brow, so far as he could see under the little hat, was broad and intelligent. There was laughter in her eyes as she returned his scrutiny.

"You are at liberty to remind me that there is a front door to your house," she smiled.

"I couldn't do anything so rude," said Grant, closing the window and drawing the curtains across.

He pulled up a chair and, with a little nod of thanks, the girl, perfectly self-possessed and wholly mistress of the situation, settled down in its voluminous depths.

"I don't as a rule knock at people's windows," she said, "but when one has quite a mysterious errand, it is only right that one should behave in a more or less mysterious fashion."

Grant seated himself at his desk and scrutinised her with pardonable curiosity.

"If I am not mistaken," he said, "you are the young lady who was enjoying a solitary ramble on the beach this afternoon?"

She nodded, and he waited for her to disclose the object of her visit.

"I shan't keep you very long," she said. "You know Sir John Venniman?"

Grant nodded.

"Most people know Sir John Venniman," he said. "He is one of the few men who enjoy a fame which carries beyond the confines of Chadleigh Norton. Do you wish to see him?" he asked.

She shook her head.

"If I had wished to see him I should have gone to him," she said calmly.

He thought he detected a slight accent in her voice, a softness of certain consonants which is observable in the speech of youthful southerners of America. Her next words confirmed his diagnosis.

"I am an American," she said, "and therefore my eccentricity is a little excusable."

He smiled as he remembered that Sir Max had applied that very word to his own attitude.

"I have not noticed any particular eccentricity--a word with which I am not greatly in love to-day," he said, but she stopped him.

"It isn't usual for a young woman to make surreptitious visits to a comparatively young man," she said drill; "but the occasion demanded secrecy, and I am sure you will forgive what must seem to you to be an unwarrantable intrusion, when I have explained the object of my visit."

Grant was wondering what was coming next. For a moment she did not speak, and then she asked abruptly: "Do you admire the narrative style of the *Arabian Nights?*--I ask you because I am a little nervous, realising I am speaking with one who is a director of public thought and a mentor of diction."

He smiled responsive to the laughter in her eyes.

"It is a style before all admirably adapted to confessions," he said gravely, "and it is one which I am always endeavouring to inculcate into the reportorial mind."

She settled herself, clasped and unclasped her hands a little nervously, and he thought he detected, in spite of her buoyancy, some evidence of distress.

"My name is Ruth Manton," she began. "I am the daughter of Colonel Gregory Manton, of Memphis, Tennessee. I was also my father's sole heiress, and when dear papa died, years and years ago, I came to Europe and have been ever since a wanderer on the face of the earth, for I like travel, and I was at one time rather keen on the ethnological side."

Grant nodded.

"I am also," she went on, "though you might not suppose this, a very serious patriot. I think my country is just the greatest country on earth, and whilst I recognise all its faults and all its drawbacks, I want it to be the greatest country on earth for everlasting."

"That is a very laudable desire," said Grant, "and one which does you infinite credit."

"You are laughing at me," she said.

"Indeed no," he protested. "I am very much impressed. Patriotism is one of those rare qualities which one seldom sees walking alone in these days. Sometimes it is supported on the sturdy arm of Interest, sometimes it is so cleverly disguised as to be hardly distinguishable from political jargon, and more often than not it is the arrow-head of a weathercock which records the wind of prosperity."

"Very pretty," she approved, and Grant was surprised into a chuckle.

"Well, I'm a patriot, and I've views," she went on. "You've views, too, and I've read your articles for months past. I've just come back from Germany," she said, with that curious abruptness of hers. "As soon as I got to London I inquired where you were, discovered that you were out of town, guessed you were here, and came straight down. I've been waiting an opportunity to speak to you. I came from Freiburg, where I was staying at the Kaiserhof. You know the hotel? There are rather pleasant grounds, and I was sunning myself rather earlier in the morning than a visitor usually goes abroad, when, like a melodrama detective, I 'heard voices.' You must understand that the gardens are laid out with lots of high box-hedges, rather on the lines of an easy maze, and my chair was placed against one of these hedges--the owners of the voices being on the other side. They spoke in English--which of all languages is most seldom heard in Germany to-day--and one said:

"'If Venniman's invention is really what you say it is, we may dismiss all idea of taking England, and our American plan drops to the ground.'"

She stopped and was a little disappointed by his calmness. He saw her disappointment, and hastened to explain his failure to respond.

"It was awfully interesting," he said with a smile, "but not necessarily thrilling. For instance, quite unimportant people could have been speculating upon this scheme or the other for embarrassing England." The girl nodded.

"So I thought myself," she said, "and I walked on till I came round to the break in the hedge, being curious to see who it was discussing such high politics."

"And you saw?"

"I saw," said the girl quietly, "Baron von Krussman, the Imperial Chancellor, and a young man, whom I afterwards discovered was a Mr. Carl Ballin."

Grant whistled.

"The devil you did," he said.

"I left Freiburg by the same train as Mr. Ballin, and I learnt he was coming to England to make a flight from Chadleigh Norton to one of the Rhine towns, and I learnt other things which I needn't tell you for the moment."

She leant forward, looking seriously at her host.

"Mr. Macrae," she said, "I have read every leading article on Germany you have ever written, I think, and I am more than ever convinced that your view is right. There is going to be some very bad trouble with Germany. It isn't only towards you her attack is to be directed, but ultimately towards America."

This was Macrae's view also, but it was one to which he had never given expression, desiring to keep the issue clear.

"That's all," said the girl suddenly. "I'm afraid I've interrupted your work dreadfully."

She rose as if to go, and Grant followed her example.

"Only one thing I would like to ask you," he said, "and that is this: are you pursuing your interesting investigations as a hobby?"

"I am pursuing them as a duty," she said quietly. "Possibly you think I'm rather absurd, and you may suggest a thousand and one things that a girl could do with her spare time besides acting as a sort of private detective. But, believe me, Mr. Macrae," she went on earnestly, "I feel this matter very deeply. After all, why shouldn't I do a little bit for my country? You see, in the United States we confine our secret service work to discovering how much Mr. Gink paid Mr. Blink for a road-car concession, and we get over the question of

foreign intrigues against the United States by the simple process of saying that they don't exist. I'm no Anglo-maniac, but I realise that Britain stands as a bulwark between America and her European enemy, and that the crushing of England would give Germany something more than the few Colonies you have taken from her--it would put at her mercy eighty million people of a free nation which has never accepted the responsibility of maintaining an army commensurate with its size and its immense wealth. America is to-day the fat cow for the milking. America will have very bad trouble with Germany, for I am convinced that Germany's objective has been shifting."

Grant turned his keen eyes upon hers.

"Exactly what do you mean by that?" he asked.

"I mean," she said emphatically, "that the objective is no longer England and her Colonies, but that 1915 taught Germany the immense possibilities of warfare, and revealed to her possibilities of conquest undreamt of. The subjugation of England is not the be-all and the end-all of German ambition. England is only the mid-way. She is out for bigger game--and it is all England's fault! You left Germany with a fleet, and you left Prussian militarism with its symbol. What was the centre and core of militarism? It was the house of Hohenzollern. You took Napoleon and sent him to St. Helena--you did not destroy Napoleonism until then; you didn't scotch the Zulu peril till you banished Ketchewayo and Dinizulu; you smashed Mahdism when you smashed the Mahdi's tomb, you ended Krugerism when you drove the old Boer to exile--oh, I could multiply the instances over and over again. And what did you do with Prussian militarism? What lesson did you learn from the past? You crushed the people and left the symbol. Worst folly of all, you left it, its sure shield--a navy!"

She spoke rapidly, vehemently, and her little hands were clenched until the knuckles showed whitely.

"I am scared because I understand and have faith in history as the surest guide and prophet," she said. Then suddenly she went pink. "You think I'm a histrionic bore, don't you?"

She rose to her feet, smiling.

"Indeed I don't," said Grant seriously. "I wish you would let me see you again in town."

She thought awhile.

"I would like to call upon you at your office. What is the best hour for seeing you?"

"Any time after twelve," he said. "Won't you lunch with me on Monday?"

She hesitated.

"It is rather difficult," she smiled, "to draw a line when the passionate patriot ends and the decorous lady begins. Won't you lunch with me? I am staying at the Carlton."

He bowed.

"With all the pleasure in life," he said. "And now I will see you to your car."

"Please don't," she said quickly. "I came a long way round, and committed all sorts of trespasses to reach you without observation. If you don't mind I'll go back the same way. My chauffeur is waiting at the other end of the road--indeed, I had rather you didn't," she said, and she was so earnest that he nodded his acquiescence. He walked with her across the lawn, and took leave

upon the little path which runs through the plantation to the eastward of the house and ends at the gate giving upon the road.

He watched her until she was out of sight, then he turned and walked slowly back to the house, and sat before his table, his head on his breast, his fingers beating a ceaseless tattoo upon his blotting-pad, certain evidence of his preoccupation.

Chapter III

The girl walked quickly along the path, flashing a little electric torch she took from her bag to guide her, and came to the end of the plantation. She was lifting the latch when a hand fell heavily upon her shoulder. She turned with a start.

In the darkness she saw two men, and there came to her a sudden sense of peril.

"What do you want?" she asked quickly.

"Just a few words of conversation," said he whose hand still held her.

The voice was that of a well-educated man, and, as she judged, one who was fairly young.

"I am sorry to be obliged to detain you," it went on, "but I am afraid necessity knows no law."

"If you wish to speak to me," she said coldly, "you had better come back with me to Mr. Macrae--and please let go my arm."

"On the contrary," said the other suavely, "I shall neither take you back to Mr. Macrae nor shall I release you until I learn something from you which it is very vital I should know. You have been to see Mr. Macrae, and you have told him a great many things, and, I might add, spoken a great deal of nonsense. You did not tell him--I can only suppose that you are reserving that dramatic denouement for your lunch on Monday--that you entered the room of a gentleman at Freiburg during his absence, opened a desk, and removed a small but remarkably valuable little book."

She gasped.

"That little book I should like to have," the man went on. "I need not ask you whether you took it because you have already betrayed yourself. My dear young lady, you are playing with fire, and a particularly deadly kind of fire."

She found her voice.

"The book is in safe keeping," she said defiantly, "and if you had it, it wouldn't be of any use to you. I have memorized--" She stopped and could have bitten her tongue when she realised her fatal error.

"You have memorised," repeated the other thoughtfully. "That rather complicates matters. I had hoped that the recovery of the book would have ended the incident so far as you were concerned. I am afraid we shall have to keep you for a day or two. You need not be afraid," the man went on, "we shall do nothing but hold you for a little while--after you shall go. For the moment...."

He slackened his grip to take a firmer hold, and she felt that she was in the hand of a man of considerable strength. But in that moment, when his hand was loosened for the fraction of a second, she put forth all her strength and, wrenching herself free, she ran.

The way to the road was barred to her, and she fled, as she thought, toward the house. The little electric lamp was still in her hand, but she dared not use it, though the path was rough and strange. She realised she was running downhill. She had no breath to scream, and indeed was not of the screaming kind.

She had a little light, for here the plantation was not so thickly planted and the rising moon showed her dimly the way. She heard the man running behind her, but he was running cautiously, conscious of the danger which lay in sprawling root and outgrowing sapling. But he was gaining on her…

Now she was in the open and her chance of escape was lessened terribly. "Stop!" grated the voice behind her, but she ran on. She swung round a clump of bushes and struck another patch of rising ground. Her breath was coming shorter and shorter… then she saw.

On a knoll before her, silhouetted against the rising moon, stood a tall man, motionless, rigid, his head hung forward as if listening.

"Help! help!" she gasped, and fell almost at his feet.

For a moment the figure did not speak, and the two men, who had stopped dead at the foot of the knoll, saw him raise his hand and caught the glitter of the revolver it held.

"Germans!" said the stranger of the knoll, and his voice was harsh and uneducated. But there was a malignity in the tone which turned the two men cold.

"Germans! I smell ye--damn ye! Germans like them who was at Neuve-Chapelle who battered me own officer to death and left me like I am! Germans! Yer swine!"

He raised his hand and there was a flash and a report. The two men turned and ran, and the girl, scrambling to her feet, seized the man's hand.

"Don't, don't!" she breathed, and looked up at the face, now half turned to the moonlight, in terror. What she saw sent her swooning to the ground… for the stranger was blind.

Chapter IV

WHEN she recovered consciousness she found herself in a room which had a strangely familiar aspect to her dazed eyes. She was lying on a sofa, her blouse was unfastened at the throat, and her face was wet. She looked about her wonderingly and saw a man watching her with a half-amused smile. She realised she was back again in Grant Macrae's study, and that it was that gentleman himself who was now observing her so closely.

"I'm afraid I've been frightfully feminine," she said, leaning up on her elbow.

"If half that Tom says is true," he said, "you have had every reason to be feminine."

With a deft touch she straightened her hair and fastened the collar of her blouse.

"Tom is?" she asked.

"Tom is the gentleman who brought you here," said Grant, "and incidentally I might tell you that you have had the honour of being carried in the arms of a man who is decorated with the Victoria Cross."

She shivered as she remembered.

"A blind man," she said in a low tone.

Grant Macrae nodded.

"He must have startled you rather," he said, "but Tom is the best chap in the world. If it wasn't for his obsession that every suspicious character he meets is a German, he would be nigh on the perfect human being. Would you like to see him?"

She hesitated, then nodded.

"He isn't so dreadful, you know," said Grant as he walked to the door and opened it.

He went into the passage and she heard him call. A few minutes later she heard the steady, even walk of a man coming along the corridor, and then Grant ushered the visitor in.

Whatever this man might have seemed to her in the moonlight in her moment of terror, he was good to look upon, with his fair, almost golden, hair, lean face, and his broad shoulders. You would not have known that he was blind, for his eyes were a deep blue and apparently uninjured. He stood in the doorway, his lips twitching and his big hands fumbling nervously.

"Come in, Tom," said Grant gently. "The lady is quite well now."

The man coughed awkwardly, and said in a husky voice that it was "all right."

The girl walked across the room towards him. She was still feeling a little shaky, but the effect of her adventure was fast wearing off.

"I don't know how to thank you," she said, and the note of pity in her voice made Grand Macrae look at her again.

"I owe more to you than I know," she said, and held out her hand.

He did not take it, and for a moment she felt embarrassed till she realised, as one has to realise with the blind, that this most natural gesture which mankind make to one another has no significance for the blind, who cannot see the hand extended to them. She reached down and caught his hand in hers, and he responded at once with a firm grip.

"It was nothing, miss," he stammered, "only them Germans. I knew they were Germans all right, sir." He turned his face to Grant. "I could tell if I was in the Crystal Palace with a German, and he was at the other end of the building, sir."

There was a thrill of pride in his voice as he made this claim. Grant nodded to the girl, as though to confirm all that he had said.

"Who brought me here?" she asked suddenly, turning to Grant.

He looked toward the man.

"Tom Carrington," he said. "Tom's strong enough to carry six ladies like you, and he knows every inch of the path, don't you, Tom?"

"Yes, sir, indeed I do," said the man with a smile. "I thought this young lady had fainted, so I just picked her up and brought her to you because I knew this was the nearest house."

He turned to Grant.

"If you don't mind, sir, I'll go down and finish that mug of beer of mine. Good evening, miss," his face towards her.

"Good night," she said gently.

Unerringly he found the door, opened it, and closed it behind him.

"He gained the V.C. at Neuve-Chapelle," said Grant, when the other had passed from earshot. "He carried his wounded officer under fire from in front of

an enemy's trench. Then the Germans carried one of our trench lines and they came upon Tom and his officer lying side by side. They battered the officer to death with the butts of their rifles, and they shot Tom through the head."

The girl shuddered.

"How perfectly horrible," she said.

"It's not a nice story," said Grant. "They thought they had left them both for dead, but Tom had a miraculous escape. Both his optic nerves were gone, and there is no possibility of his recovering his sight. But that doesn't hurt him so much as the memory of the crowning horror of that day. The last sight he saw was the officer he loved better than his life being murdered."

"Who was the officer?" she asked.

"Lieutenant Edward Venniman," he said quietly.

She opened her eyes in surprise.

"Sir John Venniman's son?"

He nodded.

"Tom lives with him--they are almost inseparable. That is why Sir John has given up his study of bacteria and has concentrated his mind and his thought and his every effort upon high explosives."

A bell rang sharply in a distant part of the house.

"That's Sir John, for sure," said Grant.

He went out of the room and the girl heard him open the front door. Presently she heard voices in the hall.

"I want to introduce you, Sir John," said Grant's voice, and the girl rose from the sofa to meet the man whose name was famous throughout the world.

He was a small man, not more than five foot three in height, thin and spare. His clothes were ill-fitting and stained, and he was collarless. His big mop of iron-grey hair formed a fluffy halo to his thin, ascetic face. He was in no sense embarrassed at meeting a lady in his present condition of déshabillé.

"I am glad to have the opportunity of knowing you," he said perfunctorily. "Have you seen Tom Carrington?" The inquiry was addressed to Grant.

"He's downstairs, regaling himself with some of my beer," said Grant. "Won't you sit down, Sir John?"

The scientist rumpled his hair to worse confusion, and looked from one to the other.

"I'm afraid Tom ought to be in bed," he said gravely. "That boy is a greater nuisance than a baby."

Grant went out of the room and returned in a few moments with his big guest. He stood in the doorway, smiling sheepishly. Sir John Venniman shook his head.

"Oh, Tom, Tom," he said reproachfully, "you are always giving me scares. Don't you know that blind men oughtn't to go wandering about at night."

"Is it night?" asked the man in surprise.

"Is it night?" repeated Sir John despairingly. "What would you do with a great booby like that?"

He wagged his finger at the man.

"There are certain things blind men can do and certain things blind men can't do," he said--the girl shivered a little at this crude method of address, but apparently Tom Carrington was amused at the strictures, and stood with a broad grin, showing his strong white teeth, as one who had had a humorous adventure and must of necessity accept the reproof.

"I was looking for Germans," he said.

The lips of the little scientist parted in a strange smile.

"Always looking for Germans, that fellow!" he said.

He crossed the room and caught the other's arm in his own and squeezed it.

"We'll find 'em one of these days, Tom, eh?"

"I'll bet we shall, sir," said Tom confidently.

"And we'll give 'em what for, won't we, Tom?"

"I'm sure, sir," said the other.

Sir John opened the door and led his charge through. He made no attempt to take farewell, either of his host or the girl, as she sat listening to the voices of the two men, till she heard the click of the front door as it opened and the soft pad of it as it closed. Then she turned to Grant and her eyes were shining.

"Isn't he splendid?" she said.

Grant nodded.

"Is he--?" she hesitated.

"Mad?" finished Grant. "Oh dear, no! He is obsessed, that is all. Some day John Venniman will take his pound of flesh for the murder of his son. That is the day he lives for."

The girl had been a little surprised that in neither of her visits, which had certainly been made under extraordinary circumstances, had she seen any sign of servants in Grant Macrae's house. He himself had opened the door to Sir John, he had summoned Tom Carrington from the kitchen below. He had also utilised that opportunity to give a few instructions to his domestics apparently, for scarcely had the door closed upon Sir John than a neat serving maid carried in a well-laid tray.

"I keep my domestic staff out of sight and out of hearing," said Grant. "But if it is any comfort to you to know, you are simply surrounded by female persons of every social domestic degree."

She would have declined the dainty little meal which he put before her, but he insisted. He was even sufficiently unromantic to suggest that her swoon might be traceable less to spiritual emotion than to the length of time between her meals. He pulled up a folding table, opened it by the sofa, covered it with a little white cloth, deftly arranged silver and steel in their appropriate places, and with the air of a connoisseur lifted, with a small pair of silver tongs, the most appetising little cutlet she had ever seen, and placed it on her plate.

"You are rather domestic yourself," she laughed.

"Immensely so," he replied gravely. "You see, I have to feed you up. I want to get you strong enough to tell me exactly what happened after you left me."

In as few words as possible she told him the story of her adventure.

"Did you recognise the man?" he asked.

She hesitated.

"I don't think I could," she replied.

"Do you think you recognised him?" he persisted.

She hesitated again.

"I had a thought for one moment that it was Mr. Ballin," she said. "Of course I couldn't prove it, and I couldn't swear to it. I recognised his voice rather than his face."

Grant said nothing, but sat in his favourite attitude by the desk, drumming his fingers upon the blotting-pad.

"It sounds horribly sensational," he said, "and if I ran that type of paper I should make quite a big story of it. As it is, I must table it for future reference. If you care to stay here a night," he said, "my housekeeper will put you up. You will risk losing your reputation, but you probably lost that years ago if you have acted as unconventionally through your life as you have this evening."

She shook her head.

"I must go," she said. "My poor chauffeur is still waiting at the end of the street, unless these people have killed him."

"That's hardly likely," laughed Grant. "Our little community have very strict bye-laws, one of which is that it is absolutely verboten to kill chauffeurs in the street."

As a matter of fact, they found the chauffeur in the car where she had left him, the man having settled himself down to the possibility of an all-night wait, with that trance-like patience and fortitude which is the special property of men who drive private cars.

"I shall see you on Monday, I hope," said the girl at parting, and offered him a cool little hand.

"If you are left to us, certainly. This is a nice car," he said inconsequently. "How long will it take you to get to town?"

"Two hours."

He looked at his watch.

"It is now nine o'clock," he said, and opened the door of the limousine.

She stepped in, and to her surprise he followed.

"I am going to London with you," he said, and silenced her protest.

"But I said good-bye to you," she laughed.

"You can say good-bye in the Haymarket. An extra good-bye or two won't occasion you any serious discomfort. I can bribe a taxi-man to bring me back, and anyway, if I can't, I have a flat in town. One thing is certain, that I'm not going to lose sight of you until I see you safely home."

She murmured a little protest, but in her heart of hearts she was relieved.

Chapter V

THE *Daily Megaphone* dismissed the extraordinary incident in a couple of lines. The *Gazette and Chronicle*, and indeed all the other papers published in London, gave quite a thrilling account of an adventure which befell a certain motor-car on its way to London on Friday, September 17th, 1925. The introduction to the *Gazette and Chronicle*'s account may be given, and it might be added that the details were supplied to the newspaper representatives by a certain loquacious chauffeur.

> "On Friday night a motor-car, the property of Miss Manton, and occupied by its owner and a friend, was the centre of a remarkable experience. The car was being driven from Chadleigh Norton to London, and the journey was half accomplished when the remarkable happening which is recorded below occurred. The car was speeding along the main London road, deserted at this hour of the night, when the chauffeur heard the noise of an aeroplane. Slowing his car, he looked up and backward and saw,

coming over the road, not more than 100 yards above the earth, what appeared to be a large monoplane. In these days a monoplane travelling by night is not so rare a sight as it was, perhaps, ten years ago, and the chauffeur was only mildly interested in the apparition. He had scarcely withdrawn his eyes from the approaching aircraft, when a tremendous explosion occurred in the rear of the car, smashing the windows and the wind guard by its violence. The chauffeur looked up, and says he saw at that moment a second bomb falling from the aeroplane above. The bomb fell harmlessly in a field to the left of the road. What might have happened subsequently we may only conjecture, but at that moment the aeroplane tilted sideways and came down quickly into a field. Possibly the force of the first explosion had upset its equilibrium, or it may have been that the airman had some engine trouble. The chauffeur proceeded to put as great a distance as possible between himself and his assailant. The affair created a great sensation in the locality, but every effort to trace the aeroplane has failed. Apparently it returned to its hangar immediately afterwards. The suggestion has been put forward that it was a military aeroplane practising flying by night, which had been equipped by mistake with bombs instead of dummy bombs, and these had become detached owing to the vibration of the engine."

"I think your chauffeur talks a great deal too much," said Grant, reading the account.

"It is one of the privileges of the democracy," she said lightly.

They were lunching at the Carlton in fulfilment of their arrangement. Grant nodded and smiled to somebody at a distant table, and the girl followed his eyes.

"That is a very pretty lady," she said.

"That is Olga Massey," he replied, "and the pompous gentleman with her is her father. He does half a million pounds' worth of trade with Germany every year, and takes a thick-headed view of Teutonic aspirations. The younger gentleman with her I think you know," he added drill.

She frowned.

"Why, it is Mr. Ballin," she said quickly.

Grant nodded. Presently Ballin rose from the table, with a little bow to his host, crossed the room and came to them.

"How do you do, Mr. Macrae?" he asked with a frank smile.

It was not a thing which an English gentleman would have done without invitation, and Grant had no other alternative than to introduce him to the girl. If the truth be told, he welcomed the opportunity. He was curious to see exactly what would happen.

The young man clicked his heels and bowed.

"We have met before," he said, and corrected himself. "When I say 'met,' I should have said we have seen one another before. I have a very good memory for faces," he smiled, "and especially faces I have seen in Freiburg."

The girl looked at him straight in the eyes, but there was no sign of perturbation.

"I hope you don't mind my interrupting your lunch," he said, addressing Grant. "I didn't see you on Saturday at Chadleigh Norton, and there were one or two things I wanted to speak to you about. When may I come and see you?"

"Any afternoon," said Grant.

This little visit was surprising. Carl Ballin and he were merely on nodding terms, and Grant suspected another motive for the interruption. Ballin had come boldly to challenge the girl's identity. Little more was said. With an exchange of commonplaces Ballin went back to his table. The girl looked at Grant.

"He came here to discover whether I recognised his voice," she said.

"Exactly what I was thinking," replied the other. "Do you know, I am rather scared about you."

"Scared?" she repeated.

He nodded.

"We are up against a very terrible and unscrupulous combination," he said. "I am almost sorry you have the code book you speak of, and doubly sorry that you have memorised a part of it and that they are aware of the fact."

"It's perfectly innocent really--the code book, I mean," she smiled. "There is some of it, of course, which is obviously intended to convey news of the movements of troops, but a great deal is quite unintelligible to me."

Grant took his cigarette case out of his pocket, pushed his coffee cup forward for replenishment, and slowly selected a cigarette.

"It is the fact that they know you do not understand the unintelligible portion of the code," he said quietly, "that saves your life."

They were not to finish their tête-à-tête without interruption. Presently the bulky figure of Mr. Massey rose from his table and moved across the room with a certain ponderous dignity, becoming in a man of his parts. He, too, must be introduced (and heartily cursed for his boorishness by Grant Macrae), and must seat himself without invitation. Assuming that air of fatherliness which was in keeping, as he imagined, with his age and position, he turned a waggish glance upon the girl.

"Don't let Mr. Macrae poison your mind about Germany," he warned jovially. "He's a very terrible man."

The girl's polite smile encouraged him to continue.

"He's looking for war all the time," he said. "Good Heavens! One would think we hadn't enough of the beastly thing. I suppose you know," he said, directing his conversation to Grant, and taking a more serious tone, "that we are entertaining the Burgomasters of all the principal German towns next week?"

"I heard something about it," said Grant. "Are they entertaining them in France too?" he added innocently.

Mr. Massey frowned.

"There was some suggestion," he said, "but really these French people are very prejudiced. I like the French enormously, and in fact I do quite a big trade with them. But their best friends must admit they are prejudiced."

"Are the Belgian people as prejudiced?" asked Grant drill.

Mr. Massey snorted.

"No, they won't join us in the scheme, which is distinctly unfriendly."

"Ah!" said Grant. "They're prejudiced too. You see, they had the Germans in their country. They had their homes burnt and their citizens slaughtered in batches; they saw their women and children submitted to horrible treatment; they have their maimed to remind them--maimed buildings and maimed people; they have their war babies too," he said in a lower tone, and glancing at the other through half-closed eyes. "Poor little brutes, that came unwanted into the

world, with hateful Belgian mothers and unknown German fathers. That's the sort of thing that feeds the prejudice of the people of Belgium and helps the villages of the Meuse to remember that war isn't a game but a damnable and hellish thing."

He did not apologise to the girl for the warmth of his language, and she would have liked him less if he had.

"No, no," he went on, "I am not going to help to entertain your Burgomasters. My father helped to entertain Prince Henry of Prussia when he came to England at the outbreak of war, and took a motor-car to every strategic point to discover the lay of the land. If I have my way, and if the influence of my paper can do anything, you won't be able to take your German Burgomasters through the city in broad daylight."

"You don't mean that you're going to organise opposition?" gasped Mr. Massey.

Grant nodded.

"That's exactly what I do mean," he said coolly. "It is your job and the job of your friends to keep your indecent friendships to yourself. If you parade them in the light of day, you are going to get all the bricks that are coming your way."

"It will be an outrage," said Mr. Massey severely. "It will be the most discourteous thing that has ever been done in this country. Haven't you the bigness to appreciate courage in others? Aren't you large-minded enough to offer the hand of friendship to a beaten enemy?"

"If he was beaten, yes," said Grant, "but he isn't beaten--not by a long chalk. Listen to me!" He thumped the table before him and thrust his face closer to that of the older man. "We never felt war in England. We sent our sons and our brothers, and some of us sent our fathers, to a strange and distant place which was as remote from here as Piccadilly Circus is remote from rural quiet. We never felt war or smelt it or heard it. We had a bomb or two drop. The people thought that was an amusing game, especially those people who did not lose any friends by these murders. What did the war prove to you? if it didn't prove that the German respects neither God nor man, that he has no more regard for his solemn obligations or his treaties than he has for that"--he snapped his fingers--"then you're a singularly dull man. He has signed a Peace Treaty. He has undertaken to do many things, some of which he has done. If it suits him, he will carry out his promise. If it does not suit him he will break his promise--that is all. There is nothing in the world that is going to coerce him into taking a line which is inimical to his interests."

"What about the English Fleet?" asked Mr. Massey solemnly. "What about the great numbers of men who are trained to arms, now scattered through the country, and ready to come at duty's call?"

"Fudge!" said Grant Macrae contemptuously. "Ten years ago. What effort has been made to keep them together? None. And as to the Navy, hasn't Germany got a Navy too?"

"Half the size of ours," said Mr. Massey triumphantly. "That was one of the clauses in the Treaty, that Germany should only build one to our two."

"I'll allow the number," said Grant, with a faint smile, "but you'll admit that, though it is only half the size of the British Navy, it is a pretty efficient one. You'll admit that its submarines are perhaps the best in the world, and that the German is trained to their use."

"I'll admit anything if you'll admit that we have such an overpowering preponderance of ships and guns and men trained in naval service that the German can never hope to gain a victory on the sea."

"That we shall know more about in a few years' time," said Grant cryptically.

"You are very uncharitable," said Mr. Massey, rising. "You will not allow a single good quality or attribute in the Germans. Whatever you may think, my view is that in the war they did wonderfully."

"They did more wonderfully than we ever expected," said Grant. "They did so wonderfully that they nearly had the world at their feet, with the jack boots of Prussian militarism on its neck. Nobody knows better than I how wonderfully they did, and nobody fears more than I a renewal of their attempt to outdo that wonder."

He stopped the flow of Massey's rising eloquence.

"When we finished with Germany we yielded to the clamour of their friends in this country, and we left them their Navy and their royal house. We left these in defiance of all the views of the Admiralty."

"We took their Colonies," interrupted Mr. Massey. "Don't forget that. We took every Colony they had."

"Why did we take them?" asked Grant quickly. "We took them because we had the Fleet to take them. We held out our hands and they fell in. There was no great credit in taking their Colonies, in spite of the resistance they put up in East Africa and the Cameroons and German South-West. Don't you realise, man, what that signified? It signified that the nation with the Fleet is the nation with the Colonies. What we have taken, they can take back as easily, the moment their Fleet is on anything like equal terms with ours."

"That will never be," said Mr. Massey firmly. "The Government which restricted our shipbuilding programme would be kicked out."

Grant looked at him scornfully.

"There are moments, Mr. Massey," he said, "when I wonder how you came to make so large a fortune." Mr. Massey carried this saying back to his table to ponder upon, and in his own peculiar way interpreted what was undoubtedly a most offensive remark into a compliment.

They talked a little while longer, and then Grant looked at his watch.

"Heavens!" he said in consternation. "I promised Sir John that I'd do a little commission for him. Would you mind if I ran away?"

"If that isn't a polite excuse for making your exit," she smiled, "I am going too, and I will drop you anywhere you wish."

In the car the conversation turned upon Sir John.

"There are people who think he's quite mad," said Grant. "For my own part, I am satisfied that lie is a brilliant genius."

"In what direction are his experiments being made?"

"In the only direction that matters," was the startling reply. "He is working on a submarine detector. Exactly the details of the invention I do not know, but the Admiralty have made several tests and are very pleased. The thing apparently is not wholly developed yet, but so far as I can make out it is on the lines of a submarine signalling apparatus, and includes a very sensitive microphone, which apparently responds only to the sound which is made by propellers. That is the invention as I knew it a few months ago. It has probably been entirely revolutionised by now. You can often see old Sir John and Tom Carrington pulling out to the centre of Bank Bay, towing a curious and weird

contrivance. But Tom, with his revolver and his spasmodic shooting, offers no inducement to the curious investigator."

He made his call at a large electrical stores in Queen Victoria Street, and the girl waited, and dropped him at the door of his office in the Strand.

"You're to go straight home," he said to her, "and for the moment drop your investigations until I can give you more help than I can just now. I'll say this to you," he went on, his hand resting upon the door of the car and his strong face turned to her, "I think you're on the right track. I am certain that there is trouble afoot. If you would care to work with me, either on the paper, or in separate investigations, I will give you what help I can in return for whatever help you may give me. Is that a bargain?" She held out her hand.

"It's a bet," she said.

Chapter VI

THE contents-bills of the newspapers told of the *End of the Dixmude affair*.

Ten years before, this phrase would have had another significance; but now the public interest in Dixmude centred round a dispute between a foreign and a British contractor who had both supplied, apparently according to order, certain materials and rebuilt certain houses, the one with authority and the other without, and the matter had excited no little attention on the Continent, where it was thought the foreign contractor was being unfairly treated, and the decision in the action which subsequently ensued had been eagerly awaited. It was just at this time that the feeling between Great Britain and her neighbours had become slightly strained, a development for which Belgium had been the more or less innocent cause.

Certain antipathies had been created in the early days of the war which had antagonised the Belgian population. Huge posters had been posted at all the street comers of the Belgian towns in those electric days of August, 1914, containing flamboyant promises on behalf of an allied Government, "that not a single German foot should violate the territory of Belgium"; and when, on top of this, the country had been overrun by the enemy, nobody had taken the trouble to explain that the posters merely contained extracts from an irresponsible newspaper, and the impression had been allowed to grow that these placards indeed had been a Government proclamation, and that the Government concerned had broken faith. This misunderstanding had grown to be a legend, and when, at the conclusion of the war, British financiers put their money into Belgian property, and assisted, with money, material and labour, to re-establish the battered homes of Britain's little Ally, a new situation was created.

Our ally required all her resources to clear up the mess the Germans had made in the north and in the east of France, and had no time or money to spare, for the moment, for Belgium.

Nor was it possible, with her industries half ruined, for France to lay her hands upon the share of Belgian trade which was rightly hers. Britain, untouched by war, her industries unimpaired, her machinery still moving in its well-oiled slides, albeit a little slower, could throw into Belgium her surpluses and could, without any competition, secure the bulk of Belgium's trade. France had resented the cry of "business as usual" which had been raised in the

course of the war, and now the critics saw another instance of unfair competition.

Bruised and crippled as she was by the war, there were a thousand unseen and unknown influences at work to make the sore rankle more than it did. "Business as usual" became a contemptuous phrase to signify advantage gained at your friend's expense during his preoccupation. It was not difficult to trace these influences, which went systematically to work to stir up feeling between France and her Ally. Every month, it seemed, new newspapers were coming into existence in the towns of France--newspapers admirably planned and possessing the most excellent news service, which had as their raison d'être, as far as could be seen, the task of educating public opinion in France to a new view of Great Britain.

This propaganda had been cleverly devised, so cleverly that its growth had not been observed until public opinion had been definitely formed. There came a time when the British realised, with a shock, that they were almost unpopular in a country where they had hoped to establish bonds of friendship which would survive any and every trial.

With Russia, this method of isolating Britain had not succeeded. Russia was still recuperating from a war in which she had suffered enormous losses, and from which she had emerged with new and difficult problems. The settlement of Poland, the administration of her new territories, the two-century-old Jewish question--all these combined to occupy her every moment. The attempt which Germany had made to create friction between Great Britain and Russia had been made when the terms of peace had come to be discussed. It was then, through the neutral countries, that England was importuned to lend her weight against the Russian occupation of new territory. The danger of the Dardanelles being in the hands of Russia was urgently pointed out, the need which would exist for an increase of strength in the Mediterranean to meet the "Russian peril," all these were vividly sketched; but the Allies were firm upon this point.

Those neutral Balkan nations which had come into the war area after Russia had accomplished the bulk of work on the Eastern side, had added their voice to demand the internationalisation of Constantinople and the Dardanelles, but without success. This was all to the good, and if Germany delayed any further effort until the Russian Army had recuperated, the danger to Great Britain was considerably reduced.

The terms of peace had left Germany with a Navy one-half the size of that which Britain possessed. A clause in the Treaty of Copenhagen had laid down the future shipbuilding programmes of the German Empire, and Germany had agreed that one German to every two new British warships should be the ratio of her shipbuilding progress.

Of late, however, there had been one or two disturbing happenings brought to the attention of the British Government. Though any increase in Germany's shipbuilding programme was a causus belli, with the fluxion of time the Government had grown tolerant of slight deviations from the accepted programme.

When the new 17-inch guns had been fitted to the *Ersatz*-WILHELM II., instead of the 15-inch guns, which were originally designed, the Foreign Office had addressed only the mildest protest--a mildness for which Admiralty experts were in the main responsible, for it was not believed at that time that the German 17-inch gun was a better weapon than the British 15- inch.

There were other illegal additions, too.

Sir John Venniman, sitting at breakfast at Chadleigh Norton, was carefully reading a German newspaper. There was a pile of these on a chair by his side. His shirt was, as usual, collarless and open at the throat, and he wore the stained old suit and the carpet slippers which constituted his normal attire.

Yet, despite this untidiness, he was a cleanly looking old man, ruddy, and in his alertness almost birdlike. He had a flood of comments upon men and things which was seemingly inexhaustible. His companion, who sat at the opposite side of the table, a profound expression on his face, was endeavouring to follow the erratic reasoning of his employer and friend.

"Years ago, Tom," said Sir John, "there was a Queen of Prussia--or perhaps it was a King, but I think it was a Queen."

"A Kaiseress," suggested Tom.

"There were no Kaiseresses in those days, Tom, or Kaisers either. Anyway, she would have been called a Kaiserine"--he spelt the word and Tom repeated the letters carefully.

It was his joy to feel that he was being educated, and in truth his education had been vastly extended in certain directions by a ten years' contact with this brilliant old man.

"Anyway, whatever she was, she received permission from Napoleon to have a standing army of so many thousand and no more. And do you know what she did, Tom?"

"I'll bet she did something dirty," said Tom, and Sir John beamed.

"Quite right, my boy, quite right," he said. "She or her husband raised their standing army of so many thousands, drilled them, got them ready for war, and dismissed them. Then they raised another army of the same number, trained them, drilled them, dismissed them. This went on for some time, Tom, and on the next occasion when Napoleon came up against Prussia he found an enormous army waiting to receive him--all trained men, trained in batches of so many thousand, Tom."

"That was artful," said Tom, admiringly.

"And that's what she's going to do now," Sir John went on. "It isn't a question of Army, it's a question of Navy. Suppose we say she shall build twenty submarines a year. That means that she shall complete twenty submarines. Now listen!" He read slowly, translating as he went:

The old man put the paper on his knees and glared across the table through his gold-rimmed glasses.

"Last year, six under-water boats had to be scrapped owing to the poor quality of the steel. The year before, in three different shipyards, some five under-water boats of the Vulcan ships were damaged by the collapse of a shed."

"Serve 'em right," said Tom, approvingly.

"Tom," said Sir John, solemnly, "you're an ass! You ought to use your brain. What's the good of being a blind man if you can't use your brain?"

Tom grinned.

"I fixed that new coil of yours yesterday, anyway," he said quietly.

"So you did, Tom, so you did," Sir John beamed. "Really, you're a wonderful old blind man. I don't know what I'd do without you. What do you want now?"

His companion's hands were moving gently over the table in search of some object.

"My prayer-book," said Tom. "I put it down somewhere."

"You'll lose your head one of these days. I'll bet it's in your pocket," said Sir John.

The blind man felt in his pockets, and his smile was broader than ever.

"You're quite right, sir," he said. "You've got eyes enough for two people, you have. You can see through a chap's pocket like an X- ray."

He chuckled his amusement, and Sir John joined in the laughter.

He folded his serviette and rose from the table, walked quickly to the other end and took the soldier's arm.

"Come on, we'll go into the garden," he said; "let's forget there are such things as Germans and war and pain in the world."

On a garden seat, amidst a riot of August flowers, the two men sat, the tall, broad soldier with his fixed gaze turned to the blue sky, his big hands clasping the worn prayer-book, and the little scientist by his side. And Sir John talked gently of things that were very beautiful to his mind, of the wonderful sacrifice which had been made for humanity, and of the love that was greater than all. And he spoke of his dead son and, without sorrow, told little stories of his boyhood, of his splendid principles, of the place which his genius would have made for him in the world. And then he took the prayer-book from Tom Carrington's hands and read the morning lesson, and at the end returned the book to the outstretched hand of his servitor. This had been the routine for ten years. Never a day passed but these two men had foregathered for their tiny service. They were simple men, strong in faith and beautiful in mind, loving one another after their strange ways, and closer in their relationship than father and son or than brother and brother.

The old man rose briskly and took the other's arm, and for an hour they paced the broad garden walk, and the roar of Tom's laughter testified to the cheer of their discourse. Noon found the scientist working in his laboratory, Tom Carrington, patient and silent, sitting by the bench, his deft fingers piecing together a little machine of extraordinary complexity. It was marvellous to watch him and to know that he was blind. Sir John, humming as he worked, was nearing, as he knew, the end of his labours. The apparatus to the perfection of which he had given ten years of his life, and to create which he had sacrificed the pursuit of investigations in a branch of science which had no association with mechanics, was as near perfect as he could make it. The bench was covered with tiny black spheres, each a little larger than an orange. Some of these were connected by a thin chain, no thicker than the average watch-guard. He was busy attaching sphere to sphere. Between every fourth ball was a small cigar-shaped object, from which radiated thin steel spikes, until it bore a resemblance to a porcupine. They were all part of the Venniman submarine detector, about which so much had been written and upon which so many speculations had been made. The newspapers had taken a perfunctory interest in the experiment, and there had been nights when Burnham Head had held a congregation of journalists, who, straining their eyes toward the dark waters of the bay, had seen the vivid green flashes which had sprung up from the water, and which, for the purposes of experiment, had represented no more than the passage of a small row-boat in the region of these little sentinels. Very exhaustive details are required if public interest is to be sustained. These Sir John Venniman was not prepared to give. The Admiralty sent an expert or two, who were mildly interested. The French Admiralty had asked for further particulars, and the Russian had sent Captain Slavoveitch to Chadleigh Norton

to secure further information. But for the moment war, and warlike experiments, were not especially popular in England. People were tired of war and, save amongst the young and consequently adventurous, it was a subject which produced a condition of boredom sooner than any other.

Nevertheless, Sir John Venniman had persevered. Discouraged alike by his brother scientists, who in a solemn manifesto had declared that it was the duty of science to devote itself now exclusively in the direction of recuperative experiment, and regarded even by his best friends as suffering from a mild form of monomania, he went on with his work as though he had the approval and the moral support of the world.

"War is the mother of invention, Tom," he said on one occasion, stopping at his work and looking round at the attentive figure by his side. "If it wasn't for the possibilities of the motor-car as a transport for troops, support would never have been given to that industry. If aeroplanes had never been possible engines of war, nobody would have troubled very much about the Wright Brothers' invention. Railways, steamships, even modern surgery--they've all been pushed forward by somebody or other, Tom, who had an eye on war and the use they would be in war."

"Fighting's natural," said Tom, after a pause.

Sir John turned his kindly eyes upon the man and nodded thoughtfully.

"You never crystallised a greater truth in a shorter sentence in all your born days," he said. "Fighting's natural. It's as natural for men to fight as it is for women to have babies."

He put down the little screwdriver with which he had been pressing home a screw of microscopic size, and surveyed his handiwork.

"I'll tell you another thing, Tom," he said; "the most intellectual nation, the most cultured nation, and the most civilised nation will always win in war. That is, if she applies her culture, her civilisation and her intellect to the proper end, which is the preparation for war. If all these bright brains will only spare tune to invent war engines which will be superior to the engines created by less intellectual nations, justice and culture shall prevail."

"Them Germans ain't cultured," said Tom, after a pause.

The old man smiled grimly.

"Oh yes, they are, Tom. Don't you make any mistake about that. They've got a kind of culture, but they've developed the wrong way. It isn't our idea of culture, that's all. The Greeks had culture, the Romans, the Egyptians, the Persians, the Chinese--they all had got a culture of a kind, Tom."

He prattled on throughout the morning and, when the lunch bell rang, he locked the laboratory door and walked arm-in-arm with his protégé through the long conservatory which connected the laboratory with the main building.

Sir John Venniman kept no manservant in the house. His gardeners occupied the two little lodges which flanked the entrance gate to his big house. Manor House was in point of fact by far the most pretentious of the dwellings in Chadleigh Norton. Sir John held certain manorial rights in the region, and when Sir Max Graaf, acting on behalf of the little community, had bought up the land, Sir John, while entering into the scheme for establishing this lordly little village, had definitely refused to sell to the syndicate. He built Manor House after the new village had been completed, and he differed from the remainder of Chadleigh Norton's inhabitants in that he was in permanent residence.

It was exactly a week after Ruth Manton's remarkable adventure in Chadleigh Norton that the village was again the scene of a mysterious happening, and this time not without its tragedy.

On that Saturday afternoon, just before sunset, Grant Macrae, lounging, as was his wont, on the top of the cliff, saw the old man with his inseparable attendant rowing slowly out to the middle of the bay. In the stern there was what looked like a black shapeless mass, which, through Grant's binoculars, bore some resemblance to a huge net. Grant watched curiously, and when he turned homeward for dinner he threw out a glance to sea and found that the boat was motionless, and that its occupants had evidently settled down to wait patiently for the darkness.

So far as could be ascertained from inquiries which he subsequently made, Sir John Venniman and his man had conducted experiments which left no doubt in the mind of the scientist as to the efficacy of his invention. The boat seemed to have come back to land between half-past ten and eleven at night. The gardener and his assistant were waiting on the beach, and, having drawn the boat up out of the reach of the tide, the four men returned to Manor House, the two gardeners carrying between them a part of the apparatus, and Sir John the more delicate mechanism in a small box under his arm.

Sir John slept in a room looking down on the conservatory, which separated the house from the laboratory. He went to bed at a quarter-past twelve, extinguishing the lights, and at a quarter-past two an electric bulb, which was fixed at the foot of his bed, with the reflector so placed that the light shone full on his face, was suddenly illuminated.

Sir John, instantly awake, slipped out of bed and pulled on his dressing-gown. He touched a switch and extinguished the light. To the right of the window was a small polished box, fixed to the wall. The door of this he opened and, feeling gingerly for the three switches which were inside, pressed them over as far as each would go to the right. Almost instantly there came to his ears a faint tinkle of glass from somewhere outside. He opened the door which led to the adjoining bedroom, where Tom Carrington had his quarters. A pressure on the ex-soldier's arm aroused him, and in a few words Sir John explained.

"Go along to Mr. Macrae," he said, "and tell him I've had an alarm."

The blind man slipped an overcoat over his pyjamas, pulled on a cap, and made his way unerringly to Grant's house. Five minutes later Grant had joined the old man.

"I'm sorry to bother you, Mr. Macrae," smiled Sir John.

He was standing in the dining-room, smoking one of those skimpy and cheap cigarettes which he preferred, and he had utilised the time of waiting in making himself a cup of tea. He greeted Grant with that air of unconcern which was peculiarly his own.

"I'm sorry to drag you out of your bed," he said, "but you were kind enough to write me a week or two ago and tell me that, in case I had an alarm of any kind, I was to communicate with you, wherever you were."

"What has happened?" asked Grant.

"Somebody's been trying to enter my laboratory. I haven't been to see yet what has happened to the unfortunate man. If he is in he won't be able to get out. If he tried to get in after I had my warning, I'm afraid he will be dead in the grounds."

Sir John took an electric hand lamp from the table, opened the door of the dining-room and stepped out. Grant followed along the corridor till they reached a small but very heavy door, which opened to the garden.

"I think you'd better let me take the lamp and go first," said Grant.

Sir John shook his head.

"There's no danger, I assure you," he said grimly.

Grant wondered why he was conducting the search outside of the laboratory rather than from the inside, and presently he was to discover. The path from the house ran parallel with the conservatory and swept to the right in a quarter circle, to carry it wide of the laboratory buildings. When the curve straightened again, it was running less than two feet from the wall of the many-windowed laboratory. Suddenly Sir John stopped.

"Here we are," he said.

A man lay rigid across the path. Sir John, putting the light of the lamp in his face, stooped and felt his heart.

"He's still alive," he said, "and he may reckon that he's very lucky."

He lifted up the man's hands one after the other. Across the palm ran a livid red mark.

"That is an electric burn," said Sir John. "Let us see whether he has any papers on him."

There was nothing in the man's clothing, so far as they could ascertain in a hurried search, to reveal his identity. He was young, not bad looking, obviously Teutonic, and his close-cropped hair suggested that he was a member of one of the Imperial German services. He was dressed plainly in a blue suit.

"Shop made," said Grant, examining it, "and quite new. Evidently bought for the purpose, and his underclothing is exactly the same, I should imagine. Is he the only one?"

They made a rapid search of the ground, but could trace no sign of any other intruder. Together they bore the unconscious man back to the house, and laid him on the sofa. There was no doctor in the village, so, pulling off his coat, Grant Macrae began to apply artificial respiration to the unconscious man, whose breathing had apparently stopped. The grey light of dawn was struggling through the windows against the artificial light when the man recovered consciousness. He looked stupidly from one to the other, and muttered something in German.

"What is your ship, my man?" asked Grant in the same language.

"KAISERIN AUGUSTA," muttered the man.

"Where are your friends?"

"I don't know. There were three," he began, and then it slowly dawned upon him that he was being interrogated, and that he was violating stringent instructions which had been given to him.

"I don't know anything," he said.

The scientist looked at him strangely. "I can make you talk, my friend," he said pleasantly enough, but with that curious bird-like twist of his head which in itself suggested aggression. The man glowered up at him and for a moment their eyes met. Then to the amazement of Grant, he saw in the face of the German sailor a growing fear that became almost terror.

The professor spoke softly and rapidly, and he spoke, too, in that slurred southern German which was almost a patois. So fast did he speak, and so low

was his voice, that Grant could not follow, but he saw the man's lips part and his eyes widen. "You could not, Herr Doctor!" he gasped. "You would not..."

"You shall see," said Sir John.

There was a pause.

"I will tell you... all I know," muttered the man.

Chapter VII

"WHAT inducement did you employ?" asked Grant an hour later. Sir John put his finger-tips together and regarded them attentively. "The method I employed was that one which may be described in one word--frightfulness," he said. "Have you not noticed, my dear Mr. Macrae, that men and women no less than nations are influenced by the qualities of their own which they find in others? Thus a beautiful woman is more impressed by beauty than is a dowd. A courageous man is attracted by courage, and so on. Similarly a bully is most susceptible to bullying, and a man who utters threats is best cowed by threats. The German favours a policy of frightfulness, because he knows in his heart of hearts that if that policy were applied to him he would knuckle under. Remember the history of the war, how Germany having devastated Belgium and the North of France was reduced to maudlin tears at the destruction which the Russian wrought in East Prussia. Any man who knows the German character could have told the Government during the war that they had but to threaten the heads of the departments responsible with death by hanging to stop all the ill-treatment of our prisoners. As to my own little prisoner, I threatened him with sudden tragic consequences which would follow upon his refusal to give the information I needed. Those consequences I had not to invent. I had simply to threaten him with a variety of punishment which was undoubtedly inflicted upon Russian soldiers by German officers to bring him to my way of thinking." Grant shuddered.

"I told him exactly the line I should follow, exactly the character of the inducement I should offer." He shrugged his shoulders. "We scientists have a large pull with the rest of the world," he said.

"What did you discover?" asked Grant.

The professor smiled.

"What I had expected," he said. "This man came with others to discover the secret of the submarine protector. Failing their ability to grasp its essentials, they were to destroy the machine--that is all."

The professor sipped his tea thoughtfully.

"I wonder if they've gone?" he asked.

He turned with his beaming smile upon the blind man, who sat an attentive listener to all that was going on.

"Tom, my boy," he said, with that bird-like heartiness which was part of his system, "here is a chance to try your wonderful invention."

The blind man grinned, and held out his hand. Sir John edged closer until the groping fingers touched his shoulder, then made for the door which led to the room upstairs. For a moment Grant hesitated, but Sir John called to him over his shoulder.

"Come along, and I will show you something which nobody but myself has ever seen."

They made their way upstairs, the professor leading, passed the bedroom door, still open, and climbed another flight. The party reached the roof through a door which opened from the top of a last and steeper flight. It was part of a somewhat unlovely addition to the original building which had been made to the old Georgian mansion. Grant found himself in a square machicolated turret. The professor took from his pocket an electric lamp and flashed it cautiously on the ground. In one comer of the tower-top was a square box. He opened this and displayed in the light of the lamp a number of fine steel cords stretched across.

"We will leave that open," he said, and then turned and walked to the other comer. He disclosed what appeared to be a small mortar with a breach of unusual rotundity.

"That's Tom's invention," said Sir John proudly. "A compressed air-gun, loaded and ready. We always expected an attack from the sea, didn't we, Tom? We'll try it to-night, Tom!"

He peered out towards the bay, but there was little to be seen in the black night.

"Come down to my room," he said. They made their way down again. First they passed to the little study which led off the dining-room. Sir John took down from a shelf a pair of aluminium receivers from which dangled a long connecting flex. This he pressed carefully into a plug in the wall and turned a small switch above the connection.

"Do you understand the Morse code?" he asked.

Grant nodded.

"Put these on your head and listen," said Sir John, "but wait!" He unlocked his desk, took out a substantial-looking red volume.

"Now go ahead, and tell me what they are saying."

Grant fixed the receivers in some bewilderment. He listened intently, and for a time heard nothing. Then the unmistakable "click, click!" of a wireless Morse message came through.

"M, B, R, Z," he spelt out slowly.

Sir John turned the pages rapidly.

"Here we are," he said. "'*Put to sea, attempt failed.*'"

The blind man sitting in the corner chuckled amusedly.

"I should say so!" he said half to himself.

Again the ticking sounded in Grant's ears.

"O, V, Q, M," he spelt.

Sir John's nimble fingers turned the pages of the closely set book.

"Yes, *'We are in danger from shore*,'" he said with some glee.

Again a four-letter message came to the journalist, and again he spelt it out.

"'*Shall I shell position?*'--we are the position," said Sir John looking up over his glasses. Again, and promptly, came the reply.

"R, Z, A, R," repeated Grant.

The old man ran his fingers down the page.

"Here it is," he said, "'*No, we are attracting attention.*'" He looked around triumphantly. "This is where we try Tom's gun."

He dropped the book in the desk, and locked the desk in almost one motion, crossed the dining-room, and threw back the long shutters.

"Now, Tom!" he said.

Grant saw nothing. He heard the faint snap of a button. Tom had put into operation the invention of which he was so proud. There was no report, only a strange whining sound came to the men at the open window. Then suddenly over the bay there burst a brilliant white light which illuminated the scene as though it were day.

"There they are!" said Grant, pointing.

Three ships, two of which were obviously warships, were steaming out of the bay. The light lasted for twenty seconds before it suddenly disappeared leaving the world blacker than ever.

"That's Tom's invention," chuckled Sir John. "A gun fired by compressed air and its shell ignited by friction--I tell you, Tom is a clever fellow!"

"What have you done with the prisoner?" asked Grant after a while.

"He's safe till the morning. The difficulty will be," Sir John went on, a little gravely, "to explain him away. It is not my purpose to announce him and his attempt to the police."

At that moment there was the faint tinkle of a bell.

Sir John looked at his visitor guiltily.

"I am afraid we have awakened the village. Go and find out who that is, Tom," he said.

Tom left the room, and came back in a few moments, and there was in his face a look of such deadly malignity as surprised even Grant.

"What is it, Tom?" asked the Professor.

"German," growled the man.

"A German?" repeated Sir John, puzzled, and then he realised who the visitor was.

"Ah, it's Mr. Ballin. Tell Mr. Ballin to come in, Tom, and take that look off your ugly old face."

A minute later Carl Ballin strolled into the room. Grant noticed that he was completely dressed--a circumstance which was astounding in view of the hour.

"Your firework display woke me up, Sir John," he said easily. "I thought I would come along and discover what all the trouble was about."

"The trouble, my dear Mr. Ballin," said Sir John, his head askew and observing the other keenly, "was caused by one of your excellent compatriots who endeavoured to break into my laboratory and was caught."

"Caught, was he?" said Carl quickly. "What did you do with him--is he dead?"

"He is alive and quite safe in an empty tool-shed," said Sir John.

"Are you sure he is German?" asked the other incredulously.

"Bavarian, I should think," was Sir John's answer. "The southern German speaks a little more thickly than his northern compatriot."

"Can I see him?" asked Ballin abruptly.

Sir John smiled. His bright eyes never left the other's face.

"I'm afraid that's impossible," he said.

"Perhaps I could discover what his object was--a drunken fellow's freak, I should imagine," persisted Carl.

Sir John smiled again.

"I think I know what it is all about," he said easily. "He has told me quite a great deal--and he is perfectly sober."

Grant, watching the man closely, saw his brows knit in a sudden frown. He saw, too, the perfect self-control which the German exercised to recover himself from a fit of sudden anger.

"I expect he has told you a great deal of nonsense," he said carelessly; and then turning to Grant, "You have a very late visitor, Mr. Macrae."

"Late visitor," replied Grant, in his turn surprised. "I was not aware that I had any visitors, early or late."

Carl Ballin shrugged his shoulders.

"Perhaps I have made a mistake; I saw a car outside your house as I passed."

"A car?"

Ballin nodded.

Grant turned to Sir John.

"You won't want me any more to-night, Sir John."

"I think not," replied Sir John with a smile. "Tom and I can deal with any crisis which may arise between now and morning."

Grant left the house with Ballin. They turned and walked together along the broad village street. Yes, there were the lights of the car in front of his house. Grant hastened his steps and came up to the car, peering through the darkness in an endeavour to recognise the chauffeur.

"Good morning, sir," said the man; "did Miss Manton meet you?"

"Miss Manton?" said Grant quickly.

"Yes, sir," said the man; "she came down from town in the night on a very urgent matter; they told her at your house that you had gone on to Sir John's."

Grant turned quickly on his companion.

"Did you see anything of this lady?" he asked.

Ballin hesitated.

"I--thought I saw somebody," he said slowly, "but I wasn't quite sure who it was. I thought possibly it was one of the Miss Masseys, aroused by the firework display which Sir John gave us."

"She may have returned to the house," said Grant, but inquiries there did not produce any news of the missing girl. Until daylight he pursued a fruitless search for her. At the coming of day Grant made his way down to the beach, for here it was that he had first seen her, and for this reason he always associated her in his mind with this strip of foreshore. He was retracing his steps after a profitless search, bewildered and not a little troubled, when something in the bushes by the side of the path which led up to the beach, attracted his attention.

He pulled aside the boughs and gasped.

What he saw was a lady's shoe, and one which was scarcely worn.

New as it was, the patent leather was covered with scratches. They were not ordinary scratches, and he turned the shoe over and over in his hand wondering what his discovery indicated.

Then like a flash, he saw.

Chapter VIII

SOMEBODY had scratched, evidently with a sharp pebble, four words on the shiny surface of the shoe. He puzzled them out, for they had been written in a hurry.

"*Ballin. ship. pris. German.*"

Brief as the message was it was as clear as daylight what had happened.

Ballin had been responsible for her capture; she had been seized, taken on board a ship a prisoner, and by this time was on her way to Germany.

Grant was alone.

Ballin had gone off to his house before daybreak.

Grant slipped the shoe in his pocket, strode up the hill, through the village street, turning in at the gate of Sir Max Graaf's ornate residence. The servants were still up. Mr. Ballin was in the morning room they told him, and there Grant found him.

"He was sitting at his ease, a cup of coffee on the table beside him, and he rose as Grant entered with a little inclination of his head. Grant was very white but cool. He closed the door behind him and walked steadily over to where Carl stood.

"Where is Miss Manton?" he asked quickly.

Carl raised his eyebrows.

"I don't quite understand what you mean," he said.

"I'll explain," replied the other without raising his voice. "Last night you and some of your friends kidnapped Miss Manton, carried her down to the beach, put her on board one of the steamers that were lying in the bay, and she is now on her way to Germany."

Only for an instant was Ballin taken back.

Grant saw the rapid flicker of eyes which betrayed a momentary embarrassment, but for the second time that morning the German recovered himself.

"My dear chap," he said, "verily you must have been reading one of your feuilletons, and the romantic story has got into your brain. I have not seen Miss Manton, and it is not my practice to kidnap young ladies in the middle of the night, any more," he added pointedly, "than it is my practice to receive visitors of the opposite sex at that period."

Grant ignored the sneer.

"You must find Miss Manton," he said, "or--"

"Or?"

There was no mistaking the challenge in the other's tone.

Carl Ballin saw the eyes of his visitor narrow and the face harden. He dropped his hand quickly to his pocket, but not quickly enough.

At that moment Grant was on him, his sinewy hand at his throat, his other hand grasping Carl's wrist. A quick jerk and the German was flung back in his chair, a knee was on his chest, and the revolver which he had drawn, wrenched from his hand.

"I give you exactly two minutes to tell me what has happened to Miss Manton," said Grant between his teeth, "and if at the end of that time you refuse to answer, by God, I'll strangle you." There was a dead silence for some moments, and then Ballin spoke.

"Since my life is of some value to the State," he drawled, yet despite his nonchalance Grant noticed a certain tremour in his voice, "and I have a premonition that you will keep your word, I will tell you all that I can tell you.

Your young friend intruded herself upon an innocent party of sailors who had come ashore for a jaunt, and she might have been unpleasantly treated had it not been for my intervention. As far as I know she went on board the PRAGUE--
"

He stopped short and bit his lip.

"She went on board the PRAGUE," repeated Grant.

"When I said PRAGUE," said the other with a shrug of the shoulders, "I meant--"

"You meant PRAGUE," said Grant shortly. "Tell me what happened to this lady whom you saved from a jaunting party of sailors who landed at midnight miles from the nearest town, and who are so rowdy that even the coastguards were unaware of their presence. Go on, please."

"It isn't much use my going on," said Ballin sullenly, "if you are not prepared to believe me. As far as I know, she went on board the ship to lodge a complaint against the men and probably the Captain of the ESSENBURG."

"You said PRAGUE a little while ago, but that does not matter," interrupted Grant. "She went on board the ESSENBURG to lodge a complaint, did she? And how does it happen, Ballin, that you knew what ships they belonged to?"

"Oh, that's easy," said the other carelessly, "I saw the ribbons on their hats."

Grant nodded.

"I think much of what you have told me is a lie. There is one detail you have given me quite unwillingly for which I am greatly obliged. If any harm comes to Miss Manton through you or your damned government, one of the biggest coups you have ever planned will come sadly undone. Good morning."

He walked out of the house slamming the door behind him. His car which had been engaged all that night in searching the roads leading in and out of Chudleigh Norton was waiting in the road, and he sprang in. London was only just awake when his car flashed through the streets. He knew only one member of the Cabinet intimately and that was Lord Arthur Matheson. Matheson was one of those individuals whose views on the international situation the *Megaphone* echoed. The Admiralty quarters were undergoing repair and Matheson would be at his house at Buckingham Gate, and thither Grant drove.

He had some difficulty in persuading the servants to awaken the first lord, but after a quarter of an hour's wait, the minister, arrayed in pyjamas and dressing gown, came into the drawing room to meet him.

Lord Arthur made no complaint at being aroused from his bed at this--for him--unearthly hour. He knew Grant Macrae well enough to realise that nothing but the most serious business would have induced him to call at such a time. Briefly Grant related the events of the previous evening, and the first lord listened in silence, interposing a question now and again. When Grant had finished, Matheson spoke.

"It will be a fortunate circumstance if she is on the PRAGUE," he said, "and not upon one of the warships. The PRAGUE is a fairly fast cruiser which was engaged in mine-laying in the late war. She no longer appears on the auxiliary cruiser list, and is supposed to have been converted into a yacht for the use of one of the Hamburg-American directors. Just wait one moment."

He disappeared from the room and was gone ten minutes, at the end of which time he returned carrying an envelope closed by a heavy seal. "I am sorry to have kept you, but I had to do some coding," he smiled; "take this round to the Admiralty to the wire room, and hand it to the officer in charge."

Chapter IX

AT half-past ten in the morning Lloyds' agents at Dungeness reported the movement of a German warship northward. At eleven o'clock another warship passed, steaming up-channel, and exactly half an hour later a yacht-like liner went past displaying no number. The signal man might not have recognised her, but two naval officers who were watching with him had no doubt as to her identity and a wireless in code was flashed to Dover.

After passing Dungeness, the PRAGUE took an easterly course as though she were making for Boulogne or Dunkirk.

But she had altered her course too late.

In the channel she came up with ARETHUSA and UNDAUNTED, steaming slowly across her course. A string of flags went up from ARETHUSA, and the captain of the PRAGUE had no difficulty in translating the message into, "Heave to, I am coming aboard you."

In reply PRAGUE signalled her number, and continued on her way.

There was a flash and a bang from ARETHUSA, a ricocheting shell flung up in the water before the steamer, and the captain of the German boat with an oath rang his engines astern.

The officers on the bridge of the ARETHUSA watched the manœuvre and grinned.

"He is making a signal," said one, and put up his telescope. There was no difficulty in recognising the familiar combination.

"'We have infectious disease aboard'" read the officer, and there was a derisive guffaw.

"Signal her," said the skipper of the ARETHUSA, "we are sending a doctor on board!"

A little steam pinnace raced out to the side of the German boat, a nimble lieutenant scrambled up the monkey ladder, and was followed by two blue-jackets. The captain met his interceptors in that arrogant spirit which has made the north Prussian skipper the least lovable of his kind.

"This is an outrage, gentlemen," he stormed; "one would think we were still at war--you shall hear of this from my government."

"I can assure you, sir," said the bland lieutenant of the Royal Navy against whom this terrible threat was launched, "that nobody regrets inconveniencing you more than myself. You are bound for Bremen, I presume."

"I am bound for Hamburg," said the captain shortly.

"From?"

"From Bilboa," replied the captain. "My papers are in order, if you wish to see them. But I shall require an explanation as to why you have taken this unusual step."

The young officer bowed.

"I will offer you all the explanation that is necessary, captain," he said, "when I tell you that we have reason to believe that a very dangerous criminal stowed himself away on your ship at Bilboa. The right to search," he went on oracularly, "is a moot and contestable point. I must take the responsibility for intruding on you," he said.

"Suppose I refuse," said the captain.

The officer shrugged his shoulders with an exaggerated gesture of despair.

"In that case, Herr Captain, it would be my business to blow you off the face of the sea." The German captain's face was symptomatic of an approaching attack of apoplexy.

"You may search the ship," he said surlily, "but I can assure you that not only will you fail to discover your criminal, but if my government has any spirit left, your days in the Navy are numbered."

The search was a long and exhaustive one, but it failed to discover its object. After an hour's systematic investigation, in the course of which every cabin was searched and even the bunks were explored, a puzzled young officer returned to the deck.

"Well, gentlemen," said the captain, "have you found the lady?"

He recognised his error in a flash, and could have bitten his tongue.

"The lady?" said the officer slowly, searching the man's face; "who said anything about ladies?"

"I--I!" stammered the captain.

"By the way, skipper," said the officer suddenly, "I haven't inspected your cabin." He saw the look of alarm that flickered momentarily in the man's eyes.

"She is hardly likely to be there, is she?" said the German with heavy jocularity.

"We will see," said the officer.

A steward led the way to the cabin, large and roomy, a big bunk in the comer of the room, a desk, a lounge, and a big tall-boy comprised the furniture. The officer looked round the room carefully.

"What is in here?" he asked, and he tapped with his stick the boarded space beneath the captain's bunk. Usually this space is occupied by chests of drawers in which a skipper keeps his wardrobe. In this case the tallboy in one corner of the cabin evidently served this purpose. "There is nothing in there," said the captain, who had followed the party into the cabin. The naval officer stooped and examined the wooden partition. There were a number of little holes bored at intervals, and the sharp eye detected two chips of wood upon the carpet.

Assuredly those holes had been recently made.

"I want this opened," he said.

"It doesn't open," said the captain.

"Then I want it broken down," said the officer shortly.

Nobody made a move. He called the British bluejacket who stood at the door.

"Break this in," he said, and with two blows with the butt of his rifle the man drove in the thin match-boarding. The officer pulled away the shattered woodwork.

"Oh, indeed!" he said, and inserting his arm, he drew out the half-unconscious girl who was lying on a mattress at the bottom of the recess. The officer lifted the girl, and with two strokes of his knife severed her bonds. The gag, which was no more than a respirator of the old war days, was off in a second.

"Put this lady in the pinnace," said the officer sharply, and the big bluejacket lifted the girl up in his arms as though she were a child, and walked from the cabin. For the moment there was no word spoken. The officer's chin was on his chest, and he was evidently thinking; then slowly he raised his head and met the eyes of the German.

"Are you an officer in the Imperial Navy?" he asked, with great deliberation.

"I have that honour," said the other stiffly. The words were scarcely out of his mouth before the naval man struck him full in the face. "If you can possibly arrange a meeting without outraging the official sense of propriety," he said calmly, "I will give you every satisfaction for that blow," and turning on his heel, he left the cabin.

* * * * *

Grant was waiting at Dover and was the first of the civilian visitors to the Arethusa. The girl, who had made a rapid recovery, had little to tell. She had been seized on her way to Sir John's house by somebody who she thought she recognised as Ballin, but as to this she was not sure. She had had time to scratch a message on her shoe--and only time. She had apparently, been treated with some consideration on board the Prague, and it was not until the British warship had been sighted that she had been bound and concealed.

"I have given everybody a lot of trouble," she said, smiling ruefully, "and I am afraid none more than you."

She looked up at Grant's face, and there was something in his drawn mouth and sunken eyes which told her more plainly than words the agony he had endured.

It was a something which sent a thrill of joy to her heart and compensated her far more than she could ever have expected to have been compensated, for the discomfort and terror under which she had lain during the past twelve hours. She tried to say something apposite, but found herself indulging in the most absurd of banalities. Thereafter she lapsed into silence which Grant made no attempt to break. They scarcely spoke in the journey to London, and it was not until the taxi had deposited her at the door of her hotel that she regained her self-possession.

"Have I been a great nuisance," she said again.

"You are a great responsibility," he answered gravely.

There was a mischievous quality in her smile.

"I suppose," she bantered him, "you feel like my father and my mother."

"Hardly that," he answered slowly. "I feel rather as though I were your lover."

She felt the blood rush to her face, stammered a few incoherent words, and, snatching her hand away, disappeared into the hotel. Grant waited a little time, then re-entering his taxi was driven off to his office.

Chapter X

MR. HOLMAN MASSEY, that pompous man, was not easily depressed. He was one of those fortunate souls who owned to neither temperament nor diffidence. He had the ability of interpreting the most unmistakable of rebuffs into humorous but not ill-natured expressions of respect. He had assurance, based on an illusion as to his own qualities, and an unimaginable reverence for the power of money which only those men possess who satisfy their requirements in the open market. Mr. Massey had for his comfort all that money could buy--and nothing else.

He had cause for grievance against Grant Macrae, for Macrae had utterly spoilt the civic welcome to the Burgomasters which Mr. Massey had organised as secretaire.

"The dastardly attack," here I quote Mr. Massey, which Grant Macrae and his journal had made upon the Burgomasters and which was responsible, no doubt, for the coolness of their reception, and for the fact that several civic bodies in England had cancelled their reception, had made but a momentary impression on Mr. Massey's mind.

Mr. Massey's mind was frequently described by himself as broad, by which he meant that he was one of a large body of men who are willing to forgive a kick if there was a fair chance of their assailant proving useful in the future. Mr. Massey's breadth of mind enabled him to agree with diametrically opposite points of view when they were expressed on separate occasions by two or more people who were likely to be of service to him. If by ill-fortune Mr. Massey found himself confronted with the problem of giving his view upon the subject in the presence of influential but rival exponents, Mr. Massey's mind was described by himself as "open."

He strolled into Grant Macrae's private office in the late days of June, and Grant, who had had a hard day's work and was willing to be bored, tolerated the intruder.

"I want to let bygones be bygones, Mr. Macrae," said Massey, imposingly, "we are neighbours and I trust friends."

He paused and Grant obligingly agreed.

"You stopped my reception," said Mr. Massey, "but I realise that you were merely getting at your point of view, and I am broad-minded enough to be aware that your point of view is just as excellent as mine."

"That is singularly nice of you," said Grant, reaching for his cigar-box.

"Now I have come to ask you as a personal friend to do me a favour," said Mr. Massey, more impressively than ever. He pulled up a chair on the opposite side of the desk, and lowered his voice as though he had a precious secret to impart. "Some friends of mine are interested in the festival."

"The Schleswig-Holstein Festival?" asked Grant, displaying a sudden interest.

Massey nodded his head solemnly.

"The Schleswig-Holstein Festival," he repeated. "Now, Mr. Macrae, none of us like the Germans really, though some of us have to do business with them, and as you know we have no politics and no prejudices in business."

"I realise that very well," said Grant, a little bitterly; "you might even add 'no patriotism.'"

"You see how things are going"--Massey left the controversial amendment out of the discussion--"and it is hardly necessary that I, an ignorant layman, should attempt to instruct you who have all the news and all the events of the world at your finger-tips." Again he paused, expecting a polite denial; but Grant was not feeling at all polite, and he resumed.

"Things are not going as well as we could wish on the Continent, Mr. Macrae. Belgium is feeling a bit sore. France is feeling very sore, though why I haven't the slightest idea, because undoubtedly we saved France from destruction."

"One moment," interrupted Grant; "when you pass over a railway bridge, have you ever considered what it is that is supporting you, the girders or the bolts?"

Mr. Massey looked startled.

"I can't say that I have," he said; "but, of course, it is the girder and the bolt."

"Exactly," said Grant; "call France the girder and Britain the bolt, and you get the situation as it existed during the late war. We all helped to save one another from destruction. France was short of ammunition and short of material, but she made good her losses in the course of the war, and she fought with superhuman courage; I hope you will please remember that, Mr. Massey."

"Of course--of course," said Mr. Massey. "I had no desire to say anything that France would take exception to."

Grant smiled, but Mr. Massey, who had no sense of humour, went on unabashed. "France cannot understand our position. We were a business people and had to take advantage of the situation as we found it. We were enterprising, and secured the trade--that was to our credit."

"Again I would interrupt you," said Grant. "During the war there could be no business as usual in France. Her main and vital industries were in the hands of the enemy. Her coal mines, her iron mines, and most of her textile districts were in the occupation of German troops."

"Exactly," said Mr. Massey, gathering his views as he proceeded; "but the point I want to make is this: the natural alliance, if there is to be a readjustment of alliances, is between England and Germany. And that's why I want you, Mr. Macrae, to help all you can to encourage the Schleswig-Holstein Festival. Let it be seen that England sympathises with a crushed, a beaten, but an heroic enemy who is endeavouring to rehabilitate himself."

Grant laughed. Even with his desire to be polite he could not help himself.

"I hope you don't think you have struck an original idea, Mr. Massey," he said with a smile. "It is one of the oldest arguments that has been used. It is nothing to me whether the North German festival is a success or not, though it may be to you, for I suppose you have some money invested in it?"

Mr. Massey blushed.

"A hundred or two," he mumbled hurriedly, "but that has nothing to do with the matter; I am arguing on principle."

"Well, on principle, Mr. Massey," said Grant, "there can be no question that our main interest is to be discovered in the support of every nation which opposes Germany, German Kultur, and the expansion of German trade. Sooner or later the enemy is going--"

"Don't call him an enemy," pleaded Massey; "be reasonable."

"I repeat," said Grant, "the enemy is going to make an effort to recover some of his lost prestige. He hates England--he has never disguised the fact. Why, even to-day, the Hymn of Hate is to be found in every school primer throughout Germany! The conquest of Britain is a real and tangible dream; it did not exist before 1914--but now the German people live only for the day which will find our power crushed."

"That will never be," said Mr. Massey, stoutly, and the thrill in his tone suggested that he himself was in no small degree responsible for the impossibility of such a plan.

"When is this festival to be?" asked Grant suddenly.

"They haven't decided the date yet," replied the other. "All I know is that on that day a record number of special trains will be run from all parts of Germany and that we shall see a real peace conference. Do you know," he asked, "that on four hundred and eighty separate platforms a resolution will be passed, that 'in

the opinion of this great assembly war is not justified except in defence of national existence'?"

Grant leant back in his chair, a puzzled frown on his face.

"And so," he said slowly, "the German Government is going to run excursion trains to all parts of the empire at an especially cheap fare, and all for the purpose of announcing a platitudinous resolution from four hundred and eighty platforms! Do you seriously suggest that the Government of Germany is making these elaborate railway preparations--I saw a telegram yesterday that no goods trains would run upon that day and that ordinary passenger traffic would be suspended--in order to pass innocuous resolutions on an unknown date?"

"I do," replied Mr. Massey, firmly.

Grant laughed.

"Do you realise the enormous amount of preparation this great festival entails--for you cannot disorganize railways at a moment's notice--and remembering this, does it not seem to you a very strange fact that the German Government has not settled upon the day this spectacle shall occur...?"

* * * * *

"He is quite hopeless," said Mr. Massey to a circle of his admirers at the Merchants' Club, "quite hopeless. I put the matter to him logically and as clearly as I possibly could, but I assure you he is so steeped and saturated in anti-German feeling that he even discovered a sinister design on the part of Germany in their peace festival."

Undoubtedly Grant Macrae was a suspicious individual. He had read about these preparations to hold what amounted to a national conference in Schleswig-Holstein. He was not impressed with the pious desire which had been expressed with singular unanimity by every newspaper throughout Germany, that this festival should be one marked by "heartfelt thankfulness to God that He had favoured the renaissance of German art and Kultur."

It was indeed remarkable, as he had said, that confronted with the necessity for organizing a complicated time-table, food supplies for the enormous influx of visitors which the festival would produce, and sleeping accommodation for the hundreds of thousands of pilgrims who would make their appearance on that joyous occasion, those responsible for its arrangement had not definitely fixed the day it would occur. If Grant was interested in this matter, England as a whole was not.

There was much to occupy the attention of the newspaper reader without dwelling upon the domestic affairs of the German Empire.

Since Hungary had proclaimed her independence, and the Emperor of Austria "in gratitude for the delivery of his country from the barbarian invader" had come into line with the minor states, the British people had been content with the disappearance of the dual kingdom, and had seen in the inevitable break-up of Austria-Hungary, the fulfilment of wishes which curiously enough they had never expressed. But though the destruction of the dual empire had been outside their interests at the beginning of the war, they had eagerly seized upon its disintegration as tangible evidence of the fulfilment of at least a part of their war plans. They had not destroyed the German empire, its might or its prestige. They had not dealt so shattering a blow at their enemy that he was unable to recover, so that when men came to review the balance sheet of war it was only natural that they should seize upon the fait accompli in Austria as one of the acts to which they might claim credit. Thereafter they either looked upon

Germany with good-natured contempt, believing implicitly the stories which were coming through of Germany's economic ruin, or strove to forget that such a country existed. They believed implicitly that Germany was crippled for a hundred years; that her trade had passed automatically into the hands of her conquerors, and that articles which came to them marked plainly "made in" were indeed the product of that country, though why a land which hitherto had produced only the raw materials of manufactures should suddenly form into a great industrial country they did not stop to inquire. On the 1st of July, 1925, the *Daily Londoner* announced that the British fleet would be reviewed on July 18th, and commented upon the fact in a leader from which the following extract is taken:

> Lord Goschen, on one memorable occasion, advised Sir Alfred Milner if he had any doubt as to the supremacy of the British in South Africa to make a visit to Simon's Town and see the British fleet. The Megaphone with its usual disregard for patent fact has commented upon this occurrence with a sneer that the ships in Simon's Bay did not prove efficacious in protecting the ambitions of Pretoria. The same objection cannot be raised in relation to the Megaphone's favourite bugbear. The proud fleet which will anchor at Spithead on July 18th will give the croakers cause. What has Britain to fear with a navy equal in point of size and gun power to any three navies in the world? We may well be proud, etc.

Grant Macrae read the leader through word by word and grinned. Porshein, the proprietor of the Londoner, had found it convenient during the great war to describe himself as a Russian Pole. There was no disputing the truth of one fact, that his two daughters had married into German families that were "noble born."

Porshein was moreover associated with one of the big electrical firms of Germany.

"The 18th!" murmured Grant as he read the announcement.

He did not doubt its accuracy, because Porshein had been very kind to some of the junior members of the Government and accommodated them at intervals. He secured information, sometimes a day, sometimes a week, before its publication through the ordinary channels. Occasionally he would make a statement foreshadowing some act of the Government, a forecast which aroused such a storm of protest as to call for an official denial that any such Government action was contemplated. There never was a ballon d'essai which was not floated from his office.

Frankly, the public were not greatly interested in Germany, and when side by side of the announcement--it was officially given out the next day--there was a statement from the Hamburg correspondent of Reuter that the date of the great German festival had been fixed on the 17th, the coincidence passed unnoticed. On the 3rd July the Hamburg-American Steamship informed the shipping agencies that the sailing of the VATERLAND and the HINDENBURG, their two greatest ships from New York, on 12th July and 19th July respectively had been cancelled, owing to defective engine trouble which had developed during the last voyages.

"These two ships will be replaced by the SEYDLITZ and the KAISER FRANZ JOSEPH," ran the statement. The big German shipping companies had struck an unlucky week, for one of the biggest South American liners also developed engine trouble and returned to Madeira, transferring her passengers to a smaller ship and making her way "under her own seas."

"It looks serious," said the first lord of the Admiralty, "very serious. I admit that much, but--"

He and Grant were dining alone at Buckingham Gate.

"Our information is that nothing unusual is going forward in Germany, and that there is no real reason for apprehension. Besides, my dear chap, it is very unlikely Germany would try any monkey tricks at a time our fleet is practically mobilised, and at a moment when we had adopted one of the most important inventions we have had in the past twenty years."

"What is that?" asked Grant Macrae.

"The Vennimore detector," replied the first lord; "you know old Sir John?"--Grant nodded, and the first lord went on--"we have had extensive tests, and there is no doubt that the adoption of this system is going to make all the difference in the world to naval warfare."

"You think it is efficacious?"

"I know it is efficacious," replied Lord Arthur, "we have had some of the best men in the service testing it, and it was practically flawless."

Grant Macrae was thoughtful.

"How long would it take to adapt this machine?" he asked.

"Four months," was the reply.

Grant made a little grimace. "I would give half the money I possess," he said, "to know what their game is."

The first lord laughed.

"I think you are worrying yourself unnecessarily. By the way, how is your little friend, Miss Manton?" Grant smiled.

"Quite unsubdued," he said; "I gave her a long lecture on running risks, but I am afraid I did not convince her. She is a patriot."

"An American patriot?" said Lord Arthur; "aren't they rather rare?"

"An American patriot," repeated the other. "I think most Americans are patriotic, but unfortunately there aren't a very large number of Americans. She knows what we all know, that America is a big prize for an enterprising militant."

They sat for an hour discussing the problems which were exciting the Government at the moment. The French were a little cool, thought the first lord, and it did not help to strengthen the bonds between the two countries that England, because of her unimpaired industries, was gaining ground at an enormous rate in the field of Commerce. The North of France had not yet recovered from the German occupation, and the French treasury was in fairly straitened circumstances.

The enemy had not occupied England, her coal mines were undamaged, her factories still stood, the vast machinery of commerce had been undisturbed by the war. It had not even rusted, for during the last year of the war when the coming of the end became apparent, and the demand for ammunition was falling off, manufacturers had devoted their attention to the securing of the world's markets. This naturally hit Germany, but it hit France more. The British had secured a lead in trade which they could not very well lose, and our

late ally was showing an irritation which was understandable, even though it was deplorable.

"Let me ask you a plain question," said Grant Macrae, suddenly, "if we found ourselves involved in war in two or three months' time, could we depend upon the help of the French?"

The Cabinet Minister shook his head slowly.

"I don't think I should be justified in saying that we could," he said.

"Or Russia?" asked Grant.

Again Lord Arthur shook his head.

"We could depend upon their moral support, but Russian losses were so heavy, their expenditure so great, that another war would be immensely unpopular."

"I see," said Grant, "so that if Germany attacks us, we shall be practically alone."

"That's about the size of it," said the other cheerfully; "we should be obliged to depend upon our incomparable navy of which the Londoner speaks so feelingly this morning, and I think we should be in an extent quite right," he continued; "the navy has never been so efficient as it is now, and if Russia and France could not assist us they would certainly not assist the enemy. It would be a free fight between the navies, with the chance--and a very dim chance--that the German would invade us and repeat on a more poignant scale the horrors which France and Belgium endured in 1914- 15."

"Suppose the navy fails through no fault of its own?" inquired Grant.

"It will not fail," said the other shortly; "but if it did there would be Hell. I will keep my eye on this festival," he said in parting. "I have already drawn the attention of the Prime Minister to the fixing of the date, but he does not seem to think that it portends anything unusual. I doubt if Germany is prepared for war, and certainly we have seen nothing very terrible in the press, nor have we yet a causus belli."

Grant raised his hands in despair. "Causus belli!" he said, "what causus belli does the German require? You have forgotten your Æsop, my dear chap; the wolf very soon found his causus belli when he wanted to eat the lamb."

"At any rate, we are prepared," said the other, and with this assurance Grant went home in a troubled frame of mind.

Chapter XI

HE had arranged the next day to lunch with Ruth Manton. He had been endeavouring to persuade her to surrender to him the little code book, the possession of which constituted her offence against the German empire. Sweet as she was, she could be very obstinate, and she had met all his pleadings with a blank refusal. He renewed his effort at lunch.

"What is the use?" she countered. "I have practically the whole of the important codes by memory. I can't de-memorise it, and giving the book to you would merely put you in danger without relieving me."

"I am willing to take all the risks," he said.

"But I am not," she said quickly, and went very red.

"I mean," she corrected herself, "it isn't a question of your personal danger that worries me, it is the thought that I should place any human being in a position of peril."

"I very much appreciate your consideration," he smiled, "but I am in a much better position to deal with an attack which will inevitably be made upon the possessor of that book, and I think it were better that it were in my safe."

She laughed.

"I think you're making a great fuss over nothing, really," she said with a light of amusement in her eyes; "does it occur to you that that code is probably now in course of alteration?"

"What makes you think that?" he asked.

She stirred her coffee and looked at him with a quizzical eye.

"I have many friends," he said cryptically, "and one of these is in a position to see all the cables which are being transmitted to certain stations abroad. For the last three or four days, cables identically couched, but perfectly undecipherable, have been going through to all the German Embassies, and to all the captains of German men-of-war, who are at present outside European waters. The cables are of such length that there can be no doubt that a revision of some standard book is in course of progress."

"By the way," she said suddenly, "I saw your friend, Mr. Ballin, last night."

He frowned and stiffened slightly.

"Oh, I'm so sorry; I was only trying to be humorous, but it was rather interesting. He came after dinner and asked to see me. My two previous experiences with Mr. Ballin did not encourage me to see him alone. Fortunately there was a woman dining with me, and she was present at the interview. By the way," she said, looking at him straightly, "he told me of a little talk you had with him in the early hours of the morning I was taken on the Prague."

"I wish to heaven he'd keep his tongue still," he growled. "There was nothing in that interview which he could disclose with credit to himself."

"Now I understand," she said, "how it came about that I was rescued with such remarkable rapidity."

"What did Ballin want to see you for?" he asked, for he was more than ordinarily interested.

"He wanted to know whether I would let by-gones be by-gones, and come over to Germany for the festival."

"And you answered?"

"Never again," she answered emphatically, "I have had all the experience I want for quite a long time of German Kultur and German manners. This little island is quite good enough for me till I return to my own country. To tell you the truth, I was rather nonplussed by his appearance--at the mere fact that he had taken it for granted that I would receive him. He was just the same urbane, polite young man, very calm and very philosophical. He said he hoped as a result of this festival that all the old differences with Germany would be wiped out."

"He said that, did he?" interrupted Grant. "Please remember as much as you can of what he said in that respect."

"Let me think," she answered; "he also remarked about the British Navy being mobilised on that date."

"In what connection?"

"In connection with the festivities and whatever danger they threatened to the peace and security of England. You know," she said with a smile, "your leaders have been rather ominous."

He nodded.

"It is not wonderful that they should be so," he said quietly. "I feel that the times are ominous. I have a curious nervous sinking feeling which is either due to overwork or to some esoteric influence which cannot be explained."

She got up from the table, and he followed her from the great restaurant to the palm court outside. He was smoking a cigarette and taking a cup of coffee, chatting idly about the things of the moment, when she suddenly exclaimed:

"There is Mr. Ballin."

He looked up. Ballin was slowly descending the stairway of the hotel accompanied by Mr. Massey. Behind them singularly detached and aloof was Olga Massey. Grant pointed her out to the girl.

"She looks, very pleased with herself," said Grant, and a moment later Massey caught his eye and crossed the floor of the palm court.

"I've got the biggest bit of news," said Massey, taking a chair without invitation, and leaving his daughter to entertain his guest. "It's about this festival, and it is going to upset all your calculations."

"Is the German army disarming?" asked Grant, with mock surprise.

"You will have your joke!" chuckled the other; "no, but it's almost as important. Have you heard of the Peace League?"

Grant had heard of this little society which had branches in all the European countries and had as its ostentatious design the bringing together of all the elements which had been opposed in the last war. It was a utopian scheme foredoomed to failure, based upon theories of universal brotherhood, and it had dragged on an enfeebled existence ever since the war had ended.

"The Peace League has organised a grand reunion," said Mr. Massey slowly and impressively; "a reunion of the men who, ten years ago, were anxious to cut one another's throats. In other words, we are making an attempt--and I say we," he added modestly, "because I have played no small part in the work of the league--to bring together German and English soldiers in fraternity. In fact, we are inviting every man in England who served in the late war to visit Schleswig-Holstein, where the most extensive arrangements are being made for their comfort."

"How do you expect the majority of them to find their fares for this?" inquired Grant.

"Ah, ha!" cried Mr. Massey. "I thought that would surprise you. And now I will explain the most wonderful act of kindness and courtesy one government has ever displayed towards another. Not only," he said, tapping the table to emphasise his words, "not only will these be carried free of all costs to Germany, not only will they be entertained and provided with meals for two days, but they will receive a handsome souvenir of the occasion and will be transported back by a whole fleet of steamers. You said in this morning's paper--I have started reading your paper again--that you couldn't understand why the German lines had cancelled their sailings. The explanation is simple, my friend. The giant liners of the Hamburg American Company will be placed at the disposal of the Peace League to transport our friends to the festival and will bring them home again."

To say that Grant was staggered is but mildly to express his feelings.

"What do you think of it?" asked the triumphant Mr. Massey.

"I don't know what to think," confessed Grant, with a smile, an admission which afforded Mr. Massey intense delight.

There were other people who did not know what to think; but the impression which this great scheme created was on the whole one of sheer delight. It is not too much to say that the British people were heartily sick of war, and the rumour of war, and they welcomed whole-heartedly this "magnificent attempt to weld antagonism into a common understanding," as the *Daily Londoner* put it.

"Here beyond any doubt," said the *Daily Record*, "is an honest attempt framed on novel lines to arrive at a better understanding, and we for one welcome this proof of Germany's generous spirit without reservation."

The offer needed no newspaper advertising. There was not a journal from one end of England to the other that did not give prominence to the impending excursion. They announced particulars as to how the application for tickets should be made and printed, gratuitously, application forms whereon a man had but to state his age, his name and his address, and his unit (if any), to receive the necessary papers which would transport him abroad and provide his accommodation. There were no troublesome documents to fill up. The German government even waived its stringent passport regulations, only--and this was the fly in the ointment--there was no accommodation for the wives and children of the excursionists. "Already," said an explanatory notice, "the resources of our host will be strained to the utmost, and it is obviously impossible to provide the extra sleeping room which their presence would necessitate." Elaborate time-tables of festivities were published, and the application for tickets was obviously very heavy.

Grant Macrae felt he was being a churl, but stoutly refused to give any publicity to this popular excursion. On the 14th July he sent for a reporter to his room. "I want you to find out," he said, "how many applications the Peace League have received. They used to have a small office in Conduit Street, but apparently they have moved into bigger premises in Oxford Street."

In an hour the reporter returned, a little puzzled.

"They were quite decent to me, and told me that they would give me any information they had in their power, but apparently the applications have been rather disappointing. So far, only twenty thousand people have applied for tickets."

"Twenty thousand?" said Grant, incredulously, and the reporter nodded. "The excursionists sail from the nearest ports to their residence," the reporter went on, "from Avonmouth, Plymouth, Southampton, Dover, Harwich, Hull, Newcastle, the Clyde and Aberdeen. Ships will call on the appointed day and special trains will be run to make the necessary connections."

"And all for twenty thousand people!" interrupted Grant.

The reporter pulled out his note-book.

"As a matter of fact, I had my doubts about that 20,000 too," he said. "Look at this, sir."

He took from his book a blue form filled in with a name of a man. The address was in Sheffield. The form was a model of exactness. It told the applicant the time the train left Sheffield, the time it arrived at Hull, the hour it arrived at Bremen, the name of the camp, the number of the line and the letter of the tent where he would find "everything he needed."

"This is one of the tickets, I suppose," said Grant, turning it over; "where did you get it?"

"I slipped it off the table, when the secretary's back was turned," said the reporter unblushingly; "but don't you see its importance, sir? Look at the number!"

Grant looked and whistled, for the number on the left-hand corner was "601,174."

"Of course," said the reporter, "this may only mean a serial number, and that the actual number began over 500,000."

"We will find out," said Grant.

The next morning's edition of the *Megaphone* revealed a surprising change of policy.

So far from ignoring this grand excursion the editor was apparently anxious to assist those who were participating. In open defiance of all the laws regarding lotteries and guessing competitions, he offered a bonus of £5 to the first fifty applications who held tickets, the numbers of which by totalling the figures together made 13. It was a very simple competition, as he explained. The man who had a ticket numbered 1246, the figures of which added together made 13, would be a winner. So also would the holder of 31,414, and so on. Three days later, there were 5000 applications for the prize.

The figures given left Grant in no doubt as to what the plan was. He put the matter without delay before the Government, and the Government Department concerned laughed at his suspicion. He took it to the Admiralty with no greater success. He put it before the War Office, and was informed that "the army council saw nothing but good in the rapprochement between the soldiers of Great Britain and of their late enemy."

After this last visit, he returned to the office in disgust and shut himself in his inner sanctum. He must take a bold step and attack the enemy on his own ground, and the first step would be to interview Ballin. That gentleman, whom he succeeded in reaching by telephone, came at once. Grant ushered him in to his private room and shut the door behind him.

"Mr. Ballin," he said to that imperturbable young man, "I am going to put all my cards on the table, and I am going to ask you to do the same, without expecting that you will. This country is on the verge of war with Germany."

The other smiled.

"That is your pet illusion, Mr. Macrae," he said quietly. "Why should you imagine at this moment, when we are giving such striking proof of our friendship, or our desire for friendship, that we should be contemplating anything so terrible? I admit," he went on quietly, "that England has been a very bitter pill for us to swallow, and the hatred the German feels for the Englishman will take a lot of wearing down. We are trying very hard to put an end to an intolerable situation. We recognise that no nation can afford to be isolated as Germany has been during the last ten years, boycotted as she has been, and snubbed as she has been. It were far better," he cried passionately, "that the last German soldier had died on the field than that we should have concluded a peace which was not to our advantage. We had either to win or go out. We did not win, and we would have been destroyed as a nation when the war ended but for the resilience and the discipline of the German people. I say this about you," he looked at Grant fairly and squarely in the face, "because you are a patriot, and you love your country. You do not care who suffers so

long as your own land comes out on top. I respect your point of view, I admire it. My view is exactly the same, save that it has as the object of its solicitude Germany, whilst yours is Great Britain. The difference between the two countries is this. That whilst we Germans recognise the seriousness of our situation, you in Great Britain are smugly satisfied with the polished surface of things. You work like a Trojan to arouse your people to a sense of their danger--whatever danger there is"--again he smiled and spread his hands with a gesture of deprecation. "You say there is going to be war. Your people do not believe you and vote you a bore. Why? Because they do not see under the skin of things. Our people know--what they know. But suppose war threatened--what would be the cause? You are the cause, you and your people. You never understood Germany, you never understood war. You did not know that it is kinder to kill than to maim; you did not appreciate the German spirit sufficiently to realise that we could understand and admire thoroughness in repression, even though it were directed against us, and that your old-womanliness of shaking hands, and in your damnable magnanimity forgiving us, was the bitterest humiliation you put upon us. We are a people of war, Huns you call us, and you are not far wrong, for the old spirit which permitted slaughter, and not only permitted, but encouraged slaughter as a means to a peaceful end, is the spirit which animates the German nation to-day. When you read during the war how a German officer punished a quarrelsome German soldier by suddenly plunging his sword into his stomach and then went on cleaning his nails as though nothing had happened, you thought he was a brute beast. He was intellectual, his act was in perfect consonance with the spirit of German culture. Don't you see that all natural processes are cruel--what more cruel than child-birth? You, no less than we, secure fame, peace, happiness, ease and confidence--which implies a lack of fear--by crushing your enemies. You do not take your murderers and your parasites and shake hands with them, you destroy them, and by their destruction you engender a confidence in the law. You do not realise that you go to bed every night in peace and security because a grim and nerveless hangman has strangled your enemy. But, nevertheless, that is the truth. You owe your liberty as a result of terrible cruelties which have been inflicted all down the ages by one party upon another, by one nation upon another. You only look at results and delude yourselves into the belief that they are God-sent as a reward for your virtues. You thrive on cruelty. Your joint of beef upon your table was a living ox two days ago, in the pride and strength of his youth, and he endured the shock and the torment of death that he might supply your table. Can you show me one of the privileges which you enjoy which has not brought grief to somebody else? There is no such thing as painless evolution, for the beginning of all human progress and all human improvement is founded in war." He stopped himself and went on in a calmer tone. "I don't know why I should inflict my views and theories of fife upon you; I take it that you did not ask me to come to feed you with theories. What do you want with me, Mr. Macrae?"

Grant had been an interested listener to the exposition of the other's philosophy.

"I want to tell you," he said slowly, "that I understand your German festival very well."

"And what do you understand about it?" asked the other quickly.

"Will you sit down?" said Grant, and with a little bow Ballin pulled a chair up to the desk and seated himself. Grant took his place opposite and leant across the desk, his elbows on the table, his hands clasped.

"On the 17th of July," he said slowly, "let us say the night of the 16th, thousands of special trains will run from various places toward your North Sea and Baltic ports."

"Two days previous to this, you will have landed in or near some of those ports some 600,000 Britishers."

"As many as that?" asked the other coolly.

"Your Government is to be congratulated upon one of the most remarkable schemes that has ever been initiated. To-morrow," Grant went on deliberately, "I shall publish my views in full in this newspaper, and I have secured very large spaces in the press throughout the country in order to call attention to my view."

"That is very enterprising of you," said the other cheerfully; "why have you sent for me?"

Grant regarded him fixedly for a few moments before he replied.

"Because I believe that you are the head of the great movement which your country is making to bring about the ruin of this country," he said deliberately, "and because I am satisfied in my mind that once I have convinced you of the futility of your plan you will abandon it."

The other stared at him in astonishment.

"You are certainly a very bold man," he said, "and I would be the last to deny that your country deserves well of you."

He took up his hat and his stick, crooked his stick on his arm and pulled on his gloves.

"My advice to you," he said as he stood by the door, "is to abandon your idea of publication. Apart from the ridicule it would bring upon you, there are other considerations which should induce a man of your perceptions to hesitate before he took such a step. That, however," he shrugged his shoulders, "is a matter for you and you alone to decide."

He looked into his hat as though studying the maker's name and went on.

"I am aware that all the time I have been speaking," he said, without raising his eyes, "you have been considering the advisability of shooting me, and that your revolver is practically under your hand."

Grant started, for this was in truth the case.

"If I may extend my advice," smiled Ballin, "advice which followed benefits me as well as you, I should refrain from touching that weapon. The destruction of an instrument does not greatly embarrass the hand that plays instruments; it is the duty of the agent to be destroyed if in his destruction he is bringing his principle any nearer to success. My killing would not help you at all, and would indeed produce a very embarrassing situation, and probably give my country the *causus belli* which you were discussing so learnedly at the first lord's dinner-table the other night."

Chapter XII

WITH this parting shot he left. Grant did not trouble to wonder how Carl Ballin had discovered what happened at the dinner-table of the first lord of the Admiralty. He knew that the perfect espionage system of Germany had been reorganised, and that the best efforts of the German intelligence department were devoted to Russia and to France. He spent the afternoon working away at the story which he designed for the shocking of England. His dinner was brought in to him on a tray, and he continued his work without interruption.

A telephone call brought him from his desk at ten o'clock. He recognised Ruth's voice.

"Can I come down and see you?"

He looked at his watch, and from his watch to the desk. Very little more remained to be done. He had prepared the whole of the statement, and he could afford an hour's relaxation.

"Come down by all means," he invited.

She was in the office half an hour later, and briefly he sketched to her the sum of his deductions.

"Do you really think that things are so bad?" she asked gravely. He nodded.

"Suppose they aren't, and you have made a mistake, would it affect you very much?"

He shook his head with a little smile.

"I have already earned the name of Alarmist, and it will merely be added to my delinquencies."

She sat quietly by whilst he finished his work, corrected some proofs of the matter as they were sent down from the printer's room, and at length when the last of the long slips had been passed, he swung round in his chair. It was a quarter-past eleven, and he was thoroughly tired, but--

"I have something to say to you," he said abruptly.

She looked up. She was sitting in a low armchair with a magazine on her knees, and she put the book aside. He thought she was singularly beautiful, and the words which he thought would have come with such readiness seemed to stick in his throat.

"What is it?" she asked gently.

She had a vague idea that she knew what was coming.

"It's about you," he said, "you with your big mission and your lonely life, and I with a mission which I believe to be as big and associated with yours, couldn't we--mightn't we--the fact is, Ruth Manton, I am in love with you."

She went white, but there was no apprehension in her eyes, only a great and womanly kindness.

"How long have you been in love with me?" she asked in a low voice.

He shook his head.

"I think it must have been from the first time I saw you," he said, "and now--well, I feel I can't live without you."

It struck him that he was very unconvincing, and very cold-blooded in his declaration. He had never been so much at a loss to express his feelings in words. She rose up from her chair and walked towards him, laid her two hands on his shoulders.

"And do you really mean this?" she said, looking him straight in the eyes, "or is it a sense of pity for my loneliness--I'm not really lonely, you know--or is it a sort of comradeship which you have mistaken for something else? What is it you want of me?"

With a swift circling of his arms, he caught her towards him.

"This," he said huskily, and kissed her.

Their lips were together, he felt the beating of her heart against his, and he was experiencing for the first time in his life a sense of almost heavenly comfort when there was a crash like thunder, the walls of the office reeled and crumbled, and Grant and the girl were hurled against the rear wall. His last recollection was of a pair of terror-stricken grey eyes looking into his, and then all went dark.

He woke up in the street; he was lying on a stretcher, and the police were just about to lift him into the motor ambulance. He had a horrible pain in his head, and was conscious that he was surrounded by an enormous crowd, but his first thoughts were for the girl.

"The lady?" he muttered.

"She's all right, sir," said the inspector, bending over him. "She's here."

Grant looked up; the girl was standing by the stretcher looking down at him. She was very pale, but apparently unhurt.

"Come with me," he said, and she nodded, following him into the ambulance, and sitting on a low seat by his side.

"What happened?" he asked.

"I'm afraid I've some bad news for you," she said. "The office blew up; the police think it was dynamited."

"What of the staff?" he asked.

She made no reply. The staff of the Megaphone were being dealt with as fast as they could be extracted from that blazing inferno.

"Am I hurt very badly?" he asked after a pause.

"Not very badly; the doctor says you have only a cut in the head, and a few bruises, and it may not be necessary to detain you in the hospital. I'm going to see your wounds dressed, and then I'm taking you back to my hotel."

"Dynamited," he repeated, "of course it was the only thing they could do, but I am going to tell the story if I am dynamited a hundred times over."

She leant down and kissed him. It seemed so natural a thing to do that she experienced no embarrassment.

The wound, as she had said, was slight, and the doctor at Bartholomew's Hospital felt no qualms in allowing his patient leave. The girl accompanied him home, and after he had got to bed came up and made him comfortable for the night.

"I have put you in the next room to myself," she said, "and I have had a portable bell fixed, so that you can ring me if you want anything."

His dreams were troubled that night, and he scarcely enjoyed an uninterrupted hour of sleep. He was, despite his equanimity, shocked by the tragedy which had so unexpectedly overtaken the newspaper. The *Megaphone* was a real living thing to him, a child and an occupation, and although he promised himself that publication should not be interrupted for more than twenty-four hours, he had a sense of personal loss, as though he had seen the death of one who was very precious to him. In the early hours of the morning he fell asleep, the first dreamless sleep he had enjoyed, and awoke at nine to find the girl standing by the side of his bed with a cup of tea.

"I judged the psychological moment," she smiled. He raised his aching head with a little grimace, and her left arm circled his neck and helped him to a sitting position.

"I think you are not so well as you think," she said with anxiety in her face.

He chuckled, though the effort to laugh was painful enough.

"I am well enough to start a new newspaper to-day," he said grimly.

"Tell me," she asked, as she took the cup from him, "have you lost a great deal of money? I mean have you lost everything?"

He smiled as he took her hand.

"You're not planning to give me half your fortune? No, my dear child, I haven't lost everything. In fact, financially this loss is very little, and most of it will be covered by insurance. What I am losing, and what I cannot afford to lose, is time."

She looked at him dubiously.

"I don't think you ought to get up to-day, yet I know that you will," she said. "Is there anything I could do?"

He thought for a moment.

"There is a newspaper published in London," he said, "called the *Morning World*. It's an old established property, but has fallen on evil times, and I think they want to sell it. In the open market it's worth about £60,000, because it is a losing proposition, but the machinery is fairly modern. I am willing to buy the paper, and pay up to £100,000 for it. Go along and see its manager."

She went eagerly, delighted to find a place for herself in his schemes.

Her interview with the manager of the *Morning World* was not a protracted one, and the negotiations which followed were simplified by reason of the fact that her arrival synchronised with a board meeting at which the directors of the paper were considering the advisability of closing the paper down, and selling off the assets for what they would fetch.

By one o'clock £70,000 in cash had changed hands, by five o'clock Grant Macrae, in his new editorial office, had changed the title of the paper, had reorganized its staff, and was engaged in dictating an article on the lines of that which had come to such an untimely end on the night before.

It is only necessary to give the introduction to an article which perhaps created a greater sensation than any newspaper article which had ever previously been made public, or which has since seen the light of day. That introduction was terse and allegorical.

> "On the 17th of this month, some 600,000 young men of military age are leaving these shores for Germany. If during their absence war should break out, those 600,000 men will be interned, and the flower of the army on which we should depend in case of an attack will have been virtually wiped out of existence.
>
> "I accuse the German Government of having adopted this comparatively speaking inexpensive method of transporting Britons of military age to Germany with the object of reducing our strength of resistance.
>
> "On the day following their arrival in Germany, some 4,000 or 5,000 trains will leave for Germany's coast ports ostensibly to carry excursionists to the gigantic festivals which are being organised in the state of Schleswig-Holstein, but in reality to transport troops to Bremen, Hamburg, Kiel, Wilhelmshaven, Borkum and Cuxhaven.

"I repeat that those troops are intended to be taken on board the great liners which have specially been detained for the purpose in European waters, and transported by some means or other to England.

"I accuse the German Government of deliberately planning an unprovoked attack upon Great Britain, and I am certainly in possession of information to the effect that twenty-four corps of the line with twenty-four reserve divisions are to be employed for this purpose, and that the King of Bavaria, remarkable for his hatred of all British things, is to be in command."

This was briefly the introduction to his article. The article itself gave chapter and verse for all his conclusions. It pointed out what had passed unnoticed in England, the frequent consultations which the King of Bavaria had had with the great General Staff. It described the measures which had been followed to bring the corps up to war strength. It gave categorical lists of the output of Krupp's in the past eighteen months, and it revealed, for the first time, a breach in the Anglo-German convention.

"It is said that Germany has kept to the letter of her agreement with Great Britain and that she has only built the ships that were allowed by the Treaty of Copenhagen. This is not true. There are in German shipyards, scores of vessels and nearly a hundred submarines which do not appear in the Naval List. These are the vessels which, according to German accounts, were half constructed when, for some reason or other, the work was stopped on them. In some cases the excuse was that there were architectural errors of construction, and in others that the material supplied was not the quality specified. Ostensibly these boats were left in the hands of the contractors, for it will be noticed that these errors have never occurred in the Imperial Shipbuilding yard.

"But not only are these ships completed and engined, but they are also practically armed and ready to take the water in a month at the latest."

The *Megaphone* provided the sensations of the week. These revelations formed the subject which was canvassed at every dinner-table. That they should be ridiculed was only to be expected. The *Londoner* was merciless in its criticisms.

"We can only conclude," it said, "that the bad accident which occurred to the editor of our contemporary has deranged his judgment. To suggest that that accident, which we understand was caused by a gas explosion, was arranged by a German agent is, to put it mildly, as fantastic a theory as we have heard, not out of place perhaps in sensational fiction, but wholly contemptible when suggested in all seriousness in a daily newspaper."

The *Herald-Record* was no less severe.

"In short, this wild and incoherent nonsense is to be accepted by our people as evidence of a plot the like of which we have never seen outside a sensational novel. We cannot too strongly condemn the publication of these sensational stories. Doubtless Mr. Macrae will draw many ha'pennies into his coffers by publishing this kind of literature, but it redounds neither to the credit of himself nor of British journalism. The net result of

the precious 'revelations' is to revive all the fears and uncertainties of the old war days, but if Mr. Macrae aims at spoiling only an enjoyable outing on the part of a large number of men who are anxious to meet their old opponents on kinder terms than when last they met, we believe he has failed."

Some of the criticisms were milder. *The Post-Echo* regretted that the offending journal could not find more pleasant and more charitable subjects with which to fill its columns. The *Trade Union Journal* condemned the article as implying bad faith with the German Trade Unionists who had extended a welcome to their brother unionists of Britain. Grant read the comments without resentment.

"They are not very kind, are they?" said the girl with a laugh. She had installed herself as his secretary, nurse, and general assistant. He patted her hand.

"The best thing you can do," he said, "is to take the next boat back to America."

"But why?" she asked in indignant surprise.

"Because you are going to see things in London which little girls should not see," he said gravely, "and I think you are going to see them before the next week is out.

"Do you seriously mean it?"

"I seriously mean that England is going to be invaded, and the only thing for a woman to do, and especially a woman who has been associated with anti-German propaganda, is to clear out of the country."

She threw back her head and laughed.

"If you would really like to know what would be the best thing for me to do," she said demurely, "and if it wasn't a horribly bold thing to say, I would tell you."

"What is that?" he asked.

For answer she passed round to the back of his chair, and leaned over and kissed him on the cheek.

"I think I'd better get married," she said, and was out of the room before he could say anything.

He did not see her until the evening.

Chapter XIII

ALL day long, telegrams and letters had been arriving by the shoal, mostly from men who had studied the situation and recognised its seriousness. Great army chiefs, retired and active, naval men, writers, economists, all supported his views. There were of course a large number of abusive epistles, but that was part of the game. He had set tongues wagging and was an amused audience to a curious discussion which took place in the railway carriage which carried him to Burland. He was taking a few hours off, for Sir John had wired asking him to come down.

The old man was in excellent humour, and his blind assistant one broad grin.

"I've been reading your article, Macrae," said Sir John, after he had shaken hands, "and I hope you are wrong."

"Hope I am wrong?" said the astonished editor.

"I hope you are wrong when you think that war is going to break out within a week or so," said Sir John; "you know the Navy has adopted my invention; that it would be at least three months before they can be adapted to the fleet. I am busy working out the particulars of an extemporised detector which can be fixed in a few days. The Admiralty has asked me to get it ready by to-morrow, and I think it will just about be able to do the work, without, however, enabling the ship to accurately locate the submarine.

"What I am doing now is preparing a mere description, a clear and concise direction which will enable an engineer lieutenant to rig up a temporary instrument. That is why I wanted to see you. I won't ask you for any particulars, but are you satisfied in your own mind that the danger is so serious as you say?"

"I am," replied Grant.

"Good," said Sir John; "now we are going to work, aren't we, Tom?"

"I'm sure, sir," said the blind man.

"And we'll give the devils something to remember, won't we, Tom?"

"We will that, sir," said the soldier with a chuckle. "I'll bet they'll be sorry for themselves by the time we've done with 'em, damn 'em!"

"Ssh!" admonished Sir John, "no bad language, Tom. What a wicked old blind man you are, and what a bad-tempered old blind man! Come on." He took the other's arm affectionately, and Grant, watching this curious couple as they walked up the corridor leading to the laboratory, felt his eyes grow moist.

Carl Ballin, standing at the window, saw Grant's car whizz past on the way to Burland Station. He smiled a little and went back to his book. He was reading when Sir Max Graaf, his host, came into the room.

"Have you finished?" asked Ballin. He spoke in German.

"Thank heaven, yes!" replied the other in the same language. He went to the sideboard, poured out a lot of whiskey and diluted it.

"When do you leave?" asked Carl.

"To-morrow," said the millionaire; "I am travelling by the MAURETANIA."

"Oh," said the other, and then after a pause, "Why don't you wait to see out?"

"Because I'm not a damned fool," said Sir Max, briefly. "What is more, I dislike intensely anything that pertains to violence."

Carl laughed. "I don't know how long America will offer you a safe and calm harbourage," he said.

"For twelve months, at any rate," replied the other. "By the end of that time you ought to get this country settled, and then I'll come back."

Carl nodded many times as though his thoughts were elsewhere.

"You're taking it for granted," he said, "that we shall succeed!"

"Of course," said the other in surprise. "Why not?"

Carl shrugged his shoulders. "I don't exactly know why it shouldn't be, but I'm a little scared. Now if we only could have settled up with our friend Macrae, I should have been perfectly confident. He has set people thinking. I hate to see the British thinking."

"You're not nervous, are you?" sneered the other.

Carl laughed.

"If I am, I'm entitled to be," he said pointedly. "I'm staying behind to see the matter through; I assure you I shouldn't be nervous at all if my portmanteaux were packed and labelled New York, but the worst of my job is to come."

"What is that?" asked Sir Max.

"I never discuss my plans in advance," said the other easily. He bit off the end of a cigar and lit it. "I repeat that the scheme may fail."

"Why?" asked the other in surprise.

"Partly because of Macrae, and partly because--well, there are other reasons."

He drove down to Burland and saw Sir Max Graaf off by the 4.52. He returned to the house and spent the afternoon and a greater portion of the evening sitting by the window. From where he sat, he commanded a view of the village street and the whole of the front of Sir John's house. He had much to think of and many plans to weigh, and the more important of these called for very careful analysis. It was half-past eleven when he had adjudged the moment had come for putting his plan to its most crucial test.

All the servants, but one, had been dismissed, and that one had been sent off to London with a message. Carl dressed himself for his adventure with great care. He substituted a dark suit and a dark blue shirt for that which he wore. He also took the precaution of wearing a pair of black silk gloves. There must be no finger-prints in this business. Nothing which would bring the crime home to the perpetrator. He would make no such bungle of the business as his compatriot had made.

There was a side entrance to Sir John's house, and a window which lead into the pantry. This Carl had seen after a careful reconnaissance. To enter the house was the work of a few minutes. After that, he must proceed more cautiously. He walked warily into the deserted dining-room. Sir John was in bed, and the house was in darkness. Carl had previously encircled the building and noticed the absence of lights in the laboratory. He flashed his electric lamp about the room and discovered on the table an open ABC timetable. By the side, on a slip of paper written in the Professor's cramped fist, were a number of times. So he was going up by the 8.40, and would be carrying his precious secret with him.

Carl made his way to the stairs, tested every tread before he trusted the weight of his body to it, and came at last to the Professor's sleeping-room. He tried the handle cautiously, and the door gave.

Very slowly he pushed it open to its full width. No light flashed. No signal bell rang, and listening he could hear the steady breathing of the room's occupant. He moved with cat-like tread across the room, stretched his hands out before him, felt the edge of the bedside table, and searched it. Here it was that he found a big, bulky packet, an embossed seal upon its flap. He slipped it into his pocket, and drew from a leather sheath at his side a long keen-edged knife. He hesitated only for a moment, and then "all progress begins in slaughter," he whispered to himself. With his left hand he found Sir John's throat.... The Professor half woke, but the knife struck twice.

The old man whispered something, and Ballin, lowering his head, listened.

"Edward," muttered the faint voice, and the murderer knew that the dying man was calling upon the name of his son.

He wiped the knife on the bedclothes and returned it to its sheath, then made stealthily for the door.

Noiseless as he was, there was one who could be still more silent. He had reached the door, his hand on the handle, when an arm was flung round his waist.

"You're a German," whispered a hoarse voice; "what have you done to my master?"

"Let go!" snarled Ballin.

"Come here--you!"

He felt himself almost lifted back to the bed. Tom's hands touched the silent form, felt the cruel wounds above that tired heart.

"Oh!" he said, and it was an "oh!" like a sob.

Ballin, with a supreme effort, wrenched himself free, and whipping out his revolver, fired. A low chuckle came from the darkness. The German sprang for the door, but some one was there before him. It closed with a crash. He fired again, and this time the bullet must have hit the man before him, but before he could press the trigger for a third time some one had him by the throat, had broken the revolver from his grip, and was now pressing him against the wall.

"I've got ye this time!... You've got me, too, but that's nothing... I don't want to live after him. I always knew I'd kill another German before I died--and you're him!"

The pressure about the throat increased, the blood shot to the doomed man's head, he struggled vainly, but he was in the hands of one whose strength made the other but a child.

"Good-bye, German," whispered the blind man hoarsely. "I can't see ye, I wish I could. Good-bye, German..."

In the morning they found all three. Ballin a heap on the ground, dreadful to look upon, and Tom Carrington lying by the side of his dead master, his strong arm encircling the other's shoulder, as a man will hold a child.

Chapter XIV

THE murders were not reported in the following morning's newspapers. Within two hours of the discovery of the crime, the Admiralty and the police were in possession of the house, and that same afternoon the newspaper proprietors of London were called together and were informed of the occurrence and requested to keep the facts from the public.

Sir Max Graaf was detained at Liverpool and brought back to London for inquiries. He professed to know little, or nothing, of Ballin beyond the fact that he was a man of independent wealth, and a search of Ballin's room did not greatly assist the police to come to any conclusion as to his identity. The crime was easy to reconstruct. The sealed packet in the murderer's pocket, the blood-stained knife at his side, and the marks about his throat, the discarded revolver, and the wounds in the dead soldier--all these told their own tale. Grant Macrae, shocked beyond measure at this tragic development, did not lose sight of its significance.

"You'll have to tell the people," he said to the First Lord.

"If we tell the people we shall also tell Germany," said Lord Arthur, "and if there is one thing we want to avoid, it is to let the enemy know that we are

fixing up the new detector. I have had the description wirelessed to all the ships of the fleet, and engineers are working double shift to work the detector."

"Where is the fleet?" asked Grant.

"In Spithead," was the reply: "the last of the battle-cruisers is coming in to-night; the review is to be to-morrow instead of the 18th."

"What of the grand excursion?" asked Grant drill. "Is the Government still approving?"

Lord Arthur shrugged his shoulders.

"What can I do?" he said in despair. "I can't change the administration and I certainly cannot convince it. You know this country is full of sympathisers with Germany. I should say there are more people in high places who have an admiration for Germany to-day than there ever have been before. By the way, your numbers are not quite right. There are 572,000 who have accepted the invitation of the German Government."

"And you are going to let them go?" asked Grant seriously.

Lord Arthur raised his hands helplessly.

"What am I to do?" he asked again.

"I should blow the ships up as they came into harbour," said Grant; "at any rate, I should take no risks."

"You'll probably find yourself mobbed," smiled the First Lord; "a lioness robbed of her cub bears no comparative in ferocity to England robbed of its pleasure. The only thing to do is to hope for the best."

That same afternoon there came an announcement from the committee of the festival that it had been necessary to advance the date by one day, and holders of tickets for the great joy ride, as one newspaper flippantly described it, were asked to make their arrangements to leave on a day previous to that which had been fixed.

"That's to-morrow," said Grant, when he read the first intimation.

Surely the Government would act now. The German plan was so apparent. But the Government saw no reason to intervene, and his attempt to obtain an interview with the Prime Minister was met by the statement that the Premier was spending the week-end out of town. On the morning of the 17th of July, the great German steamers called at all the advertising ports, and embarked their cheering thousands. With bands playing and handkerchiefs waving the ships put out to sea.

"No more stirring sight has ever been seen at any British port than that which followed the embarkation of Germany's guests," wrote the special correspondent of *The Londoner*. "Here were men, who a few years ago, had been facing an implacable enemy in trenches, and were now off to fraternise with those who in the bad old times it had been their duty to kill. Universal peace was never nearer sure achievement than at this moment.

"'I am going to try and find the man who bombed me at La Bassée,' said one former reservist, 'and we will have a drink together.'

"In this spirit did the manhood of England go forward to greet their sometime rivals."

Grant was in his office when he read this description, and he had hardly reached the end of the paragraph when he was summoned by an Admiralty messenger to Whitehall. Lord Arthur was not alone. There were two grave senior officers of the navy present when he was ushered into the big council room

which had witnessed so many important deliberations. The door was closed before he spoke.

"You know Admiral Lord Polshan?" he said, and Grant bowed; "and Admiral Sir George Dirk?"

Grant had met both before, and knew them to be in sympathy with his point of view.

"It is understood, Macrae," said Lord Arthur, "that what transpires here is to be kept secret for the rest of your life, and must not be told either in form of memoir or in any other way."

"That is understood," said Grant.

"Briefly the situation is this," said Lord Arthur, "my colleagues here agree with your point of view. The German ships have reached port by now, and we can do nothing to undo the mischief which, in the opinion of the first sea lord, has been caused. That is your view, Lord Polshan?"

The older man nodded his head.

"Undoubtedly," he said gruffly. "It was a most mad-brained piece of asininity which any Government has ever perpetrated."

Lord Arthur smiled.

"That is an expression of opinion which will go straight to your heart, Macrae," he said. "Now the point I wish to mention to you is this: I am the only member of the Cabinet who shares your view, and I confess that I do share it, and that I have the greatest fears for the immediate future. I cannot take any steps without the permission of the Cabinet, because you people destroyed all initiation, during the last war, when your newspapers turned Churchill out of office. Anything I do, therefore, must be done off my own bat."

"Whatever you do, sir," said Sir George, "is done with the full approval of the sea lords."

Lord Arthur nodded in acknowledgment of this, and went on. "The fleet is at Spithead, and it is assembled practically under war conditions. We are patrolling the North Sea, and especially watching the Bight of Heligoland."

"Where is the German high seas fleet?" asked Grant.

"At Heligoland," said the first lord, "they are having a little review of their own apparently, but they also are being watched."

"What of poor Vennimore's invention?"

"It will be rigged on every ship by to-morrow night," said Lord Arthur, "and in the meantime we are patrolling the English Channel very carefully. At the same time I cannot believe that Germany would take any steps without a formal declaration of war." The first sea lord muttered something.

"Lord Polshan does not agree with me," said Lord Arthur.

"Agree with you!" snorted the old sea lord, "what did Germany do in the last war that we should believe that she will be guided by any process of international law? Is it not the most obvious thing in the world that when she wants to strike, she will strike without any of the fancy preliminaries which have marked war in the past? Has she shown you she has any consideration for treaties? There will be no declaration of war when Germany moves. The first intimation we shall receive will come in the shape of an attack--of that you may be sure. Don't you agree, Sir George?" The other officer nodded.

"I have no doubt whatever in my own mind," he said.

There was a little pause, and then:

"What would you like me to do?" asked Grant.

"I want you to come here to-night," said Lord Arthur, "and bring with you all the information you have, together with all the documentary evidence you have to demonstrate Germany's possession of unauthorised ships. There will be a special meeting of the Cabinet to-morrow--nothing can possibly happen till then, and by to-morrow I hope we shall not only have the detector complete, but we shall also know what Germany is going to do. You understand," he said at parting, "that I shall probably be kicked out of the Cabinet for this action, but I am taking that risk. By the way, they tell me that a small medallion was found on Ballin's body, with the figures '15'" and a skull and cross-bones. Have you any idea what that indicates?"

Grant nodded.

"That is the emblem of a society in Germany, designed to keep in memory the humiliation which the German suffered in that year. Ballin was obviously the head of that society, which was national in every sense."

Grant drove straight from the Admiralty to the hotel where Ruth Manton was staying, and was shown to her sitting-room.

"Have you packed your trunks?" he asked.

"You didn't think I would, did you?" she asked.

"Do you mean to tell me," he said in despair, "that I have sacrificed the hundred English sovereigns, and that the state-room I have engaged for you is to be wasted?"

"You won't have any difficulty in selling the ticket," she laughed. "If half you say is true, London will be filled with Americans who are most anxious to get back to their own country. Is there any news?"

"None that I can tell you," he said. "Just before I came out I saw a telegram from Bremen giving an enthusiastic account of the British reception at that port. It was obviously written by a German correspondent, and despatched long before the ships had come into harbour. I want you to promise me to do something."

"What is it?" she asked.

"No, you must promise in the dark," said Grant.

"I don't like to make promises in the dark, but if it doesn't involve my leaving England, I will promise. What is it?"

"I want you to have your car ready with a good supply of petrol, and at the first hint of danger get away west as far as you can. You will be safe in Plymouth, because the two Army Corps we have at Aldershot, and the two on Salisbury Plain will be able to hold up the invasion for some time."

She shivered slightly.

"You almost make me frightened, you are so very sure."

He nodded.

"I am very sure," he said.

He kissed her at parting.

"Remember," he said, "I shall not be seeing you again until this crisis is past, and I rely implicitly upon you carrying out my wishes."

She favoured him with a little curtsy, but behind the laughter in her eyes was real concern. Grant saw the paper "to bed," went carefully through the foreign telegrams, and presented himself with his portfolio of date as the old clock of the Admiralty building was striking eleven. He was admitted to Lord Arthur's presence immediately. In addition to the two admirals he had seen in the

morning, was a third, a young-looking man whom Grant remembered to have seen a year before.

"This is Rear-Admiral Branton commanding the Flying Section," said Lord Arthur. "Have you brought the papers?"

Grant spread them out on the big table, explaining each, translating little passages in the German documents he had, and was thus engaged when an officer entered the room.

"What is it?" asked the First Sea Lord.

The young officer's face was troubled.

"We have had a wireless through which I can't understand," he said, and laid a little slip of paper on the table. They crowded about the table and read:

"*we have seized the edfeld station—*" ("That's the German wireless station," explained the officer) "*—and are holding it, though it is impossible to hold out much longer. tell war office germans interned....*"

Here the message ended. There was a dead silence. The men looked from one to the other.

"I see," said Lord Arthur quietly. "What do you make of it, Macrae?"

Grant read the paper again.

"Evidently there was another message which has not been caught by your station," he said. "I take this to mean that the whole of the men who have gone to Germany have been interned, and that one party have made a fight for it, and was sending this message when the wireless station was stormed."

"There is only one thing to be done," said Lord Arthur.

So far he got when the door was flung open and a man rushed in. The wireless officer recognised him as one of his operators.

"What is the matter?" he asked quickly.

For a moment the man stood bereft of speech, his outstretched hands shaking, his lips trembling.

"Sorry, sir," he mumbled at last, "but I had a brother on the LION."

"What is it?" asked the First Lord. "Pull yourself together, my lad."

He laid his big hands on the other's shoulder.

"The fleet," gasped the operator, "the battleship cruisers...."

"What?" asked Lord Arthur, growing pale.

"Submarined, sir," whimpered the man, "at half-past ten without any warning; eighty-three ships--submarined. Oh, my God!"

A telephone bell rang sharply on the first lord's desk. It was the inter-department 'phone. He picked up the receiver and listened, answering "Yes" and "No" in an expressionless voice.

Then he hung the receiver up again.

He walked slowly up and down the long room, his hands thrust in his trousers' pockets, his head upon his breast. Then he spoke.

"The Germans landed in the night at Kemby Cove," he said huskily, "protected by parallel roads of mines, and by their high sea fleet they ran their ships ashore, and there are 250,000 men deploying across England."

Again there was a silence.

"And more to follow," commented the first sea lord.

"And more to follow," repeated the others.

Lord Arthur pulled himself together with a shrug and held out his hand to Grant.

"Good-night, Macrae," he said, "you have done your work remarkably well. If we had been as prepared as you we should not have been fighting Germany on the present terms."

"What are the present terms?" asked Grant.

"They have more than an equality of ships on the sea, and a considerable superiority of men on land," replied Lord Arthur quietly.

Grant left that chamber--a veritable chamber of death, of dead hope, dead faith and dead ambition. As he crossed the little court of the Admiralty, the clock struck twelve, and it seemed to him that it was ringing the knell of Britain. He went straight back to his office, and found Mr. Holman Massey waiting--a troubled Mr. Massey and a little tremulous.

"I hear all sorts of strange stories, Macrae," he quavered, "what's the meaning of it? It's sheer nonsense to say we shall be invaded! Haven't we got a fleet? Why, we aren't even at war! But if war comes, if war comes!" he repeated, and thumped the table.

"Well?" asked Grant, wearily.

"If war comes we shall not be afraid," said Mr. Massey sharply; "we will show the world that in the face of danger England can hold her own and carry on business as usual."

"Business as usual!"

Grant fell back in his chair, and laughed, and laughed, and laughed.