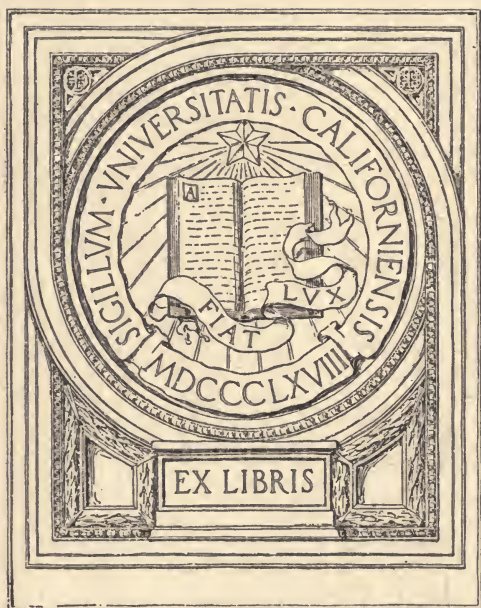


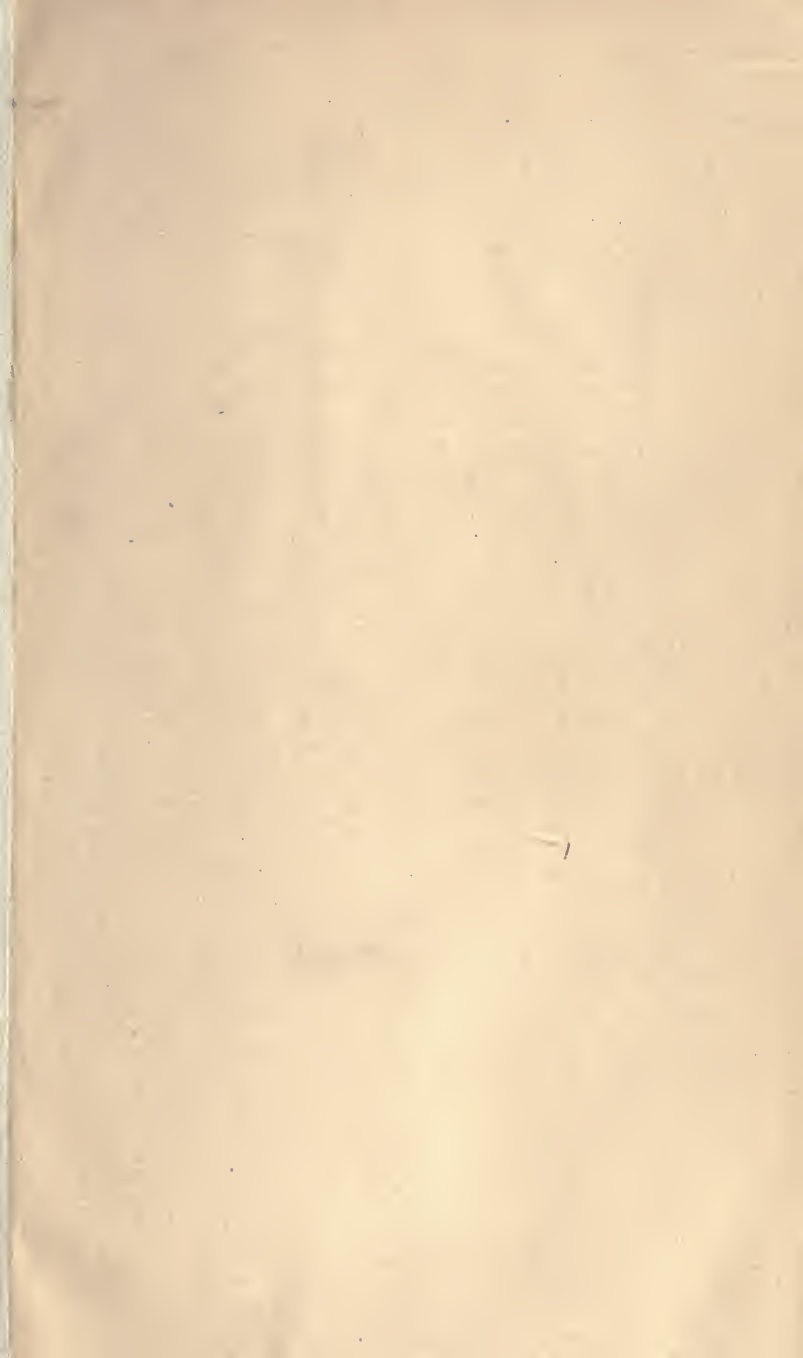
ACCORDING
TO ORDERS

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ACCORDING TO ORDERS

F. BRITTEN AUSTIN

ACCORDING TO ORDERS

BY

F. BRITTEN AUSTIN

AUTHOR OF "BATTLEWRACK," "IN ACTION,"
"THE SHAPING OF LAVINIA," ETC.

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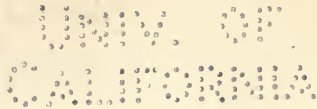
TO
GEORGE HORACE LORIMER

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ACCORDING TO ORDERS



ACCORDING TO ORDERS

I

ZU BEFEHL!

Zu Befehl! means "according to orders." It is also the invariable German military acknowledgment of a command from a superior.

THE three battalions of the —th Regiment, 300th Ersatz Division, had acquired a sentiment almost of domicile in the little French town set among the yet leafless orchards in a hollow of the rolling Picardy country. They had been long upon this sector, had come up for the fierce struggles in the Pierre St. Vaast Wood at the time of the Battle of the Somme, in September, 1916, and during their spells in the front line in the dreary winter which followed, while the French shells wailed over their heads to fling up founts of mud in the quagmire behind the trenches, they looked back to their rest area with something akin to nostalgia. When at last, relieved for a few weeks, they tramped, hag-

gard, bearded and mud-caked, into the narrow cobbled streets which led into the tree-surrounded Grande Place, with its Joan of Arc statue in the centre, it was almost as if they had returned to their native townships remote beyond the Rhine. They sang, with a spasm of lustiness, "*In der Heimat—in der Heimat da giebt's ein Wiedersehen!*" in a swinging choral that had a note of real homecoming as the heavy rifles were shifted to the correct smart slope upon the shoulder. Inscriptions upon the shops, indicative of the adaptability of human nature and the business instincts of the *commerçants*—or rather of the brave wives of the *commerçants* distant in the French trenches—helped the illusion. Strips of paper pasted across the windows bore the outlandish words *Delikatessen, Rauch- und Speise Mittel*, traced for a dimly comprehending landlady by an obliging German soldier to the allurements of his fellows.

These good ladies stood at the doors of their shops while the ranks went swinging by in the dusk, and said to one another with a quiet certitude: "*Oui, c'est la trois-centième encore.*" From the river of faces that flowed through the twilight came hoarse guttural cries of recognition from German soldiers childishly anxious to be remembered. They met with no response. The women at the doors stood calmly interested as company after company tramped rhythmically past, dreaming perhaps of a day when a battalion of another race should march

down that street in a tumult of enthusiasm that brought a lump to the throat and a mist to the eyes merely to imagine it.

In the evening, when the battalions had broken ranks and had surged out of their billets in throngs of soldiermen arm in arm in twos and threes, a woman under the hanging oil lamp in the tiny shop would look up at a remembered face with a little smile and say, half in quiet malice, half in natural human friendliness:

"Ah, vous n'êtes pas tué, alors?"

And the German, grinning, would reply in his clumsy pronunciation:

"Non, matame—bas doué—encore."

Then the woman would break into a little merry laugh—*"Ah! il ne sera jamais doué—c't homme-là!"* as she pushed the desired article across the counter. And the German, grinning uncomprehendingly, would tramp heavily out of the shop.

Relations between the conquerors and the—temporarily—conquered, if not cordial, were at least friendly. The French women had homes to be kept together and young mouths to be fed. The German soldiers naturally relaxed from the strain of those long, drear weeks when they lived under the alternative of kill or be killed. Besides, human beings not actually engaged in hostilities cannot live in close propinquity without the emergence of amicable sentiments. The German soldiers looked at the little children and remembered that they themselves,

many of them, were fathers. The mothers remarked the caress and beamed with that maternal emotion which forgets nationality. For a final reason, the German military-police system was strict. It conferred a sense of security on the one party while it enforced a stern discipline on the other.

On a bright March morning, with the sun shining so cheerfully from a pale-blue sky that there was a chatter of bird notes among the bare trees of the orchard, the *Gefreite* Hans Kellner took a walk round the billet familiar to him from previous occupancy. The battalion had been dismissed early from parade on this first morning after their arrival in the rest area, in order that the men might clean their kits and otherwise recuperate from the fatigues of a spell of particularly bad weather in the trenches. The *Gefreite*, whose step in rank above the simple private absolved him from the duty of cleaning up the barn in which his squad had slept, wandered round the house, his long porcelain-bowled pipe hanging from his teeth, and looked critically for any change that might have occurred since his last visit. There was none. The house—a farmstead which was the first of the buildings of the town when entered by the main road—wore its normal look of agricultural occupation, apparently unaffected by the war. There was still a quantity of hay and straw in the barns. The fowls pecked assiduously as of old on the manure heap in front of the house, in the courtyard all but inclosed by the barns

and opening onto the road by a heavy double gateway. The stables were empty; the horses—he knew them to be poor creatures purchased from the German authorities after being cast from the army—at work in the fields. The orchard, bright with its whitewashed stems in the sunshine, was just showing its first buds.

The inhabitants were unchanged also. M. Delavigne, the farmer, a man of about forty years, whose class had not yet been called to the colours when the invaders swept over the land and shut him off from the French authorities, passed through the yard on his way to the house. The German touched his cap and diffidently murmured "*Bonjour, monsieur,*" without, however, removing his pipe from his teeth. The Frenchman answered by the curt nod that had been his invariable response when Hans Kellner had, in his last visit, proffered friendliness. He heard Marie, the servant maid, giggling as of old with the soldiers cleaning the barn, as, rather sheepishly, he followed the farmer to his door. Uncomfortably sensible of his idleness in this busy household, he shamefacedly craved companionship. On the threshold of the big kitchen with its clean-scrubbed wooden furniture, its black gulf of a chimney, he hesitated, and gazed in without entering. Two women were at work there—the farmer's wife, fresh and buxom, some ten years younger than her husband, and her mother, old and bent with many years of toil in the fields. The old woman turned

away her head with a scowl. The farmer's wife came boldly toward the German.

"*Ah, gros paresseux!*" she said vivaciously. "And there is a heap of wood to be chopped in the corner of the yard!"

The German stared at her for a moment while his dull intelligence lumbered after the swift run of her words. Then seizing their import he smiled, touched his cap and turned with docility to do her bidding.

He procured the axe with a precise and long-founded knowledge of its whereabouts. Then putting away his pipe he set to work vigorously upon the heap of rough timber. The chopped wood he piled in a shed with scrupulous neatness. Marie-Louise, the farmer's three-year-old daughter, toddled out to him and watched him while he worked.

"*Bonjour, Marie-Louise!*" said Hans, more at home with the child than with any other member of the family.

"*'Jour, m'sieu,*" responded Marie-Louise gravely, her none-too-clean face in process of further defilement from the morsel of chocolate, acquired from one of the other soldiers, which leaked from the corners of her mouth.

His task finished, Hans Kellner put away the axe and once more lit the pipe, which was his dearest possession.

Marie-Louise brightened at once.

"*Regarde—pipe!*" she said decisively.

The German held down the porcelain bowl, painted with a highly coloured lady in yellow hair and red peasant jacket, for her inspection. Then replacing the mouthpiece between his teeth he suddenly hoisted the child to his shoulder and marched off with her to the gateway opening to the street.

There he stood sunning himself, the little one held high, prattling and laughing, beating upon his cap with one fist while the other arm tightly encircled his head.

Suddenly the German soldier perceived a motor car, followed by a second, rushing toward the town. He had a glimpse of a staff flag fluttering above the radiator. In an instant the child was dashed down, the German soldier stood rigid and saluted with exact precision as the first car dashed past. The child flung down upon the ground burst into a shriek of bewilderment and pain.

The German soldier stood like a statue and saluted again as the second car shot by. The first had contained the divisional general; the second held members of his staff. To Hans Kellner it was as though the gods from Olympus had whirled along the road, suspending the functions of humanity.

When he relaxed from his stiff posture, after a decent interval to assure himself that no third car followed, the child had fled from him, was disappearing with last audible sobs into the house.

Hans Kellner gazed stupidly after her, then philosophically replaced his pipestem between his teeth.

The child's grandmother shook her fist at him from the doorway.

The divisional general followed by several of his staff officers climbed the wooden staircase of the little *mairie* and strode into the office of the regiment commander. That officer jumped from his seat into erect rigidity with a click of heels and spurs.

"Good morning, *Herr Oberst*," said the divisional general.

"Good morning, *excellenz*," replied the colonel, wondering uneasily if all the regimental returns had been correct while he stood respectfully immobile.

"Be seated, colonel," said the general, dropping himself heavily into the chair which a subaltern member of the regimental staff hastened to place for him.

"I have orders for you."

"*Zu Befehl, Excellenz!*" said the regiment commander zealously ere he unbent from his parade attitude and resumed his seat.

The divisional general tapped his hand upon the table.

"We are evacuating the area, colonel. The retirement will be carried out immediately."

The *oberst's* eyebrows shot up at this startling intelligence. He looked at his superior as though scarcely crediting his ears.

The general waved away his doubts with an airy motion of his hand.

"A matter of strategy, *lieber Oberst*—*glänzende Kriegslist!*—Hindenburg's master stroke! We es-

cape from the enemy at the moment he intends to deliver his decisive blow and leave him a vacuum—a desert! However, *lieber Oberst*, it is not for us to discuss the decisions which have been ratified by the All-Highest War Lord—it is for us to execute them.” He blew pompously down his nose into his thrust-out bristling white moustache and glared at the colonel as he finished this sentence.

“*Ja wohl, Excellenz—natürlich,*” said the colonel, all subservience.

“*Gut,*” said the general. “The situation has already been long foreseen. You have your orders. Open your *Grosses-Hauptquartier* secret order number 355 and you will find your instructions in detail. You have only to execute them. The greatest possible speed is essential. The regiment must be on the march by dawn to-morrow. Follow your orders strictly. No sentimental considerations may be allowed to interfere with their exact performance. Get the civilian population under guard at once. You will find it all in your orders. Men under sixty. Women from fifteen to forty-five. Children at the breast go with the women. The train for the men will be at the railway station at four this afternoon. The women’s trains will leave at five and six o’clock. See that the orders about fruit trees are thoroughly carried out—also the cattle. A pioneer company will report to you in half an hour to assist in the demolition of the town.” He rose to his feet. “Those are your orders. I rely on you, colonel.”

The regiment commander also rose to his feet, stood rigid as before.

"Zu Befehl, Excellenz!"

With a mutual clicking of heels the divisional general and his satellites departed.

In as short a time as they could answer the telephonic summons the three battalion commanders stood before the colonel. He handed each of them written orders, emphasised particular points, quieted their astonishment. *"Das Meisterstück Hindenburgs!"* That was the key word to confidence, thoroughly impressed upon them.

"Destruction, meine Herren," concluded the colonel—"no looting! That is what your men must be made to understand. We have no time to pack up souvenirs. Complete destruction. You will find your times for marching off in your orders. You must be strictly punctual. And when you leave you must leave only a desert behind you. You quite understand? Then get to work quickly!"

"Zu Befehl, Herr Oberst!" said the three battalion commanders in chorus, saluting like one man with a simultaneous click of spurs. The colonel swept his glance over the row of middle-aged faces, flushed with good living, in front of him; the faces of three not unkind fathers of families, despite the military uniform. Their eyes were steady, their mouths calm. He dismissed his subordinates with an imperious gesture.

The bugles sounded in the streets. There was a

rush of heavy feet as the men fell in their ranks.

A quarter of an hour later two battalions stood ranked in long lines through the streets. The third battalion was massed in column of companies in the Grande Place. The major commanding that battalion stood in conference with his company commanders close under the statue of Joan of Arc. A group of pioneers was busy excavating a hole under the base of the monument. The battalion commander concluded his orders.

"As far as possible the men will carry out the work of destruction in the vicinity of their own billets. They are most familiar with those areas. These orders will be executed with the utmost speed and thoroughness."

"*Zu Befehl, Herr Major!*" chorused the four company commanders, saluting, ere they returned to their men.

Almost immediately the battalion commenced to move off. As the last files left the square there was a loud explosion, a cloud of smoke and dust behind them. The statue of Joan of Arc toppled and crashed. A rush of women to the doorways of the shops bordering on the square followed the detonation. Shrill feminine cries of alarm resounded over the steady foot beats of the marching troops. Anxious mothers clutched their children to them and demanded of one another the significance of this portent. A pioneer disfigured the calm features of the prostrate statue with vehement strokes of his

pick. A strong patrol of mounted military police rode into the square and descended from their horses.

In the kitchen of the farmstead on the outskirts of the town, M. Delavigne finished his eleven o'clock repast without troubling himself about this sudden assemblage of the troops. He, his wife, his mother-in-law, fondly attending to the wants of Marie-Louise, and Marie, the servant, sat in common at the bare wood table, cut in common from the long loaf of bread, and helped themselves as their appetites prompted from the big enamel tureen of soup which was between them.

Suddenly the farmer looked up. His ear, long habituated to the usual muttering thunders of the battle line seven or eight miles away, had caught a series of unfamiliar detonations. They were not particularly loud detonations—not so loud as the jarring roar, regularly repeated, which he knew to come from the big gun mounted on the railway truck—but they were sharper and decidedly louder than the customary dull reports of the warring artilleries. The sharp detonations continued. His wife also remarked them and they exchanged a puzzled look.

“They are nearer!” exclaimed the young woman. The routine of war had been so long established for them that any deviation from the normal was full of significance. “Perhaps—perhaps it is true—after all?”

Her husband shook his head pessimistically.

"No; we have heard it too many times."

The old woman looked up from her soup, gave a glance of fondness at the child and then scowled.

"*Ces sales Boches!* But they are going—they are going! I feel it in my bones!"

The farmer did not reply. At a repetition of the unc customary sounds he pushed his plate from him and went out of the house into the street.

Along the main road from the westward, whence proceeded the strange detonations, a battery of heavy guns, drawn by rumbling, rattling petrol tractors, was approaching him. Behind that, in the distance, was a column of motor lorries, also coming toward the town. Beyond them was a cloud of dust indicative of yet more traffic on the road. Of signs of hostilities there was none. The sunshine flooded a rolling landscape where most of the fields were brown. From an isolated farm between him and the battle front the chimney smoke ascended peacefully.

The heavy battery went noisily past him. He paid it no attention. For the last week similar batteries had been coming from the Front every day in such numbers as to give rise to the rumour that the Germans were preparing a retreat. The farmer's bitter scepticism was the product of a long series of such rumours and their corollaries of deception. The column of motor lorries followed, loaded high with balks of timber, huge reels of barbed wire and

other engineers' stores. Behind them an interminably long column of field artillery approached.

The farmer could make nothing of the sharp detonations save that a battery had been newly placed in position nearer than usual to the town.

Suddenly he heard a voice behind him, crying his name in accents of alarm. It was Jules, the lad who should have been working with the horses in the fields.

"Monsieur Delavigne! Monsieur Delavigne! They have shot the horses! They have shot the horses!"

The farmer turned on him sharply.

"Shot the horses? *Qui-çà?*"

"*Les Boches!*—the Germans!" The lad hurriedly substituted the politer designation he had unwarily forgotten in the excitement of the moment. The vernacular was unsafe for public use. He entered upon a long, incoherent story of the incident, trotting by the side of the farmer, who strode hurriedly in blazing wrath toward the scene of the outrage.

"We were working in the big field, m'sieu—just at the end of the furrow, m'sieu—and they came and shot them—five of them. They laughed, m'sieu——"

At that moment Marie came running after them.

"Monsieur Delavigne! Monsieur Delavigne!" Her voice was a raucous scream. The farmer stopped—immediately conscious of a new calamity.

"They are cutting down the trees! They are cutting down the trees in the orchard!"

M. Delavigne did not ask who. There was an accent on the "they" which was sufficiently indicative. The blood rushed to his face. His fingers clawed at the palms of his hands as his fists worked in an overmastering rage. His existence was crumbling about him. He turned and ran toward the orchard. It had been the pride of his father, of his grandfather; it was now his. He ran as a man runs to fend off disaster.

He dashed round the house to where the long rows of whitewashed tree trunks gleamed in the spring sunshine. The orchard was filled with German soldiers furiously at work, and resounded to the thuds of many axes. The Germans were not cutting the trees down. They had not time for that. They were deeply gashing all round the trunks so that the trees would inevitably die. To the farmer it was the equivalent of cold-blooded murder.

He rushed at the nearest man with a snarl, flung himself upon him in a struggle to wrest away the axe. For a moment the two men swayed, evenly matched, the farmer uttering unintelligible sounds, the German grinning. Then another German aimed a blow at the farmer with the back of an axe, which, just missing his head, struck his shoulder and felled him to the ground. He half rose, felt his right arm useless, and cursed savagely at the two men who stood over him, smiling in their comfortable su-

periority. A German officer sauntered up, elegant and close-buttoned, monocle dangling. In crisp, decisive French he ordered the farmer out of the orchard; in his own language he brutally ordered his men to get on with their work. The Frenchman looked at him with the eyes of a man who despairs for lack of a weapon that will kill.

Jules and Marie ran up, assisted the farmer to his feet and supported him, dazed and unsteady, out of the orchard. His wife came running toward him, so preoccupied with her own news that she did not at first notice his condition.

“Henri! Henri! They have killed the cow! They have killed the cow! Oh! Henri! Oh, what is it that they have done? What is it that they have done to you?”

She flung her arms round him, pushing aside the servants. They stood speechless, clinging to one another, man and wife, drowning in an unexpected flood of disaster. They stood locked, paralysed, for a long moment before the woman let her face drop suddenly on her husband's breast in an outburst of tears. This was ruin—deliberately inflicted. In the shock of it their numbed brains sought no explanation.

The voice of the old woman roused them:

“Henri! Henri! Elise! Elise! Quickly, quickly!”

She was out of sight, in the courtyard. Alarmed they hastened toward her. She stood clutching another old woman, who spoke with excited volubility.

At the appearance of her son-in-law she turned and cried in triumph:

"*Henri! Henri! Les Boches s'en vont! Les Boches s'en vont!*" She shouted the opprobrious name with a wild indifference to the German soldiers in the courtyard. "They are going everywhere—everywhere!"

The farmer listened to the first few sentences of the old woman who had brought the news. Then, reinvigorated with an incredible hope, he dashed to the gateway.

The street was blocked with the long column of field artillery, immobile until some obstruction in the town was cleared. The limbers were piled high with packages; the gunners who sat upon them were gloomy and silent, their long pipes hanging from their mouths. Behind them the road to the westward was packed with troops. On parallel roads he saw the dust of marching columns. A dense smoke was welling out of the isolated farmhouse in the near distance.

Coupled with the old woman's intelligence these signs were decisive. He flung his arm into the air, forgetting his pain.

"It is the retreat!" he cried. "The retreat at last! Come all of you and look! The retreat!"

He could find no other words to express his joy. The entire household crowded round him at the gateway. Even Marie-Louise toddled out, clutching at her mother's hand.

The old woman who had brought the news began to sob and recommenced the recital of her wrongs. It was her farmhouse that was now whelmed in dense smoke yonder.

"I am ruined!" she moaned. "Ruined!"

"Ruined!" cried the farmer. "So am I. But what matters? What does anything matter? They are retreating—retreating! We shall be France once more—France! *Oh, ma femme!*" He kissed her. "France! France! Freedom!"

At that moment a squad of infantry, led by an officer, came up the street toward them from the town, just finding room to pass by the stationary artillery.

The squad halted at a sharp word of command. The group of peasants at the gateway, intoxicated with the prospect of deliverance, scarcely saw them, perceived only the long columns heading eastward. Only Marie, the servant, giggled at the *Gefreite* Hans Kellner, stolid in the rear ranks.

The officer barked out his orders.

"Kellner! Take two men! Escort that man to the square!" He pointed at the farmer.

The *Gefreite* Hans Kellner stepped out of the ranks.

"*Zu Befehl, Herr Leutnant!*" he said, and saluted.

A moment later the farmer found himself in the powerful grasp of two soldiers. The shriek from his wife was simultaneous.

"March!" cried Kellner, raising his rifle.

The farmer stared round him in horror and despair, stunned by this pitiless reversal of fortune. The blue sky seemed black. His eyes rested on the flashing bayonet, the ugly little dark hole of the rifle muzzle close against his face. The menace held them fascinated.

With a wild cry his wife sprang at the *gefreite*, clutching at his weapon.

"*Et toi, Hans Kellner! Qu'est-ce que tu penses à faire?*" She used the second person singular, as she would to a servant, to this man whom she had many times ordered to chop wood and to perform a dozen other menial tasks.

The German thrust her from him with a violent hand. He bulked huge, stolid, terribly impersonal.

"March!" he commanded, and there was no disputing the order.

Like a condemned man the farmer moved away between his guards. With another shriek his wife threw herself at the officer and clamoured: "Why? Why? Why? What are they going to do?" She fell on her knees to him.

The officer turned his back on her as though she did not exist, issued further orders to his squad. The young woman got up, panting, wild-eyed. She was unaware that she held the tiny Marie-Louise tightly clutched by the hand. She saw her husband disappearing down the street, along the endless line of guns and limbers where the artillerymen sat aloft,

immobile like barbaric gods, cruelly indifferent. She sprang after him, dragging the now whimpering child by the hand. In a haze of perception she heard her old mother cursing the German officer behind her.

The three Germans and their prisoner marched steadily down the long street into the town. Other captives preceded them, and others were brought out of the houses as they passed. Mme. Delavigne hastened to keep up, deaf to the cries of Marie-Louise, pulled off her feet.

They reached the square just as the artillery commenced to move again. At its farther end was a mass of male civilians, guarded by German soldiers with fixed bayonets. Covering the mass were two machine guns on their low tripods. The men who squatted by the weapons ready to work them laughed to one another at the comic despair of some of the men in the crowd.

At the near end of the square was a mass of women, soldiers walking up and down in front of them, shouting at the females in exasperation at the shrieks and cries. Between the two masses was a group of superior officers, calmly chatting. One, who had seated himself on the head of the prostrate statue, was flicking dust from his riding boots.

The farmer was led across the square toward the mass of his compatriots. His wife dodged a German soldier and essayed to follow him. Instantly a rough grasp fastened upon her shoulder and pulled

her back. She strove toward her husband, fighting like a wildcat with her one free hand.

"Héni! Héni!" she shrieked.

The captive, firmly held by his guards, turned his head with an effort.

"*Adieu, ma femme!*" he shouted. "*Adieu! Be brave!*" She had a last glimpse of his face.

The young woman felt herself dragged away, heard a brutal voice shouting guttural threats into her ear. A piercing cry from Marie-Louise brought her to realisation of the little one whose hand she grasped. The child was torn away from her. She let it go in the infant's yell of pain at the strain upon the tiny arm. An instant later the mother was flung violently into the mass of weeping women. She saw the child carried, kicking and struggling, by a burly German soldier, to the corner of the square. She fainted.

In the centre the group of German superior officers continued their calm conversation. One replied to a question.

"No," he said. "They go to quite different destinations—the men to one place, the women to another."

The entire group turned to watch the first batch of male civilians marched off to the railway station. Hans Kellner stolidly marched his men up the hill again to the farmstead. On the road they passed Marie, the servant, weeping hysterically, being pushed along with several other distracted women

toward the square. Their conductors joked at them in debased French. The *gefrente* reported to his officer, was received with a curt nod.

"And the woman?" asked the lieutenant.

"With the other women in the square, *Herr Leutnant.*"

"So! I expected that. Pity the servant did not go as well. It would have saved an escort." He gave further orders.

As the *gefrente* entered the courtyard the old grandmother sprang at him, held him with gripping fingers. Her face was startling in its wild despair.

"Marie-Louise!" she shrieked. "Marie-Louise! Where is she?"

The German stared at her stupidly for an instant. The child?

"*Zais bas!*" he said brutally, and wrenched himself away from her.

The old woman screamed, rushed toward the gateway. German soldiers barred her exit.

Within the house the men lately billeted upon the premises were working joyously at their task of destruction. Laughing faces appeared at the windows as they flung out articles of furniture and clothing. Other men were dragging out straw from the barns, mingling it in a great heap with the furniture thrown into the courtyard.

The old woman, endowed suddenly with the fierce energy of the insane, rushed from one group to another, hampering though she did not stay their work.

Exasperated by this annoyance, some of the soldiers seized her, forced her into a chair that had been flung into the courtyard, tied her into it. But her tongue was not stilled. Her vociferation grew unbearable. They gagged her. She sat there, bound, a towel across the lower part of her face, gazing at them as they sprinkled oil liberally over the heap and about the barns and house. The fire commenced with choking volumes of smoke.

The three battalions laboured furiously in an orgy of destruction. They worked in little groups, hacking, smashing, applying the torch. Slaughtered animals encumbered the courtyards of the houses on the outskirts. Dogs dashed down the streets, yelping in panic, their tails between their legs. Heavy explosions shook the air and earth. Great masses of smoke rose above the roofs, rolled down the streets. There was an incessant fusillade from rifle cartridges left by careless soldiers in their blazing billets. The Germans shouted and laughed at the constant reports, blurred to personal danger by their libations at the broached wine casks, the snatched bottles from the litter of broken glass on the floors of the shops. The calmly strutting officers permitted the orgy to the point of recklessness, checked it where recklessness might have passed into incapacity. A haze of smoke overhung the town and obscured the sun. The fall of the church steeple was seen only by those in the immediate vicinity, though all lifted their heads at its resounding crash.

Through this inferno of smoking broken houses echoing to harsh cries bodies of troops passed interminably eastward at their best pace, halting not, except for a hastily removed obstruction. Battery after battery, long ammunition columns, dashed through at a hand gallop. Infantry, choking and cursing the fumes, poured through in long rivers of muddy field grey, steel helmeted, rifles at the slope. Their officers urged them on with fierce shouts as they turned their heads to glance at the sanitary squads busily polluting the water supply. The first-line transport which followed them was loaded high with domestic articles, hung round with slaughtered poultry. For hour after hour the hurried procession continued.

The trains of cattle trucks, choked full with despairing captives, had long ago left the railway station for their remote destinations. The first maddened scurry of ancient men, of old women, of young children, left behind amid this chaos, had long ceased. Their screams were heard no more. The streets were entirely filled with men in uniform. Those beneath the notice of the retreating conquerors were fleeing blindly over the countryside. Only here and there in dark cellars underneath blazing houses did fear-paralysed groups of old people still cower. Some of the soldiery made a virtue of turning them out.

Night fell. The town, brick and stone built, did not catch fire readily, but in the lurid glare from

houses satisfactorily ablaze groups of smoke-blackened men darted from building to building, insured its complete destruction. Two battalions reported that there was no more to be done, fell in the ranks fitfully illumined from the red-windowed houses in the square, marched out in succession. The third battalion hastened to be finished with its area. Shells, French shells, commenced to wail over and crash among the ruins, an alarming spur to effort. Sharp bursts of rifle fire came disturbingly from the west. The rear guard was in action in close vicinity to the town. A German battery to the eastward sent shells rushing overhead.

The first grey of dawn crept into the sky, not perceptible through the pall of smoke, as Hans Kellner's battalion formed its ranks in the square. The *gefreite* settled himself "at ease" between his comrades, waiting for the commands. In the interval he looked round him and saw the prostrate statue, now abandoned in the centre. A half-linked thought flitted into his mind. Marie-Louise? What had happened to her? He did not retain it, but sprang sharply to attention at the word of command and stood stiff and stolid. A moment later the battalion was in column of route, was marching out of the square.

Hans Kellner was in the rear company of the battalion. Individually fatigued though they were, the men seemed to derive new strength from their corporate association, in grateful contrast to their scat-

tered toil. The battalion swung onward like one man, with powerful strides, hurrying to leave behind it the horror of the ravaged town. The wailing, crashing French shells arrived more frequently; the German battery behind the town banged away vigorously as they approached it, smiting their ears with the double detonations of its discharges, lighting up the sky with broad white flashes. This fitful illumination helped the battalion to cross the planks which bridged the wide, deep trenches excavated from side to side of the road. The rear guard, when it finally withdrew from the town, would remove those bridges.

The battalion tramped on. The eastern sky, toward which they marched, grew lighter. But the night had not yet lifted. Looking back, a dark sky was suffused with a ruddy reflection. Fierce rifle fire crackled, rippled, leaped to smashing volleys behind them. Distant machine guns hammered loudly with viciously rapid strokes. The German battery, which they had now passed, answered the evidently increasing numbers of French guns with sharp loud reports, single now that they were no longer in front of its muzzles, regularly and quickly repeated, incessant. The battalion marched on with the comfortable feeling that the fight was behind them, receding with every beat of its thousand boots upon the road.

Suddenly it halted, remained stationary for so many minutes that an anxiety rose in every man, was

communicated to his fellows as they listened to the savagely vehement rifle fire behind them. An order was passed down the column confirming their augury. The battalion turned right about, its direction reversed. Hans Kellner's company was now at the head of the column. He heard the hollow hoof beats of the major's horse as the commander cantered down the road to take up his new position in front. A sharp order and the battalion was once more in motion. This time they marched toward that near ruddy glow in the sky, toward the menace of the fiercely crackling rifles. They scanned the dark horizon with questioning eyes. Men in that long, sombre succession of ranks shifted their packs with an uneasy movement of the shoulders—felt suddenly hungry.

They descended into the town and scrambled once more over the precarious bridges spanning the trenches across the road. The battery behind them banged away rapidly. They prayed inwardly that it might not cease. The battalion halted once more in the gutted square, eerie with its faint reflections upon skeletal walls from glowing red heaps within. The commander gave his orders. The *hauptmann* commanding Kellner's company barked out his excerpt from them. The company ascended the hill to the westward, along the main road by which the bulk of the troops had retreated. The men cast unquiet glances at the shattered houses on either hand. The French shells rushing to burst among the ruins

seemed each one vindictively accurate as it approached.

The company halted. The subaltern officers received their final orders, returned to their sections. Once more upon the march Hans Kellner turned into that gateway where, not twenty-four hours before, he had sunned himself with Marie-Louise perched upon his shoulder. The barns on either side of it were now mere glowing heaps, hot to the face as he passed between them. The farmhouse beyond was a mass of charred rafters studded with spots of red fire vivid in the gloom. His squad was halted in the courtyard; the remainder of the section passed on.

A sergeant led them to their position, just outside the smoking wreck of a line of stables, fronting the dark night westward. The men lay down, sheltered more or less by heaps of bricks. The sergeant left them to contemplate the invisible rifle fire, now loud and near, in front of them. Hans Kellner turned himself, looked back and saw the ghostly glimmering white trunks of the silent orchard wounded unto death.

Suddenly a memory lodged itself in his mind, haunting him as he lay there waiting the moment for action. It was the memory of the old woman, bound, gagged, in a chair in the courtyard just behind him. He wondered. He had not seen her. But then he had not looked, had not remembered her. What if she were still there, helpless—the fight to surge round her at any moment? He tried

to dismiss the thought, vaguely feeling it an unworthy weakness, but failed. At last, impelled as by a decision emanating from without himself, he rose and crept back into the courtyard.

He found her. She sat there, beyond a glowing smoking heap, her eyes glaring, terrible in her silent immobility among this ruin. Shrinking from her in a curious fear he cut her free. She sat for a moment or two, numbed. Her body seemed dead, only her eyes alive. He stood beside her, fascinated; pushed her to assure himself that she yet lived. On the instant, with a wild effort, a horrid cry, she sprang at his face. Startled into self-defence he felled her headlong to the ground.

He had scarcely settled himself again shoulder to shoulder with his comrades behind the heaps of bricks when he heard a torrent of hoof beats, a wild rush of cavalymen in panic gallop upon the main road to his left. They swept past, like *wilde jäger* pursued by demons, down into the town. Behind them the rifle fire burst out loud and prolonged. Hans Kellner saw sharp spurts of flame leap out away in the darkness into which he gazed. Bullets cracked above his head. The French were pressing very close. He looked up to see his officer standing behind him, rose at his word.

“Kellner, you are in command of this squad! There will be no retreat. You will die at your post!”

Hans Kellner saluted.

"*Zu Befehl, Herr Leutnant!*" he said simply.

The officer passed on.

Suddenly Kellner thought he saw shadowy figures advancing across the field in front of him. He steadied himself into a firing position after one brief glance behind him, where, he thanked God, the fire in the farmhouse had died down into darkness. He pulled trigger with the rest in one long, irregular volley from the company stretched far to right and left of him. The spurts of flame, the rapid detonations continued, were supported by the quick, loud hammering of a machine gun; were answered by similar spurts, similar detonations from the darkness in front. After a few minutes the tumult subsided. Single shots preceded an uncanny silence.

In that silence Hans Kellner suddenly jumped with superstitious terror. A voice wailed mournfully "Marie-Louise! Marie-Louise!" in a long-drawn cry. He half raised himself, glanced back at the farmhouse. A bright glow rose from it. With the first hostile shot he understood in a flash that he was fatally silhouetted.

The victorious Frenchmen surging over the wrecked stables into the courtyard found an insane old woman raking among a heap of embers seeking Marie-Louise.

II

IN THE HINDENBURG LINE

THE bombardment had already lasted nearly a week. In the deep dugout that harboured the headquarters of a regiment¹ defending a sector of the Front its continuing fury arrived merely as a succession of jarring thuds that jangled the after-lunch liqueur glasses on the rough table and imparted a quiver to the chairs occupied by the members of the mess. To touch the boarded walls was to receive an unpleasant, almost painful, vibration. The glowing electric-light bulb pendent from the steel-girded roof shone steadily, despite those heavier shocks that punctuated irregularly the steady series of muffled blows.

The atmosphere was hot with the radiation from a closed stove in a corner, and thick with tobacco smoke. Through the wreathing, slowly drifting fumes could be seen the large maps, crisscrossed with an infinity of lines—red here, blue there—and divided into prominently numbered squares, which covered the walls.

The regiment commander, whose sallow, deeply

¹The German infantry brigade is composed of two regiments of three battalions each; two brigades to a division.

lined face revealed the ravage of present anxieties upon a man as old as the whiteness of his moustache and eyebrows indicated him to be, broke off from a brooding contemplation of those maps and leaned forward to pour himself out some more coffee. The Iron Cross dangling from the middle buttonhole of his tunic tinkled against his empty liqueur glass. He refilled both coffee cup and glass with a hand that shook.

The two other occupants of the dugout, a staff captain and a young lieutenant, were absorbed in the latest batch of illustrated papers.

There was the noise of footsteps stumblingly descending the steep stairway of the dugout, and the door opened. A tall officer in a long coat yellow with mud stood stiffly erect at the entrance and saluted with a swift, precise gesture and a click of heels.

"Hauptmann Hofmeister!" he barked out.

The regiment commander, who had been peering toward him through the filmy tobacco smoke, drew himself erect also, and with an exactly similar intonation replied:

"Oberst von Förster!"

The staff captain had jumped up so hastily from his chair that it fell about his legs.

"*Lieber Hofmeister!*" he cried, shaking the newcomer by the hand. "We were expecting you. Are you quite recovered from your wound?" He turned

to the colonel. "Hofmeister and I were in the same regiment on the Somme, Herr Oberst."

The Oberst nodded and extended his hand to the new arrival.

"You come at a difficult moment, Hauptmann Hofmeister. Sit down! Have you eaten? Waldow——!"

The young lieutenant was already halfway to the door. Hofmeister stopped him. "I had *Mittagessen* with the division," he said. "They told me something of the situation, Herr Oberst."

"They didn't say the brigade was being relieved?" asked the colonel, clutching at a phantasm of hope that flitted across his anxieties.

Hofmeister shook his head. "No, Herr Oberst. The brigade will not be relieved until after the Englishers have made their attack."

Oberst von Förster performed a little gesture in which both his hands and his head were expressive of his relapse to pessimism.

"I hope they will find something to relieve in that case," he said bitterly. "*Ach!* Those people who sit back there in safety! Well, you come to us and Grenzmann goes back to the division. And I hope, Grenzmann, that you'll give them an idea of the sort of existence we lead here."

Grenzmann nodded.

"*Natürlich*, Herr Oberst," he said cheerfully, fixing already in his mind the picture of the grum-

bling, doddering old colonel with which he meant to regale the divisional mess.

"Now, Hofmeister," said the Oberst, "since you have already eaten let us get to work. They told you at divisional headquarters that we are expecting an attack—a big attack?"

He emphasised the largeness of the menace. His face looked startlingly haggard, close under the electric light. "This new Siegfried Line"—the new line from the Aisne to the north of Arras, taken up by the Germans last spring, was called by them the Siegfried Line, by the English the Hindenburg Line—"will be tested to the utmost—and we shall see if it is as strong as they make out. I am confident in it myself"—he stopped—"if only we have enough troops to hold it. If it breaks——"

He stopped again, sketched an expressive little gesture. "We have a battalion in front line, the others in support. Show him the positions on the map, Grenzmann."

He waited while the two officers obeyed, poring over the trench map, murmuring together. As they straightened their backs there was a knock at the door of the dugout.

"*Herein!*" said the Oberst, putting down his liqueur glass.

A signal orderly entered. He held out a telegram. Grenzmann took it, opened it with a quick movement, glanced at the message.

"From the forward battalion, Herr Oberst—by telephone, priority—they're asking again to be relieved——"

He passed the message across to the regiment commander. "They're having a bad time," he added confidentially to Hofmeister. "That's the third time in twenty-four hours they have asked for relief."

Oberst von Förster wrinkled his brows over the message. "*Schrecklich, schrecklich*," he muttered; "but what can I do? We must not be caught moving! We must not be caught!"

He frowned at the words, which despite their official formality were eloquent of the agonised despair that had spoken at the other end of the telephone.

"'Disclaim responsibility if disaster occurs to the sector'—yes, they throw it on me—they throw it on me."

He stood for some moments bending over the paper, then he suddenly drew himself erect. "I must see for myself." There was a new tone of decision in his voice. "Hofmeister—I am going up to the front line. Come with me! You will be able to familiarise yourself with the situation."

Hauptmann Hofmeister saluted with stiff precision and stood rigid.

"*Zu Befehl*, Herr Oberst."

"You, Waldow—you come too; and Grenzmann, you remain here—deal with anything that comes in."

The old man, long oppressed by the imagined possibilities over which he brooded in the pent seclusion of the dugout, was unfeignedly glad at the prospect of escape into the open air. Swiftly he donned his long coat, looked to his automatic pistol and emergency ration, slung over his shoulder the strap of the slate-grey cylindrical tin box that held his gas mask.

"Hurry, Waldow!" he said to the lieutenant, who was busily engaged in similar preparations. "Where's my steel helmet?" He hummed a bar or two of a song in a cheerful key. "We'll teach these damned Englanders, Hofmeister!" he said with a little laugh. "They'll never get a yard of the Siegfried Line! Not they!" He was reassuring himself more than his hearers. "You know the idea of it, Hofmeister? Not like the Somme days. No! *Das war schrecklich! schrecklich!* Trying to hold those front trenches—we played their game! But now these deep defensive zones—full of cunning bits of trenches and hidden machine guns—if they got in to them they will be killed to the last man, or what is left of them will be driven back to their own lines. *Ein grosser Geist—Hindenburg! Ein grosser Geist für die grosse Zeit! 'S wird ein famoser Sieg sein! Ja—gewiss—gewiss.'*"

He hummed a bar or two of the song the German soldiers had sung when they marched to war in the brave days of 1914: "'*Puppchen! du bist mein' Augen Schatz*——' Come, Hofmeister!

Waldow! *Fertig? Vorwärts!*" He laughed, excited as a schoolboy, his haggard, sallow face purpling with blood, his eyes alight under the bushy white eyebrows. "*Dank' sei Gott* we get out of this damned hole!" He led the way out of the dug-out.

"We shall probably be glad enough to get back to it," murmured the young lieutenant as he followed him.

Outside the dugout an electric light illumined the passage that communicated with the signal and office apartments of the subterranean headquarters. Two or three orderlies on duty sprang to erect rigidity as the regiment commander passed.

He commenced the ascent of the steep narrow stairway, slippery with yellow mud. Hofmeister and Waldow followed at his heels. The deep steel helmets curving down to the neck lent their heads a quaint touch of the antique. Von Förster had but half emerged into the chilly atmosphere of an overcast afternoon when he stopped, with the instinctive paralysis of imminent danger. A long-drawn whine broadened rapidly to a threatening rush in the air; approached, passed and culminated in a heavy, metallic crash in the instant in which he ducked his head.

"*Verflüchte Engländer!*" muttered Von Waldow below him.

The three men paused until the rain of earth clods and débris had ceased. Then they emerged

from the stairway. The black smoke from the just-burst shell drifted over a near prospect of hoof-holed mud, tumbled bricks and protruding rafters. The headquarters dugouts were excavated on the site of a ruined farm. Farther away, beyond the puddled morass which was a road, a battery of field guns—each weapon hidden in an emplacement of mud merging with the desolate expanse of mud across which they were spaced—banged away rapidly, the spurt of flame vivid against the low grey sky. Their muzzles pointed westward to where a long featureless ridge, not far distant, rose darkly, to contrast with a band of light that just hinted at the afternoon sun behind the clouds.

Against the illumination, founts of black smoke sprang up from the summit of the ridge in a wide-stretched simultaneity of appearance, incessantly renewed, that baffled the attempt to count, climbed yet a little, and hung poised before they broke and drifted, formlessly and thinning. Shrapnel, white and heavy black, dotted the ridge horizon in magically reinforced handfuls. Over the hinterland between the battery and the high ground the brown and black smoke of other shell bursts shot up from a score of places at once. Far and near over that cloud-hung wilderness a scintillation of quick, short gun flashes betrayed the positions of German batteries otherwise invisible.

The world was full of noise. Close at hand the violent rapid reports of the field battery, furiously

at work, blotted, as it were, momentarily the chaos of heavy sound that rolled, reverberating, between unexpected and confused climaxes of coincident salvos. From behind came the gruff double thud of the German howitzers, overpowered from instant to instant by the loud, sharp detonation of a heavy gun. In the air above was a continual rushing of shells, those of large calibre rumbling onward like a laden tramcar, the smaller projectiles fiercely sibilant, varied by a banshee howl where a driving band had torn loose. Far away to the west the continuous discharges of the English guns were an undertone of muttered thunder. The detonations of shell bursts and trench-mortar bombs upon the ridge were indistinguishable in the welter of slam and crash and rumbling broken roars that rolled under the low sky.

The colonel stood for a moment contemplating the scene, with the narrowed eyes and bent brow of a seaman who endeavours to estimate the fury of a coming storm. The new staff captain gazed also, fixing the lie of the land by glanced references to his map. The lieutenant stood nervously biting his lower lip, the muscles of his face quivering, his knees shaking despite an effort of his will. This was no good place to loiter in the open.

His apprehensive brain, agonisedly alert for the definite sound, identified in a spasm of hyperacute faculty a scarce distinguishable distant pop! among the uproar.

"Here it comes!" he cried.

There was a pause, and then, distinct among all the other sounds, the whine of a rapidly approaching shell detached itself, coming straight toward them. Like one man they flung themselves flat upon the mud in the instant that it rushed to the deafening crash of its explosion. Face downward, they heard the continued fall of the upcast débris, the whine of its splintered fragments. Mud rained upon them.

The colonel sprang to his feet.

"Hurry!" he said. "There will be another."

The others followed him as he hastened toward the puddled road and turned along it. The deep mud sucked at their boots and splashed, liquid, to their knees. They plunged onward, desperately at strain to get away from the danger spot. A little farther on, where the road sank below the level of the land, a communication trench opened into it on the right. A signboard all askew named it—*Siges-Allee*. They dived into it just as the whine and rush and crash of the expected shell emphasised the necessity for their haste.

The trench was deep and wide, excavated on a trace not of sharp angles but of serpentine curves. The rails of a miniature tramway followed its shelter. The three officers stepped from one to another of the metal sleepers that squelched beneath them in the liquid mud. A few hundred yards along the trench they overtook a stationary train of four trucks, a midget petrol engine at the head. The

Unteroffizier in charge stood up quickly from his conversation with the driver perched upon the quaintly small tractor. He saluted at the approach of the regiment commander.

"What are you doing with this ammunition?" asked Von Förster angrily. "Why are you stopped?"

The man shrank and stammered.

"*Die—die Granaten—Herr Oberst!*"

The colonel's rage leaped to fury.

"Shells! *Dummes Zeug!*" He slashed the man across the head with his trench stick. "This ammunition is urgently required. *Auf! Vorwärts!* And don't stop till I tell you!" He clambered onto the truck, behind the tractor, Hofmeister and Von Waldow imitating him, and sat on the stack of ammunition boxes. The frightened driver started his engine, and as the train commenced to move squealingly and slowly onward the Unteroffizier sprang onto the rear truck.

"Report yourself under arrest!" Von Förster shouted at him. "The men in the trenches might be dying for lack of this ammunition to-night," he added to Hofmeister. "We have had terrible difficulty in getting up supplies this last week."

The little train rattled and squealed and jolted along the trench, moving at a fair pace. The high earth walls permitted no vision of the countryside; but the constant overhead scream of shells, the ever-recurring crashes, were a stimulus to the imagination.

Every few minutes a ball of white smoke jumped into the near air with a sharp detonation, and occasionally shrapnel bullets hammered on the trucks. Still they went on.

Once, looking up, they perceived an aeroplane low down in the sky.

"Brave fellow, that!" shouted Von Förster above the deafening noise of the tractor. He followed it with his eyes. It swerved and swooped toward them. With a cry he pointed to the red and blue circles on its wings. "English!" Immediately they saw faint spurts near its propeller, heard the distinct raps of its machine gun. Flicks of earth leaped up along the top of the trench wall; there were splashes in the water ahead. The driver turned a scared face to the colonel.

"On! On!" shouted Von Förster.

The driver put on his best speed. The train rocked and roared in the narrow passage. Looking up, they saw puff after puff of shrapnel burst round the aeroplane. It climbed and headed for home. They rushed onward. The minutes passed.

Suddenly there was an appalling hiss, a deafening explosion in the bend just ahead of them. Another followed it, and another. Black smoke rolled down on them, blotting out vision. The brakes squealed, responding to the apprehension of the driver, as the train rounded the corner. Explosion followed explosion in the mass of smoke. The aeroplane had reported to its battery.

The train stopped with a fierce jerk. It had run into the fallen-in walls of the trench. The driver sank over his tractor, killed by a flying fragment. The others sprang off.

"Remain with the ammunition!" shouted Von Förster to the N. C. O. He himself, followed by his officers, ran crouching back along the train and clambered out of the trench. Shell after shell swooped down upon the fatal spot just ahead.

For a moment or two the three officers crouched among irregular heaps of sodden, tumbled earth. The colonel looked at his map, fixed his whereabouts. Pointing, he drew Hofmeister's attention to a scarce distinguishable trench line on the slope of the ridge, away to the right. A pole bearing a small notice board stuck up in the otherwise featureless prospect, a little behind the trench.

"The support battalion!" he shouted. "Battalion headquarters there!" He pointed to the notice board. "We will go straight on—see them coming back!"

The lieutenant, who had dallied with a hope, followed his seniors. The colonel made a wide circuit round the length of communication trench that was still being punished. More than once they flung themselves down to escape shells that came with a long swooping whine and rush, to explode in their vicinity. The shrapnel, that burst irregularly in patches over the slope, could not be avoided. They could only pray for immunity and hope their hel-

mets would resist a chance bullet on their heads. The bombardment continued steadily on both sides, neither increasing nor diminishing.

The summit of the ridge, still upspouting its fountains of black smoke and canopied with drifting shrapnel puffs, was an empty desolation at this nearer view. The continuous detonations of the explosives that hailed upon it were now the chief feature in the bewildering volume of noise that was incessantly reinforced from near and far.

Another shell rushed over their heads, finished with a soft thud in the earth—"A 'dud'!" cried the colonel, with a laugh of relief. Another followed, finished with similar softness—— No! All three glanced behind them in sudden alarm as the third and fourth shells terminated their careers with the same quiet thuds. A light cloud of dense vapour was creeping low upon the ground, extending laterally as shell after shell pitched to feed it. The wind was northeasterly, behind them, and brought them a peculiar odour.

"Quick, Herr Oberst!" Hofmesiter unbuckled the lid of his chief's gas-mask box, and then his own. Von Waldow wanted no urging. The three of them fitted the masks under their helmets, looking curiously porcine with the protruding tin snouts. Then they ran, slowly but with immense effort, over the yielding shell-torn ground, stumbling over inequalities dimly perceived through the celluloid goggles of

the masks. The gas drifted round them as they ran.

They tripped over a party of prone men lying in odd attitudes, fresh blood upon their faces and oozing through the grey cloth of their backs. Boxes of stores lay round them, scattered and broken. It was a fatigue party, caught by shrapnel. One man half raised himself, moved an arm. The gas drifted over them. The officers ran on.

They dropped into the communication trench, here badly destroyed, and dodged from hollow to hollow of the wet, crumbling earth, following its trace. On either hand the rush and shattering crash of arriving shells were the accompaniment of each instant. The shrapnel overhead was an imminent peril, miraculously escaped from moment to moment. The British were putting down a barrage, not very intense but extremely dangerous, behind the front lines.

The pale gas cloud drifted over a wide area, looking like the low mist on a wet field at evening.

The entrances of other wrecked trenches opened to right and left of them. All were deserted. Save the stricken ration party, they saw no one. Suddenly the Oberst turned to the right, dived along a lateral passage and stopped where a man crouched in a low, dark, timber-supported hole.

He pushed the man aside, slipped in and descended many steep, slippery steps. The others followed him. They found themselves in a small square dugout illuminated by a candle. The walls and roof

were supported by balks of heavy timber. A rough table was in the middle, telephone instrument upon it. Several ammunition boxes served for seats. Pick and shovel rested against the wall. Two men rose to their feet as the colonel entered. They were plastered with mud from head to foot. Their haggard eyes looked out of faces that had been neither washed nor shaved for many days. Both saluted punctiliously. Von Förster sank, exhausted, onto a seat. He nodded faintly as he removed his mask. The two others also divested themselves of their grotesque headgear. Von Waldow proffered his flask.

Refreshed, the colonel looked about him.

"I came to see for myself, major," he said. "You are having a bad time?"

"*Schrecklich!*" replied the battalion commander. "We have scarcely three hundred left. This is Lieutenant Stein, Herr Oberst—acting adjutant; poor Kaunitz has been killed."

The colonel nodded.

"This is Hauptmann Hofmeister—he replaces Grenzmann, who goes back to the division. I brought him up to see how things stand."

Hofmeister saluted.

"If only we had more men, Herr Oberst!" said the battalion commander. "We ought to be relieved—replaced by two or three fresh battalions. We want a division where we have barely a brigade. Surely we have enough troops?"

"There are masses of them somewhere in the

rear," replied Von Förster. "They are keeping them for the counterattack. We must do our best."

Hofmeister spoke to the adjutant.

"Is the shellfire at its height?" he asked.

"No, Herr Hauptmann, it has slackened—particularly on the forward positions."

"I should like to see them. Is it possible?"

"We can try, Herr Hauptmann."

"You permit, Herr Oberst?"

"Certainly—certainly."

Lieutenant Stein donned his steel helmet.

The afternoon was drawing toward dusk, but there was still plenty of light as they emerged into the wrecked trench.

Lieutenant Stein led the way over the soft shell-heaped masses of crumbling earth, heading toward the summit of the ridge. They went crouchingly, now stumbling forward onto their hands, now sinking up to their knees. The shells continued to arrive, upflinging brown mud with the black smoke or stopping short in the air with a sudden apparition of white cotton wool, lit momentarily by a red flash, that floated lazily. But it was no longer the intense bombardment of a little time ago, and movement, though risky, was possible. Stein went diagonally to his right front, where a more or less prolonged depression among the shell holes indicated the site of a trench. A party of men, not readily distinguishable in their mud-caked grey, were shovelling

at a mass of churned earth. The two officers approached them.

"Dugout blown in, Herr Lieutenant," said the Unteroffizier in charge. The men looked up, their faces pinched and drawn, indescribably dirty and miserable. They shovelled doggedly.

Hofmeister asked a question of his guide.

"We have a company here flanking this area," replied Stein; "Oberlieutenant Schwarz in command."

Hofmeister glanced across the shell-torn stretch menaced by this ruined trench, ere they dropped into the depression and followed it. Encouraged by the diminution of the bombardment men were emerging from their holes of refuge, appearing mysteriously as from nowhere among the heaps of earth. They carried spades, and N. C. O.'s set them to re-bank the parapet and to clear away the débris from machine-gun emplacements.

An officer approached. It was the lieutenant in command of the company. Hofmeister introduced himself.

"Can't you arrange to get up some kind of rations?" asked the company commander querulously. "My men are starving. They have had scarcely anything to eat for three days. How can they fight? It is scandalous, the way we are left—scandalous!" He glared at Hofmeister as though charging him with personal responsibility, careless of his superior rank.

Hofmeister promised to do what he could.

"The casualties too!" continued Oberlieutenant Schwarz. "Why is an effort not made to get them away? Come and see?"

He led the staff captain along the trench to the entrance of a deep dugout. Hofmeister descended, found himself in a large excavated chamber lit by an acetylene flare—and recoiled suddenly. The stench was insupportable. The floor was carpeted with supine bodies, bandaged in all fashions. The doctor came toward him, stepping carefully among the stricken men.

"Ah! You have come to evacuate?" he cried. His face fell at Hofmeister's negative shake of the head. "No! But, *lieber Hauptmann*, this state of things is impossible—*unerhört!* We must get them away! Some of them have been here for four days. I have no more room. What will happen when the attack comes?"

Hauptmann Hofmeister shrugged his shoulders—*bedauerte*.

"Regret!" cried the doctor. "It is easy to regret! These men are dying—German soldiers, dying in their filth. Is this the glory that you promised them, the joy of dying for the Fatherland that you war makers prate of? I tell you"—he shook his fist in the staff captain's face—"you brought about this misery deliberately—you prolong it in your vain blind gamble for an impossible victory—it is your duty to relieve it—to relieve it at once!"

"You are overwrought, Herr Doctor," said Hofmeister. "You want a rest."

"Overwrought?" The doctor laughed like a maniac. "Look at it! Look at it! I live in this night and day, and ever more are coming! A rest? Yes, that is what we all want, a rest from this fiendish murder you continue——"

He clutched vainly at the staff captain's coat as Hofmeister shrugged his shoulders once more and went quickly up the stairs of the dugout.

"As if I was responsible!" he said to Stein, who had stood behind him. "As if I also am not sick to death of it all! I shall be glad when the Englanders attack. Perhaps there will be an end of it then."

The adjutant took him from point to point of the position, crawling and floundering from shell hole to shell hole. Here and there a short length of damaged trench was being repaired, but the major portion of the defence was organised in shell craters wherein lurked little groups of men about a machine gun. Some of these craters were open to the sky, but many were covered with circular lids of camouflage, imitating brown earth and sometimes water, that should baffle the eyes of the airmen spying out the defences. One stumbled on these positions without remarking them, so cunningly were they devised. At the critical moment these lids would lift just a little and a machine gun would peep forth.

In this slackening of the bombardment a surprising number of grey figures, miraculously surviving

in this featureless chaos of tumbled earth, could just be discerned, head and shoulders, upon the summit of the ridge, desperately at toil to cast up a better shelter for themselves against the fiercer storm that was surely coming. About their feet lay the bodies of those who had finished with war. The water in the shell holes, dissolving rust from submerged objects, was red as with their blood.

Cautiously in the gathering dusk Hofmeister and the adjutant crept forward to where the dense masses of rusty barbed wire lay beaten down from stake to stake. There had been a front-line trench here once—it was now obliterated in the complete devastation of shell craters linked rim to rim. Lookout men lurked in them here and there.

From one of these craters the two officers peered stealthily toward the English lines. The nearer part of the No Man's Land was freshly scarred with shells that had dropped short. Farther away the long rank grass still grew, was thicker as it approached the British wire, which it all but hid.

"Do you see?" said Stein, nudging his companion. "It is already cut. There—and there!"

It was just possible to make out where lanes had been cut through the entanglement, though the tall grass still waved above the stakes. Beyond it the rough earth and sandbag wall of the British parapet stretched in front of them, almost intact, following the contour of the land until it disappeared into the mist on the right and the left. It was quiet, appar-

ently deserted. Far behind it a patch of green field was just visible in the fading light. A desultory cannonade from both sides boomed and slammed spasmodically. By contrast with the preceding bombardment the world seemed peaceful.

A rifle spoke from the opposing trench. The two officers ducked. A machine gun commenced to hammer out short interrupted bursts of fire, traversing the crater field, its bullets cracking above their heads as they cowered in the watery mud of their hole. It ceased. With infinite precautions they crawled out and stole backward toward the battalion headquarters.

Ssss! Ssss! Ssss! Ssss!—a group of shells rushed to burst in quick succession on the ground about them. Another series followed ere the detonations of the first had ceased. From behind came the rapid slamming of English guns, merging far and wide into one long-continued thudding beat, half-obscured by near explosions.

“Hurry, Herr Hauptmann!” cried the adjutant. “The bombardment has started again!”

They ran, desperately straining to get over the soft ground. About them, in the failing light now fitfully intensified by faint flashes, they saw grey-clad figures dashing to cover. Crash after crash shook earth and heaven. Black smoke drifted over them. The reek of burnt explosive filled their nostrils, caught their breath. Wild flights of shells raced overhead, to burst far beyond, flight upon

flight. Rockets, red and white, shot up into the sky from all along the ridge.

Panting, feeling their continued existence to be a miracle that might be at any moment terminated, they flung themselves into the trench and rushed for the headquarters dugout. They threw themselves into its aperture just as the adjacent earth went up with quick red flash and appalling roar.

In the dugout Von Förster and the battalion commander stood anxiously behind an artillery observation officer bent over the telephone instrument on the table. He was vainly trying to elicit a reply. Lieutenant von Waldow was absent.

The artillery officer straightened himself and sketched a hopeless gesture.

"The line has gone again!" he cried, his voice partially swallowed by the din. "All the lines are broken!"

Von Förster turned to Hofmeister.

"I have sent Von Waldow to try to signal back—these people must be relieved," he said. His face was haggard with anxiety, his hand tapped nervously on the table.

"Too late, Herr Oberst!" said the battalion commander, sinking limply onto one of the ammunition boxes. "This is the beginning of the end."

The Oberst ignored him impatiently.

"We must get back ourselves, Hofmeister. We must not be trapped here. We can do nothing—nothing unless we get back to headquarters."

"Impossible, Herr Oberst," said Hofmeister. "There is a barrage behind us."

"We must try—try at all costs! I wish Waldow would come back!"

At that moment the young lieutenant came slithering down the stairway.

"It is hell outside—hell!" he cried. "The signallers are all buried. The entire ridge is being blown into the air! The fire is worse than ever! I was buried myself—— Oh, I am wounded!" He finished in a cry of alarm. His left arm was dripping blood on the floor. He rocked on his feet, seemed about to faint.

Hofmeister ripped back the stricken man's tunic, produced a first-aid dressing.

"It is nothing," he said, bandaging the arm. "A scratch. You will be all right. A month in Berlin for you."

"We shall all be killed," gasped the young man, terror in his eyes.

"Just listen to it!" cried the artillery officer. "These Englanders do know how to put down drum fire!"

Outside, the viciously violent detonations followed each other without an instant's pause, deafening the ear, shaking the dugout with fierce double concussions, seeming to rend the earth to its core with each quickly reiterated shock. It was obvious that nothing could live in the open. The shelter of any dugout was precarious. They held their breath for the

stunning roar that should terminate their existence. All were trembling. The candle went out repeatedly—could not be kept alight. Some one switched on his electric pocket lamp, kept it shining across the small dank cave. Darkness was insupportable. Panic lurked in it, beating on them with each new shock that crashed without. The sight of the heavy timber balks, of the roof intact, preserved a faint confidence, a hope that was scarcely more than a symptom of the desperate will to live.

The Oberst sank on a seat.

“I ought not to be here! I ought not to be here!” he cried, repeating a fixed idea. “What will the brigade say when the attack comes? I am away from my post! I am away from my post!”

“We shall all be killed! We shall all be killed!” moaned the staff lieutenant as he rocked to and fro, nursing his wounded arm.

“Silence!” shouted Hofmeister, glaring at him with exasperation.

“This is the end—the beginning of the end,” repeated the battalion commander. “We ought to have been relieved long ago.”

“Our batteries are certainly firing,” said the gunner officer, feeling it incumbent on him to say something.

“How long can they keep this up?” the adjutant asked from the gloom behind the lamp.

“All night,” replied the artillery officer grimly.

"They will not attack before dawn, and they will keep it up till then."

"Awful! Awful!" murmured the regiment commander. "They will walk right through. There will be nothing to stop them."

Hofmeister looked at his watch.

"In that case we shall have eight hours of it," he said.

None answered him. All relapsed into a silence while they listened to the incessant crashes, the continuous succession of near explosions that smote and rent. The earth shuddered. Fragments fell from the roof to the floor. There was an appalling, stupendous roar apparently exactly overhead, simultaneous with a fierce stunning shock that bludgeoned their senses and left them dazed. In the light of the pocket lamp they saw the supports of one wall give way, sink; a mass of earth bulged into the dug-out. A glance at the roof showed it beaten down diagonally. They sat motionless and silent in the circumscribed space.

Hour after hour passed—a timeless, indefinitely extended period. Their ineffectual efforts at conversation lapsed. The acuteness of a fear in which they could do nothing for defence was dulled gradually into a vague hopelessness, the savage persistence of the bombardment hazing their senses with its monotony of thundering, riving menace.

At first tense, quivering, they relaxed to a limp exhaustion. Despite the violent concussions, the

blasts of shattering noise, they dozed fitfully under the excess of strain. Flitting dreams passed over them, blending with wakefulness. Hofmeister found himself living through a recapitulation of the incidents of the day. He saw again the agony of fright on the faces of the N. C. O. left with the ammunition on the wrecked train—the stricken ration party helpless under the drifting gas. He heard once more the querulous impeachment of the officer whose men were starving—gazed, with a horror surpassing that of the reality, on the hell of the first-aid dugout, felt himself wildly sharing the dementia of the overwrought doctor. Once more he toiled over the shell-churned ground where the haggard soldiers dug for dear life—saw the ominous lanes in the wire before the silent British parapet. Through all his visions he was oppressed by a sense of immense effort—immense futility under a cloud of inexorable menace. He woke with one of his own groans. The others were dreaming also, making strange noises.

They roused occasionally from these brief recuperations to the re-perceived uproar, to the full realisation of imminent danger never slackening in its threat. Then a cold fear gripped them as they sat deprived of any activity that could occupy their minds. The strain seemed more than could be borne. The electric lamp was almost exhausted—gave only a dull red glow. Hofmeister roused himself, shut it off and turned on his own. Crash followed crash outside with a fury that had neither

hesitated nor diminished since its first commencement an eternity of time ago. He wondered dully whether any of the battalion were left alive, wondered that the dugout had so long sheltered him and his companions.

The artillery officer stirred.

"*Herr Gott!* but I am hungry!" he said.

The battalion commander, long utterly immobile, surprised them by answering. He had seemed asleep.

"I have had nothing to eat for three days," he said. "Nor my men."

Hofmeister quickened with an idea.

"But we have our emergency rations!" he cried. "Herr Oberst!" He roused his superior. "Let us eat—it will be something to do!"

"*Ja, ja!*" murmured Von Förster with a childish vacuity. A transformation had taken place in him. He was startlingly senile, mouth loose, eyes pouched and bleary, as he felt fumblingly for his emergency ration. He was merely an old, old man. All capacity for command had vanished. "Let us eat! For the last time!" He spoke apparently to himself, and chuckled with an imbecile and horrid mirth.

Lieutenant von Waldow slept, babbling in uneasy dreams. Hofmeister took his emergency ration without waking him.

The five of them—for Stein had roused himself from the corner where he crouched—ate the sausage and biscuit of the three rations. The imminence of

death present to the consciousness of each as, now fully awakened, they listened to the everlasting crash and roar of the inferno overhead, they ate with that wolfish gluttony of those breakfasting for the last time in the condemned cell, the body imperiously asserting its craving to live, their nerves relieved to find a veil for terror.

Hofmeister produced his flask, portioned out mouthfuls in an enamel mug passed from hand to hand. Their faces, grotesquely illumined in high light and deep shadow as they clustered round the electric lamp throwing its narrow beam across the dugout, were stamped with the horror of the night.

"This is the end," repeated the major. "I marched with the first in August—fought at the Marne, Ypres, in Russia, on the Somme. Everywhere men were killed round me—all my officers. Time after time—I survived—miraculously. I believed—believed I had a star—something that kept me safe—and this is what it kept me for! This is the end." He stopped. "My poor little wife!"

"*Bitte*, Herr Major!" cried Hofmeister in expostulation. "We all have womenfolk. One dare not think of them on the battlefield!"

"Battlefield!" cried Stein. "I would not mind dying on the open field. It's being killed like rats in a trap——"

"Killed uselessly!" The gunner officer took it up. "If only we had been able to make peace on our first victories! Now—now we are being bled

to death to keep up the pretence that we have won."

"It is the beginning of the end," repeated the major.

The Oberst rose to his feet suddenly. He swayed as though in the gusts of the crashing detonations outside. He held the enamel mug in his hand as though about to drink to a toast.

"*Meine Herren,*" he said, an uncanny wild solemnity in his tone, "we are dead men." He raised his voice to be heard amid a louder explosion. "You and I, major—we marched through Belgium in the long ago—there are not many of us left. I drink to our eternal damnation! Can't you see them? Can't you hear them—those mad women—shrieking at us—clawing at us? I have heard them all this night—beating on the roof to get at us—and I laugh at them as I laughed then!"

He burst into a shriek of crazy laughter that made the blood run cold. "I laugh at them all through hell—I used to laugh at them in my dreams—I could not prevent them haunting me. We laugh at them now, major—damned but *Übermenschen*—*Übermenschen* even in hell—*nicht wahr*, major? Ha! ha! ha!" Again his insane mirth mingled with the crashes.

The major hid his face in his hands. Hofmeister sprang up and pulled the old man down to his seat.

"He is mad!" he cried. "Don't listen to him!"

The old man sat and laughed evilly to himself.

There was an even louder crash outside, a more

violent shock. They glanced toward the stairway, saw masses of earth rolling down it.

"The entrance has been blown in!" shouted Stein amid a series of terribly fierce explosions that was as the very heart of a storm. "Quick! Pick and shovel!"

He sprang to the tools. He seized one, Hofmeister the other. Some one snatched the lamp, shone it up the stairway, which was blocked with earth. Feverishly Stein and Hofmeister attacked it, flinging débris behind them into the dugout. They forgot all other dangers in the panic fear of burial alive as they hacked and shovelled at the obstruction. There were many feet of it to be cleared away. Hofmeister paused for a moment after a frenzied bout of toil.

"Listen!" he cried. "Listen! The fire has lifted! The attack has begun! Quick! Quick!"

With superhuman energy the two men delved into the mass of earth that crumbled about their feet on the stairway. Below them others, they knew not who, cleared it into the dugout. The pick smote right through. A few more shovel digs at the roof of earth above them and it collapsed onto their heads. They saw a pale grey sky. The crash of shells was a distant continued sound. The sharp, vicious hammering of machine guns was the dominant noise.

Somebody clutched at Hofmeister as he forced himself through the narrow aperture into the free

air. He glanced back and saw Von Waldow, and kicked viciously. But the young lieutenant squirmed out behind him, overtook him as he ran along an unrecognisable trench. Hofmeister fell headlong over a heap of earth and heard a violent detonation close behind—another, duller explosion following it. Bombs! The dugout! His imagination half glimpsed the fate of his comrades as he struggled to his feet.

He looked up, to see a man, hooded like a familiar of the Inquisition, horribly unhuman with his featureless face, standing on the edge of the trench above him with a bomb poised to throw.

He heard a yell from Von Waldow, saw the young lieutenant sprint at the man like a maniac, all oblivious of his wounded arm, snatch and wrench at the man's wrist, fling the bomb away after a moment of fierce struggle, in which Hofmeister agonised for the explosion. The enemy disappeared suddenly—how, he knew not. He was feeling queerly faint. Wounded! How? Where? When? Von Waldow seized him, dragged him along.

“Quick, Herr Hauptmann! Quick! I know a machine-gun dugout!” The lad was in a frenzy of excitement, utterly unlike the shrinking, frightened poltroon he had appeared in the dugout.

He dragged the staff captain a little way along the trench and stopped before a low entrance to a tunnel. They wriggled into it, hearing only faintly now the hammering of the machine guns, the thud

of bombs. As Hofmeister crawled along the passage he felt his senses return to him. He was not severely wounded. Only a touch somewhere.

"There should be machine gunners here!" called out Von Waldow, scrambling ahead in the darkness. They emerged into an underground chamber dimly visible in a pale light that fell through a perpendicular shaft at the farther end. The place was empty. Both officers rose to their feet and ran to the shaft. A machine gun on a little platform rested on the bottom. The platform was a lift worked by an arrangement of pulleys and counterweights. Hofmeister sprang onto it.

"Pull me up!" he cried. Von Waldow seized a hanging rope.

The staff captain, crouching by the weapon to adjust it for action, felt himself slowly mounting the narrow shaft as the lieutenant tugged jerkily at the rope with his one valid arm. The platform stopped. Hofmeister, looking over the sights of the gun, gazed at his foes.

Parties of brown-clad men were moving, disappearing and reappearing, amid the heaped and pitted desolation of the ridge. All were going in one direction—toward the German lines. A few ran at a slow jog trot. The most walked with plodding deliberation. All kept in their loose formations of little groups. Some had rifles, bayonets fixed. Others had only bags of bombs. All were hooded, featureless, under the flat helmets. Shrapnel burst

above them here and there, but the shell fire was not much visible, though audible enough as the counterbarrages crashed and thudded just out of sight on either hand.

Hofmeister released the safety catch, traversed the gun, seeking for a bunch of the enemy. He saw a group carrying curious heavy firearms like old-fashioned blunderbusses fling themselves down in a rear shell hole, the muzzles of two weapons point at him. He slewed his weapon with the instinctive quickness of a menaced animal, pressed on the trigger, crouching low. He heard only his first shot.

The groups of hooded men continued to stream across the German position, dropping bombs down suspected holes. One dropped down a shaft where a young lieutenant, with only one arm capable of use, was clinging to its side, vainly trying to climb the rough, absolutely perpendicular ladder.

The first counter attack was made in such chaotic fashion that the absence of higher leadership was manifest.

III

THE TERROR IN THE SKY

TWO officers sat at table in the long wooden hut that was the mess of the junior officers of the airship squadron. Both were very young, fair-complexioned, with close-cropped hair, typically North German. Round them were the remains of a copious meal. Used crockery upon the table indicated that other officers had already eaten, but the two young men sat alone.

The furniture of the hut was of the simplest. In addition to the inevitable piquant or humorous designs culled from the illustrated papers, a large, double-page drawing from the *Illustrierte Zeitung* was prominent on the wall. It depicted, with powerful imagination, a London whose architectural peculiarities were emphasised in an inferno of blood-red flame, fire-racked shipping in a tangle under a shattered Tower Bridge, while overhead a fleet of Zeppelins floated with insulting calm high above a lattice-work of searchlights starred with bursting shells. Underneath was the legend, in fat Gothic type: "*Gott strafe England! Der Schreck in Himmel*" ("The terror in the sky").

The slighter of the two officers gazed thoughtfully at this interesting product of German art.

"Is it really like that, Fritz?" he asked.

His companion laughed shortly at the earnest tone of the question. It was made manifest that he was a man of experience.

"Not quite, Otto," he admitted. He glanced at the watch upon his wrist. "*Noch zehn Minuten,*" he said, and the would-be ease of his voice somehow wrecked itself upon a false note of jauntiness. He drew a case of fat cigars from his pocket and proffered it to his companion. "Take one," he insisted. "It will be long before you get another."

Both lads puffed manfully. Fritz Steinhauer and Otto von Bruchheim had been school-chums together. Both at the earliest possible moment—but Steinhauer, by virtue of a slight seniority in age, three months before his comrade—had answered the call of the Fatherland. More fortunate than so many thousands of gallant lads shortsightedly sacrificed in schoolboy battalions, they had profited by their real abilities and much influence to enter the airship service. Both had passed through the great central school at Leipzig—Fritz always in advance—and now, after several months of separation, they were again re-united. By a happy and rare chance Otto had been posted from the school to the same squadron as his friend. He had arrived only yesterday.

Otto continued to stare at the picture, although

evidently he looked through it, down a vista of thought.

He leaned suddenly forward across the table to his friend.

"*Alter Bursch!*" His manner was shamefaced. Clumsily he groped his fingers in a breast-pocket while he spoke. "You know people feel—feel sometimes—in advance——" He extracted a little packet from the pocket. "If—if anything happens I want you to give this to your sister Elsa," he finished, in a swift, nervous run of words.

His friend looked at him in pleased surprise.

"You and Elsa! I had no idea—— But, *dummer Kerl*, if anything happens to you, it happens to me also! We all go"—he indicated with an earthward gesture of the hand—"together." A big puff of cigar-smoke and a backward jerk of the head marked his contempt for the possibility.

Otto chastised his forehead with his fist.

"Of course!" he laughed. "What a fool I am! Fritz"—he leaned forward again, his face all boyish earnestness—"this is my first trip in real earnest—but—but you know I'm not afraid, don't you? It wasn't that—it was——" He stopped awkwardly.

"Afraid?" echoed Fritz. "Of course not! Whoever heard of a German officer who was afraid?" He swaggered in front of a mental mirror after the manner of his race and caste. "But it's a pity you haven't got a real job. It's much better when there is a responsibility to keep your mind occupied."

Otto was "supernumerary officer under instruction." He nodded his head absently.

"The captain is a good man, isn't he?"

"Good? I should think so!" answered Fritz, with pride. "It is something to be his second-in-command! And, Herr Gott, doesn't he hate the English! He knows his way over their cursed country better than you do yours over the Leipzig flying-grounds. He used to fly over England at night even before the war. He has often told me about it. It seems some of the stupid Englishers heard the engines in the air and wrote to the papers about it, and once he and the other officers who used to fly in the old Zeppelin thought that the game was up. But then more mad Englishers wrote to the papers that it was all nonsense, and so everything was all right." He looked at his watch. "Time's up! Get your coat on, *alter Bummler!*"

He shouted for an orderly. The man appeared, assisted both officers into the thick padded coats which went over already cold-proof clothing. On the moment of departure Fritz turned to his friend.

"If you like to give me the packet for Elsa," he said, in a voice he made as ordinary as possible, "I will put it with some things of mine that my servant is looking after."

The light had not quite faded out of the sky of a late autumn evening when they left the hut. They emerged into a vast level field. Directly in front of them, at a considerable distance from each other,

three enormous Zeppelin sheds were the dominant feature in the landscape. Close to each, dwarfed to Lilliputians by the huge bulk, was a body of infantry, immobile in their ranks. Every tree and hedge which could possibly interfere with a landing had been cut down, but the long, straight march of elms lining a main road had been left as a wind-screen. Behind it rose the spires of a Belgian town, just discernible in the twilight.

The two lads walked swiftly across the wide landing-ground towards the nearest of the airship-sheds. Of the diffident suggestion of schoolboy intimacy that had escaped them in the privacy of the mess-hut there remained not a trace. Despite their clumsy attire, they hastened with erect, well-drilled carriage, superb in stern self-poise. They were, very consciously, German officers in an idolised service. They belonged to a super-caste of the War-Lords, in whom a hint of human weakness was as unthinkable as pity in a barbaric god. On duty, at least—they had imbibed the theory with their mother's milk—they were of a divine hierarchy, the world of men at their feet. They saluted smartly, with a stiff, precise gesture—both moved as by one spring—the commanding officer of the infantry drawn up near the shed.

The great doors were flung open. Within, masking somewhat and yet reflecting the powerful white electric lights, the monster towered above them, incredibly huge. The long parallel lines of the immense polyhedral flanks receded, softly gleaming

aluminium, and drew together far, far back in the illumined depths of the vast shed. Stout steel cables, taut to ring-bolts in the concrete floor, as well as an infinite multitude of smaller ropes, pinioned the floating leviathan to immobility. Beneath the colossal bulk of the rigid gas envelope, the hanging cars linked by the long, narrow, rod-slung gangway, even the enormous propellers seemed dwarfed to insignificance. Under the lofty, cathedral-like roof of the shed the voices of men resounded with a hollow echo. The overall-garbed mechanists by the door sprang smartly to a salute as the two officers entered.

From the central car a whitewashed rope-ladder hung, nearly touching the floor. Fritz sprang up it with such agility as his padded clothing permitted. His friend followed. At the top of the ladder an *Unteroffizier* stood rigid, saluted.

"All ready?" asked Fritz, with clipped curtness.

"Ja, Herr Leutnant."

With the swift precision of a man who thoroughly knows his job, Lieutenant Steinhauer started on a tour of inspection of the entire ship. The senior *Unteroffizier* and Otto followed him. Everywhere the crew stood ready at their stations. In the central control-car, roofed, upholstered, fitted with panels that could close over the transparent celluloid windows, the steersman stood in waiting behind the wheels and levers that gave him mastery over the lateral or vertical progress of the ship; the tele-

phonist sat before his instrument. Under a row of dials on the wall—clock, aneroid barometer, speed gauges, etc.—a great chart was spread on a strutted table, field-glasses upon it. In another compartment the wireless operator sat at his apparatus. Between the two, below the gangway, the bombs were ranged in two neat parallel rows, suspended between rails. The couple of men detailed for the duty stood by the levers which at the proper moment should release the missiles. The machine-gunners, fore and aft and centre, were at their posts. Steinhauer glanced at the spotless cleanliness of the weapons, assured himself that the correct reserve of ammunition was instantly available. The low-roofed engine-cars at bow and stern were inspected, their machinery tested in a roar that re-echoed thunderously under the roof of the shed while the disconnected propellers remained motionless. Particular attention did the officer devote to a little car slung tight-close under the floor of the gangway between two drums of coiled steel wire. A manhole was opened in the floor, an electric light switched on below. A snug little nest, well-padded, in which a man could lie full-stretched, was revealed. Steinhauer assured himself that field-glasses, telephone, and emergency rations were all at hand. The manhole was closed, the two officers and the N. C. O. continued their tour. A climb up a narrow ladder through the darkness of the great envelope, between the ballonets, to the machine-gun platform at the top, and the inspection was finished.

Steinhauer glanced at the time, and, calmly satisfied, took up his station at the head of the dangling rope-ladder. Lieutenant von Bruchheim stood by his side. Their fair, boyish faces rigid, unemotional, they stood, not less than the mighty engine so terribly beautiful in its finely-conceived immensity which dwarfed them, perfected parts of the machine a would-be superhuman Germany had forged for the conquest of the world.

Quick, hard footsteps along the concrete floor resounded in the great shed. In close conversation with a red-striped officer of the General Staff, an officer, whose spare, hawk-like face looked strangely thin above the mass of thick clothing, approached the rope-ladder. They stopped, saluted mutually with a click of the heels, and the hawk-faced officer climbed the ladder. As he mounted, looking upwards, the piercing intensity of his glance—the eyes of a fanatic—gave Otto von Bruchheim a queer thrill. An impulse of passionate patriotism, glorying in risk and sacrifice, pitiless to the foe, communicated itself to him. Not a muscle moved in him, but he suddenly felt himself capable of any desperate heroism. To die, coldly and unemotionally as a German officer should!—he thrilled in every fibre.

The commander reached the platform. The two young officers saluted with precise automatism. Their superior's eyes softened.

"Guten Abend, meine Herren," he said.

The man's personality was magnetic. Here, on

the brink of their far-flung enterprise, Otto, who had felt only awe in presence of this stern man, suddenly loved him. To his vague, lofty ideal an intense loyalty linked itself.

The commander turned to Steinhauer.

"Is all ready?"

"*Ja, Herr Kapitän*—all is ready."

The commander nodded.

"Go to your station, then." He turned to Otto. "You will remain with me."

Steinhauer saluted and departed aft. The commander, followed by Otto, moved to the fore-part of the gangway. He blew a shrill blast on his whistle.

The measured tramp of the infantry-soldiers as they marched into the vast shed resounded under the lofty roof. On either side of the great airship they stood motionless in long ranks. Other whistles blew. There were a few curt orders, no shouting. In a moment the leviathan, swaying a little, was checked only by the hundreds of men clinging to the ropes.

Another blast on the whistle and slowly, gently, the great airship began to glide out of her shed, drawn on the steady march of the infantrymen, tiny beneath them. Otto stood by the commander on the open gangway as they floated out of the hard, white brilliance of the electric-lit shed into the grey of the deepening night. Distant across the wide landing-ground the open doorways of the other sheds gaped, illumined like the mouths of caverns. From them also had their giant tenants been led out to the far

adventure. One lay poised on the ground, her immense length, bluff at the nose and tapering at the stern, blocking out the horizon. The other hung already in the air, ghostlike in the faint light, rising vertically and silently.

A whistle shrilled from the after-end of the ship. They were clear of the shed. Still they continued to glide across the ground, the tiny soldiers straining with bent backs at the ropes. The commander glanced at the other ships. Both were now rising. He leaned over the rail, blew his whistle. The signal was repeated from below. The great ship stopped, quivering. "All clear!" was reported from the ground. The commander blew one last loud blast upon his whistle.

"*Nun kann's losgehen!*" he said to Otto, with a grim smile, parodying the famous phrase that had unleashed the fiends of war.

The young officer glanced over the rail. The earth, misty and indistinct, was already far below them, was falling away. Without shock or tremor the great ship rose straight up in the windless air.

"Come!" said the commander to Otto, and led the way to the control-car, bright with electric light.

Kapitän von Breitmüller commanded not only his own craft, but the two other ships composing the squadron. As he entered the control-car he called out an order, prefaced with the code-names of the other ships. "Course W.N.W. at a thousand metres, rising." The telephonist repeated it to the

wireless operator in the other cabin. Other orders directing the flight formation, distances, engine revolution, etc., followed. Otto glanced at the rapidly-mounting needle of the aneroid barometer. It touched 1,000. At the same moment he heard the bell of the telegraph-indicator to the engine-rooms and the answering clangs.

With a deafening, rattling roar, that swelled still louder in response to another clang on the telegraph, the engines started. The great ship woke from her inertia, pulsed with throbbing life. With a dizzy swing she came round to her course. Again the telegraph clanged, and yet louder rattled and roared the great propellers as they clove and forced back the air in their fiercely-swift revolutions. Everything in the great ship quivered with the force of her rush through the air and the feverish life-beat of her engines. To touch wood or metal was to come into contact with an almost painful vibration. The needle of the aneroid barometer still climbed. As she rose into higher regions the ship found herself heading into a slight breeze. She commenced to pitch in long, slow undulations, like a ship in a gentle swell at sea, the cabin floor rising and dropping away almost imperceptibly.

Von Breitmüller drew his junior to the great chart, marked a point upon it with his finger, shouted to be heard above the roar.

"Here," he said, "we meet the other squadron."

To-night the *verdammte Engländer* shall know what the hate of Germany means."

The boy glanced up, surprised at the hatred in his superior's voice. The passion he had often factiously awakened in himself when chorusing the Hymn of Hate was here beside him in a living embodiment, the incarnate spirit of the monster throbbing fiercely through the sky on her errand of destruction.

In obedience to an order from the commander, he went out of the control-car along the gangway. A rush of intensely cold air smote him, penetrated his thick clothing. He glanced over the rail. The earth lay hollow beneath him like a dark bowl from whose rim rose, silver-grey, the night sky. Far below, in the blackness, the lights of a Belgian town glimmered yellow. Aft of the ship, to port and starboard on the same plane as the leader, the single lights of the other two ships glowed like large stars. The radiance from their cars could just be seen.

He passed along the gangway, stepping over the machine-gun crews huddled in thick wraps under the lee of such protection as they could find from the bitter blast. In the rearward engine-car he found Steinhauer in earnest conference with the mechanist *Unteroffizier*. Despite all their efforts, the starboard engine was refusing to run as sweetly as it should. Here, in this long, low-roofed cabin filled with machinery, the atmosphere was pleasantly

warm. The noise stunned one, bludgeoning the senses in the confined space.

Steinhauer looked up with a preoccupied frown, shouted at the top of his voice an explanation of the trouble. The N.C.O. gesticulated with a spanner, alleged a diagnosis, and promised alleviation. Von Bruchheim returned to report.

He found the commander receiving a wireless message from the other squadron. They were in touch. He looked out of the windows, saw searchlight after searchlight shoot out into the night sky and be instantly extinguished. The other squadron was signalling its position. Von Breitmüller shouted an order. From their own ship and from those following, similar beams barred the sky for a moment with an intense whiteness, and then were not. The stars, temporarily obliterated, leaped back into a black heaven. The squadron had effected junction with four more ships, three composing another squadron, the other carrying a very important personage in supreme command of the whole.

From now on von Breitmüller received orders, re-transmitted them to his own squadron. The first was significant. All lights were dowsed. The control-car was illumined only by glow-lamps over the steering-compass, the indicator dials, the chart. The speed of the fleet was increased. Slanting upward, the ship, driven through the air with a force that shook her violently, climbed by her inclined planes to yet higher regions. Already the dial indicated

over three thousand metres. Von Breitmüller pointed to a spot on the chart. They were already over the sea.

For rather more than an hour their fiercely pulsing progress continued without event. Dimly through the side-windows, frosted with the exhalations of the men inside the cabin, could be discerned the glint of stars in a dark sky. Of their consorts nothing was to be seen. Otto knew only that the other squadron was ahead, their own squadron spread in a wide echelon behind it. But messages were continually exchanged between the ships. Steinhauer had now entered the cabin, stood with his friend behind the commander, who sprawled upon a cushion, gazing downward through a transparent panel in the floor. They looked also, bending over his shoulders.

Beneath them was an intense blackness that they knew to be the sea. Once or twice a thin strip of white overlaid it, suddenly produced and equally suddenly abolished—the searchlights of patrolling ships. Over on the port bow—it seemed almost directly under them, but was in reality many miles distant—two such strips lay long and motionless across the water, were moved suddenly in a quick jerk, but were not extinguished, and three searchlights shot upwards, waved uneasy arms in the dark sky. "Dover!" said Von Breitmüller. They raced on undiscovered, leaving the searchlights well away

to port—behind them. Half an hour passed. Von Breitmüller raised himself slightly.

“Observation!” he said to Steinhauer; to Otto: “General supervision of the ship! Keep in touch with me.”

The two young men left the comparative warmth of the control-car, stumbled along the gangway in an icy blackness, feeling more distinctly the gentle heave and pitch of the ship, realising her effort in the numbing vibration of the rod-supports as they clung to them. The vast rattling roar of the propellers would have drowned any attempt at speech. They reached the spot where the observation-car was slung under the drums of steel wire. The cowering, shivering attendant roused himself. The manhole was uncovered. Fritz switched on the light below for an instant; then, after an intense grip of his comrade’s hand in the darkness, slipped in, stretched himself. The manhole was replaced. An electric bell rang. The man pulled a lever and instantly the drums began to revolve, slowly at first, then ever more swiftly, paying out endlessly the thin, strong cables. Without the experience of his practice-flights Otto would have realised the frightful, dizzy swing of the little car suspended far below from the jerky, distressful toss it imparted to the entire ship.

Sharp bells rang simultaneously in various parts of the craft, clear above the roar of her machinery. “Quarters!” Otto hurried along the gangway. He

found the machine-gunners standing ready, their thick-gloved hands on the breech. The bomb-droppers were alert, their eyes fixed on the glow-illuminated indicator, the levers ready grasped. The searchlight-operator crouched behind the great barrel-lens on the swivel-mounting. Yet the leviathan pulsed onward, dark, emitting no sound other than her familiar roar, tossing jerkily with the pendulum-swing of the car swaying many feet below, rushing towards a fateful moment.

Otto hastened from point to point. His deck inspection finished, he glanced over the rail. Below him all was dark, but in that tenebrous depth he discerned a sinuous strip of even more intense blackness that stretched widening to a point beneath him in sharp curves—the River Thames! Flushed with excitement, he sprang up the narrow ladder which passed through the gas-envelope in a vertical climb to the machine-gun platform above.

He emerged into an intense cold and a spectacle of strangely large stars in a numberless multitude that seemed to crackle as they twinkled in unearthly brilliance on a dark blue background. The heaven was thick-sown with them from zenith to the low horizon. From its depths the beam of light that had left its origin in the days of Charlemagne fell now upon this strange product of the twentieth century rushing softly silvern through the radiant night to annihilate a moment or two in the brief lives of pygmies such as those who made her. But Otto

had no thought beyond the immediate. He hastened to the two machine-gun crews, assured himself of their readiness. Then he went to the inward-curving bulwark of bullet-proof steel that enclosed the platform. A rush of bitterly cold wind smote him as though he had run into a wall. He drew back, gasping.

In front of him the broad aluminium carapace of the leviathan stretched featureless, falling away to the sides, and far ahead at the nose, in gentle curves, nowhere dead straight. Beyond it was the star-studded night, through which they drove with sagging, straining rise and fall. Up here, intercepted by the vast bulk of the envelope, the roar of the engines was not so loud, but no other sound came to dispute its pre-eminence. Suddenly, as he gazed, he saw the swift leap of a reddish reflection. A second later, searchlights, bundles of them with divergent shafts, shot up into the sky far ahead and to the right and left. They moved, ferreting with long white fingers among the stars. In their midst twinkling yellow points of flame lived for an instant, were constantly reborn. Simultaneously with a second leaping flash came the rumbling, double detonation of its predecessor, heard through the roar of the hurrying engines. Thrilled, Otto clutched the rim of the bulwark, crouched to escape the blast of wind, and gazed.

The first squadron was in action. Red flash after red flash leaped skyward over a wide area. From

those to the right of him, far, far down, he could glimpse the brief yellow germ of the explosive. The roll of their heavy detonations was continuous from spasm to spasm. And ever the questing searchlights moved their long white fingers across the sky, now jerking away independently in a vain hope of the quarry, now clustering together, a waiting menace that suddenly dissolved and swept the heavens anew. Continuously among them, larger and ever larger as the ship rushed onward, flashed the little yellow stars of the shrapnel-bursts. Suddenly a dozen searchlights swung round. Poised on the tip of a converging steeple of white beams, like an egg-shell on a cunning water-jet, the long white body of an airship gleamed ghostlike in the sky. The yellow shrapnel-stars multiplied themselves furiously around, below, above her. From the depths beneath her leaped red flash upon flash in savage retaliation—a rolling, heavy thunder of detonations. She swung round, jumped vertically in her effort to escape the deadly glare. Her long body inclined out of the horizontal—nose upward—whether through injury or because she climbed, Otto could not tell. The searchlights held her.

A vivid yellow flash, a simultaneous sharp crack, in the air to his right, level with him, snatched him from the vision. Other sharp cracks, whose flashes he could not see, followed. Glancing over the bulwark, he perceived a faint white milky radiance veiling the black depths, issuing from immediately

below. Through it he saw, far away to starboard, the white eye of another searchlight spring into brilliance, swing its long beam towards them. They were discovered! As he sprang to the hatchway he saw the machine-guns and their crews silhouetted black in the blinding whiteness. He swung himself down the manhole to the ladder in desperate haste, the necessity of immediate report to the commander urgent within him.

He slid rather than climbed down the steep, narrow ladder. Here in the darkness between the unseen ballonets, walled in from all vision, a great fear—not for himself, but for the ship—surged up in him. The pulsing vibrations of the ladder, the noise of the engines—here a ringing roar—reassured him that she still lived. A pitch and roll and giddy swerve told him that she manœuvred. The imagined splitting flashes of shrapnel-bursts outside the frail envelope haunted him as he clambered down with frantic haste.

He dropped onto the narrow gangway. All was still dark, though dimly light by comparison with the blackness from which he had emerged. They had dodged the beam. But the horizon was latticed with waving, moving searchlights. From the depths below they shot up like nests of broad white spears. From below also, but ahead of them, the vivid red flashes leaped up without cessation in widespread fans of lurid light. And, grimly significant, far, far below, he saw the fierce glow, the rolling smother,

of buildings in a blaze. Despite the overpowering noise of the ship's engines, the detonations came to him in a continuous dull, shuddering thunder. He thought he heard the sharp cracks of anti-aircraft guns.

As he ran along the gangway to the control-car he saw a gleam of something swooping hawklike through the night sky, rushing down to meet them, bows-on. He shouted a warning to the machine-gunners, forgetful that they could not hear. But they also had seen. There was a sharp crackle of reports, spitting flames—the aeroplane and they whizzed past each other. “Look out!” he shouted to the gunners, useless though it was. The aeroplane had turned, was sweeping down upon them again, racing after them. He waited in an agony of suspense for the bomb. It came not. Their enemy had haply exhausted his supply. The machine drew parallel with them. Otto glimpsed the polished, canoe-like nose of the nacelle, saw the jutting machine-gun switch towards them, spit repeatedly. From aft and centre the two machine-guns of the airship answered in a fierce duel. The aeroplane rushed onwards, outpacing them—nose-dived suddenly.

Otto hurried into the control-car. Von Breitmüller greeted him with a quiet sardonic smile, looking up from the observation-panel in the floor. He held a telephone-receiver to his ear, was speaking into the transmitter.

"Yes—yes," he said, "I understand—no, wait for the intersection of the streets—the glow will help you——" Otto imagined his friend swinging far below, gazing downward, speaking into the telephone. "Right!" von Breitmüller continued. He raised his head, shouted an order to the steersman: "Starboard two points!" Then again into the telephone. "Don't wait too long! Yes—yes." He stretched out his hand, grasped the handle of the telegraph to the engines, pulled it over with a clang. There was a sudden silence. The engines had stopped. They were floating forward on their impetus. The noise of their consorts' bombs surged up to them in a thunder of reiterated shocks.

Telephone to his ear, von Breitmüller laid his hand upon another telegraph—that to his bomb-droppers—waited. In the dimly-lit control-car was a hush of tense nerves. The stillness of the ship, vibrationless and silent after so long, was impressive. Von Breitmüller spoke again. "Yes—yes." His fingers settled themselves in a grasp upon the handle of the telegraph—paused. He jerked it suddenly over. Otto glanced down through the observation-panel, fascinated. From the black depth below leaped a spout of livid red flame—another and another. The airship jumped and quivered, rocked in the crashes of the explosions. Von Breitmüller knelt impassive upon the floor, spoke into the telephone, looked up to Otto. "Target!" he said, with grim delight. He spoke again

to the observer. "No—take your line from the river—can you make out the bridges?—right—it's about eight hundred yards from that point." He spoke as though he carried a map of the hated City in his head. "Yes—that's the direction—right." He clanged the engine-room telegraph once more. Once more the rattling roar awoke, but this time diminished, at half-speed. He shouted an order to the steersman—a blinding white glare shot up through the observation-panel, illuminated the cabin.

For one second the commander bent over the panel, his sardonic features strongly accentuated in the unearthly glare, looking like an evil magician cowering over a devil's cauldron. Then he sprang to his feet, switched the engine-telegraph on to full speed, shouted order upon order to the steersman. The ship leaped and shook in a roar of machinery, swung and lurched with an inclined floor. But still the glare shot up through the observation-panel, dazzling any attempt at downward vision. Another beam smote suddenly upon the side-windows. The features of all in the cabin were grotesquely thrown into relief by the pitiless white blaze.

The commander spoke into the telephone again. "No—no—don't bother—I must lighten her anyway."

He clanged the telegraph to the bomb-droppers repeatedly, savagely. From below the blasts of the recklessly-flung missiles rushed up to them, but the flashes were masked by the steady brilliance of the

unwavering searchlights. Otto glanced at the aneroïd, saw the needle jump. The ship shot up to greater altitudes. Through the frosted windows he saw the gleam of quick yellow flashes, caught sharp detonations in the general roar. There was a louder one—a shudder of the ship. Von Breitmüller was shouting into the telephone. "Steinhauer! Steinhauer!" he called. He looked up, his face anxious. "Go and see what has happened."

Otto went out. The long under-body of the envelope gleamed white above him, the rod-slung gangway was startlingly illumined. In the air all round the shrapnel lit and cracked incessantly. He heard a fragment whiz past his head. He hurried to the windlasses of the observation-car. *They were gone!* A shell had evidently burst right between them, hurled them from their mountings. He stood motionless for a second, paralysed with horror at the fate of his comrade. He saw the sister—Elsa—looking into his eyes. Then, mastering himself with a spasm of will, he glanced upward—saw a great black rent in the white envelope.

A moment later three well-placed shells burst with vicious flashes at different points along the deck. The ship tossed, lay over, lost her level keel. The noise of her engines diminished, altered in character. With experienced ear, he realised that one was running free, that another had ceased to work. The ship sagged all awry, swerved, and pitched. He

had to clutch the rail to maintain his footing. He wondered whether she were falling.

Another and another shell struck her, yet still the terrible burst of flame he feared—looked for at each moment—was withheld. The hostile guns below had got her range exactly on a parallax of searchlights. The shells burst all round—again and again upon the deck. He felt the gangway quivering loose under his feet. He was sure that already some shells had burst inside the envelope—by a miracle, had not exploded the ballonets. Trembling, he hastened back to the control-car, clambering over broken stanchions, swinging himself in one instance with frenzied, unconscious courage across a sheer gap.

He found his superior shouting a message to the telephonist for repetition to the wireless operator. He reported their disaster to the flagship. Otto gave him additional details. Cool and sardonic, von Breitmüller listened, repeated the information in succinct, official language to the telephonist.

The message was interrupted by a priority call from the machine-gun platform on top of the envelope. The *Unteroffizier* in charge reported a concerted aeroplane attack, appealed for manœuvres to assist in beating it off.

Von Breitmüller shook his head with a grim smile. He turned to Otto, who stood clutching the doorpost in an effort to keep himself upright.

“Go up and take charge. Fight to the last!” His

eyes flashed. "We should be proud to die amid the ruins of our foes." Otto glanced at the blanched faces of the steersman and the telephonist. "Don't grudge your life, boy. We are only the vanguard. Our comrades follow us in swarms to rain down fire and hatred for our vengeance. *England! England ich hasse dich!* Our death shall be a fiery curse from heaven!" The man's face was that of a fanatic at the stake. "Go, boy!" he finished. "Good-bye!" He pressed his hand. Outside, the shrapnel crashed and crashed.

As Otto left the car he heard the commander order the telephonist to release all the bombs. The bombers had been killed, then!

Once more he scrambled hurriedly along the gangway, not giving a glance to the scene around, below him. But, subconsciously, he was aware that the other ships of the squadron were continuing the attack—were meeting a fierce defence. He swung himself up on to the ladder through the envelope, no longer vertically above him, and stopped, checked by a smell of gas. With quick decision he thrust a handkerchief into his mouth and climbed.

He emerged, with bursting lungs, on to the platform—saw one gun only spitting fire; two men crouched beside it. He ran to assist. As he went, something swooped with an angry whirr, low down, close overhead—shot away. There was a blinding flash, a loud double roar, a sheet of awful flame.

The leviathan tilted, hung almost vertical; great

tongues of flame, rolling black smoke, licked upward. With a blind instinct he caught at the bulwark to prevent himself slipping, shielded his face from an intense heat. A man yet clinging to the machine-gun below him let go his hold.

Wrapped in flame, the leviathan drifted, slowly sinking, a fiery terror in the sky.

IV

PANZERKRAFTWAGEN

HAUPTMANN VON WALDHOFER, Batteriechef of the —th Battery Fussartillerie, stood, helmeted and with buttoned coat, hastily sipping a cup of steaming hot coffee in his dugout. The electric light, fed from the power station at Cambrai, miles back, illumined a cosy little apartment. Portraits of the Kaiser and Von Hindenburg looked stiffly from the matchboarded walls in the incongruous company of a medley of coloured pages from *Simplicissimus*, *Jugend*, and, quaintly enough, the *Vie Parisienne*. One side was fully occupied by an enormous, large-scale map of the Somme area, divided into numbered squares, heavily scored with blue pencil here and there, across which ran a great curve of red lines massed in intricate pattern—the enemy trenches—and radiating, pin-supported, coloured threads from the point slightly E. S. E. of Flers, fanwise, far across the opposing lines. The battery-made bed, wire mesh stretched over a wooden frame, sloping slightly from the head toward the foot, on which lay blankets in the disarray of recent use, bulked largely in the apartment.

But there was still room for a little table, on which books and writing material were neatly arranged, and two comfortable, plush-covered armchairs, besides the camp washstand in which the water yet steamed. A carpet, mud-stained but thick and soft to the tread, covered the floor. In the corner, remote from the bed, was a stove whose long pipe bent at right angles below the roof and followed it until it ascended with the steep stairway at the entrance. The deliberate comfort of the dugout indicated long residence and the expectation of an indefinite stay. Only the pick and shovel in readiness by the door gave a hint of possible cataclysm.

An orderly stood stiffly at attention while his master finished his coffee. The captain put down the cup.

"What time is it?" he asked sharply.

"A quarter to seven,¹ Herr Hauptmann."

"What sort of morning?"

"Clear, Herr Hauptmann, but very cold."

"Any aeroplanes?"

"None over the battery, Herr Hauptmann."

The captain gave a final glance at himself in the French wall mirror which hung over the table, touched lightly with his finger tips the black-and-white ribbon of the Iron Cross upon his breast, as though flicking away a speck of dust, and turned to go. As he went, the hanging calendar caught his

¹6.45 a. m. German summer time. 5.45 a. m. English summer time. 4.45 a. m. Greenwich time. The summer time was used in all the armies.

eye. He tore off the top leaf. The date revealed was September 15, 1916.

He climbed, with the heavy step of an oldish man, the narrow, steep, thirty-tread stairway, and emerged into the cold blue sky of a clear dawn. Around him was bare, rolling country. About half a mile directly in front of him, the village of Flers huddled itself among thin trees, its skeleton roofs silhouetted against the blue. Between him and it, but close at hand in a slight depression of the ground, the four 105 mm.¹ guns of his battery stood, spaced and silent, under veils of a gauzelike material tufted with green and brown that blended well with the terrain. Inconspicuous even to a side view, thus covered, they were invisible from above. Near them were stacks of ammunition, also shrouded. Save for a sentry, the guns were deserted. The personnel of the battery was lined up in two queues, where the smoke of a couple of field kitchens betokened breakfast.

The battery dugouts were excavated in the breast of a slight swelling of the downs, their exits looking N. W., on the flank of the gun positions. The battery commander stood for a moment, surveying his little community, banded together for the service of the four squat, veiled idols lying, unhuman and aloof from the domestic needs of men. Then, following his morning habit, he turned and climbed the little rise of ground. On his accustomed viewpoint, he stopped and gazed westward. Before him,

¹The well-known 4.2" gun.

clear in the cold, early light, the undulating downs gathered themselves into a long, fairly regular ridge, some two miles distant at the summit. A maze of communication and support trenches, just visible, crisscrossed their white lines in the chalk of the hither slope. On the sky line of the ridge directly west, a large clump of bare, shell-sharpened tree stumps broke its emptiness. It was the Bois de Foureaux—known to the British army as High Wood. Farther south, a similar group of stumps spiked up into the sky—the Bois de Delville—Devil's Wood.

That clean-swept landscape mounting to the desolate sky line was the great, dominant fact in his existence. Ever concrete in his mind, it claimed his first waking vision, even as the weather horizon claims the first heed of the sailor or Vesuvius the morning glance of the Neapolitan. This morning it lay cloudless, save for the towering smoke of an occasional shell burst in the vicinity of the Bois de Foureaux, and strangely quiet. The whole wide stretch would have seemed untenanted by man had it not been for the occasional primrose twinkle of a field gun's flash. The reports of such guns came in isolated slams at varying intervals. To his right, an English shell hurried, with a long-drawn whine, to burst heavily in Flers. Far back, several enemy aeroplanes, tiny specks in the cold blue sky yellowing to the dawn, were dodging like midges among a smother of little brown shell puffs. From overhead came the drone of a German machine. But, by con-

trast with the frequent uproar which welled out of this region to translate itself into long thick smoke along the ridge, the scene was curiously clear and silent.

Satisfied with his scrutiny, the captain turned and descended again to the battery position. He passed along the line of dugouts in the flank of the rise until he reached one whose entrance bore the notice, "*Fernsprecher und Befehls Unterstand*,"¹ neatly painted on a board. The oberfeldwebel standing at the doorway sprang to a precise, heel-clicking salute. The officer acknowledged it curtly and dived into the dugout.

Here yellow electric light replaced the cool grey dawn, and tobacco smoke floated in long wreaths about the bulb. A young lieutenant, seated at the telephone instrument on the table, took the pipe out of his mouth and rose smartly as his superior entered.

"Good morning, Eberstein," said the captain. "Anything fresh?"

"Nothing, Herr Hauptmann," replied the lieutenant respectfully.

"Nothing of this rumoured attack?"

"Nothing."

The captain seated himself heavily at the table, and the lieutenant was at liberty to resume his chair.

"And that frightful bombardment all last night,

¹ Telephone and command dugout.

Eberstein, what do you make of it?" he asked, as he lit a cigarette.

The mouth under the fair moustache of the young lieutenant twisted into a contemptuous smile.

"Bah! The Englanders want to make us nervous or to persuade themselves that their wonderful 'great push' is not played out."

The captain blew out a long puff of smoke and nodded his head in dubious thought.

"And you think it is?"

Von Waldhofer, a man of somewhat deliberate mental processes, was never unwilling to discuss general topics with his subordinate. Eberstein's cheering, if crude, optimism was a welcome stimulus to him.

"Of course it is," said the lieutenant. "Since the first rush, they have been practically fought to a standstill. Here it is two and a half months since the offensive began, and where are they? Now, in one week on the Donajetz, we——"

"Yes, I know, Eberstein," his superior interrupted him. "You did wonders. But it is the Somme and not the Donajetz that interests us now." He removed his helmet and passed his hand wearily over a high, semibald brow. "I wish I could be as certain as you." He stopped, then broke out again, with the overemphasis of a man wearied with long brooding over a problem: "The colonel was so positive last night! And he had just come from the general staff. At dawn, he said, we might expect it. I can't make

it out. All night that frightful bombardment, obviously preparation—until just now. Then this quiet! I feel something is coming.” He shook his head. “We are much too near in this position.”

“If they come, so much the better!” cried Eberstein. “We will annihilate them. But I do not for a moment believe——”

He was stopped by a heavy, distant roar that commenced with the suddenness of a thunderclap and continued in one never-ending roll.

“There we are!” exclaimed Von Waldhofer. He looked at his watch. It marked seven o’clock precisely—six a. m. English summer time.

A moment later the telephone bell rang in an excavated offshoot of the main dugout. The orderly on duty there answered the call. “Message from the observation officer!” he announced, in a loud voice.

Eberstein picked up the receiver lying on the table in front of him.

“Yes?”

“Intense artillery fire, all calibres, upon entire sector. Whole front being heavily bombarded. Infantry attack expected momentarily.”

Eberstein repeated the message, and, ere he had finished, the battery commander had sprung to the door of the dugout, shouting his orders. He heard them megaphoned on by the sergeant major above. Out there in the first rays of the sun, the four squat idols had shaken aside their veils, lay surrounded

by tensely waiting acolytes. The moment of their dread speech was at hand.

In the electric-lit dugout the two officers sat silently listening to the distant storm. It rolled in one unnerving, continuous thunder. Not their duty was it to reply. They were detailed for barrage upon a particular sector. But near at hand the heavy detonations of guns told off for counter-battery work followed one another ever more quickly. Near at hand, too, came the long whine and crash of English counter-battery shells hurled in reply.

Again the bell rang, and again the telephone orderly called out:

"Speak to battalion commander, please!"¹

This time Von Waldhofer picked up the receiver himself.

"*Ja, ja!* We are all ready!" he said. "Yes, it is coming this time. No, no further message. Oh, yes, we are in communication. No? Have you heard anything definite? No. I wonder if there's any truth in it. Good-bye." He put down the receiver and turned to Eberstein, stopping for a moment to listen to the roll of the hostile bombardment.

"That old story again! You remember we heard it before the first of July—some wonderful invention the Englanders are supposed to have for annihilating us all. I wonder if there is anything in it?"

¹German heavy artillery is organized in "bataillons" of four batteries.

The lieutenant laughed mockingly.

"The Englishers invent anything? Not they! Besides, I don't believe in the possibility of any new invention to revolutionise war. Just think! Here have all the nations of the world been fighting for two years, and what new inventions have we seen? None! There have been perfections and the rediscovery of old methods—that's all. What is the Zeppelin but a perfected Montgolfier? It is neither the first nor the only dirigible, even! Poison gas and liquid fire—what are they but the stinkpots of Greek fire of the Middle Ages, rediscovered and brought up to date? There is nothing, can be nothing, really new!"

Von Waldhofer shook his head. "Nevertheless, these rumours are so persistent. They are vague, I admit. Yet where there is so much smoke there is generally a fire. We are very close here. Just listen to that bombardment!"

For a moment or two both officers sat silent again, listening to the roll of awful menace. Then Von Waldhofer shouted an order to the telephonist:

"Get through to the observation officer!"

Almost immediately the orderly called out:

"Speaking, Herr Hauptmann!"

Von Waldhofer picked up the receiver.

"What is happening?"

"The bombardment is continuing," came the reply.

"Much damage is being done to the trenches. Some

sectors are almost obliterated. My wire has already been cut twice."

"No infantry attack?"

"Not yet. This is evidently preparatory."

"Keep me informed," said Von Waldhofer, and put down the receiver. He turned to Eberstein. "Well, we shall soon see."

The roll of the hostile artillery ceased as though controlled by a single volition, remained silent for a few seconds, and then, with one thunder surge of sound, recommenced.

"The barrage has lifted!" cried Von Waldhofer. He raised his voice to be heard by the oberfeldwebel who waited, megaphone in hand, his legs visible half-way down the dugout steps. "All ready, sergeant major?"

"All ready, Herr Hauptmann."

The telephone bell rang again in the dugout.

"Message from the observation officer!" proclaimed the orderly.

Von Waldhofer snatched up the instrument.

"Yes?"

"Barrage!"

"Fire!" shouted Von Waldhofer to the oberfeldwebel.

Eberstein looked at his watch. The hour was seven-twenty.

As though the commanding officer had pressed an electric firing button, the four heavy crashes of his guns followed, merging into each other, renewed in

a never-ending chain of detonations as fast as the crews could load, relay, and fire. A constant stream of 4.2" shells was rushing from the battery to fall in a narrow area at the predetermined range. But, loud as were the violent concussions of the guns close at hand, they were but one element in the chaos of frenzied sound that had leaped from the whole countryside at the moment of their first report. Every German battery was firing at its maximum intensity. On the background of the dull roar of the English guns danced the rapid reports of the quick-firers at full pressure of urgency, and surged ponderously the double thuds of the howitzers and the sharper, louder crash of the heavies, blended without a moment's interval into one unceasing peal. The rifle fire from the trenches was inaudible, swallowed up.

Von Waldhofer sat with one telephone receiver pressed to his ear. Eberstein picked up the other. They heard the observation officer's voice faintly.

"What?" shouted Von Waldhofer into the instrument.

"Something is coming—something strange—I cannot see well, there is so much smoke—something—slow and crawling—a machine—firing——" The voice ceased abruptly.

Von Waldhofer and his lieutenant looked at one another.

"The wire has gone!" cried Eberstein. He had to shout to be heard in the din.

"Let us hope it is only that," replied his chief.

Both strove deliberately to ignore the fear in the forefront of their minds. Von Waldhofer shouted loudly into the telephone: "Kurt! Kurt! Are you there?"

There was no answer.

Outside the dugout, the battery was still firing furiously, would continue to do so until it received fresh orders. The general uproar had abated not at all, had, if anything, intensified. Into the welter of sound came a familiar, heart-stopping, hissing rush, followed by a loud crash. Another and another and another swooped down on the heels of the first. An English 60 pr. battery was searching for their position. But the two officers, fascinated by the mysterious, distant menace that was crawling into their world, did not hear and gave no thought to the shells. Once more Von Waldhofer shouted into the telephone: "Kurt! Kurt!" Still there came no answer. The eyes of the two men met.

"What can it be?" demanded Eberstein impatiently. "Is he dreaming?"

"Perhaps the wire has been cut close here," said his chief, resolute, like a good soldier, to allow no disturbing speculations in this battle crisis. He shouted an order to the oberfeldwebel.

The telephone bell rang sharply.

"Order from the battalion commander!" announced the telephonist.

Von Waldhofer was already listening.

"Yes?"

"Feindliche Panzerkraftwagen¹ übersteigen die Schützengraben Punkt C 32 d4.I. Sofort Feuer dagegen mit aller Kraft eröffnen!" ("Enemy armoured motor cars are crossing the trenches at point C 32 d4.I. Open heaviest possible fire upon them immediately!")

The battery commander sprang to a little table, outspread with a large-scale map upon which lay protractor and dividers. A second or two of hasty calculation, and he shouted his orders to the oberfeldwebel:

"Cease fire! All guns twenty degrees more right! With percussion! Left half at 3150 metres! Right half at 3100 metres! Forty rounds battery fire!"

He heard them repeated in stentorian tones through the oberfeldwebel's megaphone. The rapid detonations of the guns ceased. There was a pause, a few seconds only. Then the voice of the sergeant major announced:

"All ready!"

"Fire!"

Again the fury of the guns burst forth.

"Panzerkraftwagen!" said Eberstein. "But surely armoured cars cannot cross wire entanglements and trenches! There is a mistake somewhere."

"There is no mistake that something has gone wrong and that we are without observation," returned Von Waldhofer irritably, indisposed to ab-

¹ *Panzerkraftwagen*: "Armoured power wagons" is the official German designation of the "Tanks." The word is also applied to armoured cars.

stract argument just then. The orderly had once more failed to elicit any response from the observation officer. "Take a couple of men and a new instrument, follow the wire along as far as possible, get into a good position for observing, and open up communication with the battery—no, wait a moment!" The telephone bell was ringing again.

"Message from battalion commander!" said the orderly.

"Yes?" Von Waldhofer spoke into the instrument. "I am firing on them now. No, I am without observation. Five minutes ago. Really! What are they? Not ordinary cars? Something quite new? *Herr Gott*, this is serious! Yes. Yes. I quite understand. I am not to retire while I have ammunition. Good! You may rely on us. We shall stand to the last man."

He put down the receiver and stood for a moment in deep thought, his hand pressed to his high, bald brow. Then he shook himself alert. He turned to Eberstein. "Hurry!" he said irritably. "Everything is at stake!" The lieutenant sprang up the stairway and vanished.

Von Waldhofer put on his helmet and gave a last order to the telephonist before he followed his subaltern.

"Ring up Captain Pferzheim. Tell him to send up every available round as quickly as possible. Urgently required."

Then he also ran up the narrow stairway into the bright morning light.

"Two telephonists, all necessary instruments, with me into flank observing station at once!" he shouted to the sergeant major.

He went swiftly toward the battery. The last gun had just finished its allotted ten rounds. They lay now silent in their wide-spaced row, smoke up-curling from their muzzles. Their attendant crews stood, coatless, mopping the sweat on their brows. Far and near the thunderous uproar of the battle swelled; it seemed louder than ever, now that he had come from the dugout into the open air. The English batteries had lengthened their range. As he walked he glanced at Flers. It was whelmed in fumes. Explosion upon explosion leaped up among the huddled houses in the trees, fragments, timbers, earth clods momentarily poised upon a dome of dark smoke. White shrapnel puffs sprang incessantly into existence above the roofs. He heard the hissing rush of an approaching shell without faltering in his pace, so preoccupied was he with the urgency of the moment. He saw the quick upspout of smoke, the heavy metallic crash came to his ears. He noted only that it was well behind the battery. His eyes were fixed on the officer with the guns.

"Oberleutnant Schwarz!" he called, stopping suddenly some twenty yards from the battery.

The long-coated, helmeted lieutenant stiffened as though galvanised, walked smartly up to him, sa-

luted, and waited rigidly for his orders. Oberleutnant Schwarz, a young, freckle-faced fellow, set the pattern for discipline in that battery. The commander noted the punctilious attitude without his wonted inward smile. The occasion had found the man.

"Schwarz, communication with the forward officer is interrupted. Eberstein has gone to re-establish it, if possible. I am going into the flank observing station. Orders will come from there. Put the einjähriger into the telephone dugout. The situation is critical. Something has gone wrong. A new kind of armoured car has broken through the trench line. They must be stopped at all costs. The orders from the battalion commander are formal. The battery will not retire while it has ammunition. I have ordered up every available round. The battery will maintain its position, whatever happens, while it has a man and a shell. Is that clear?"

Oberleutnant Schwarz saluted in precise, parade-ground fashion.

"Quite, Herr Hauptmann," he replied unemotionally.

"If I become a casualty, the command devolves upon you," continued Von Waldhofer. "Remember, these armoured cars are your target, wherever they can be fired on. Use direct laying if you get the opportunity." A flight of shells burst in a succession of heavy crashes on the swelling ground to his right. He glanced at them. "Keep a couple of

ground men going over the wire to the observing station. Here, two of you!" he shouted suddenly to some mounted N. C. O.'s who at that moment trotted up to the battery with a string of ammunition limbers. Upon his sign, one of them dismounted. The captain swung himself into the vacated saddle. Oberleutnant Schwarz saluted once more. Accompanied by the other N. C. O., the battery commander set off at a hard gallop up the rising ground into the cloud of smoke from the just-burst shells.

The flank observing station was a splinter-proof dugout on a little knoll some five hundred yards away to the left flank of the battery. It had been constructed in provision of the unexpected. Von Waldhofer spurred toward it now at the top pace of his horse. Despite many shell bursts on the ground and in the air, he reached it safely. Leaping to earth, he threw the reins to his follower and sent both horses back. Then he dived into the dugout.

Both telephonists were there, awaiting him. The large-scale map was pinned out on a board, instruments upon it. The range finder stood by the observation slit. One of the orderlies was testing the telephone communication to the battery. Von Waldhofer pulled his glasses out of their case, pressed himself against the observation slit, and looked out.

Directly in front of him the bare ground, with many minor undulations, rose steadily to the shattered silhouette of the Bois de Foureaux on the sky line. But no longer was the view clear as when he

last had gazed on it. Over all lay a haze which the early-morning sun was powerless to penetrate. In the foreground and wide to right and left in the middle distance spurted and twinkled the primrose flashes of the guns, more rapidly multiplied than any eye could count. On the ridge the smoke lay thick, bellying in dark masses over the tree stumps of the wood, poised on the horizon in tall, heavy-headed columns, like elm trees in full foliage. In the air, long bands of white shrapnel smoke reached out and clung to each other in a lazy drift, while among them the large, dead-black bursts of heavy, high-explosive shrapnel appeared suddenly, darted ahead from the round nucleus, and then unfolded themselves slowly and snakily earthward. Between him and the ridge, the whole wide amphitheatre was being thickly sown with English shells. Near and far, the smoke columns shot incessantly into the air. Over the road from Flers to the Bois de Delville, which crossed his view at right angles, the white shrapnel puffs clustered in ever-renewed groups. Over all, English aeroplanes in scores flitted to and fro, daringly low, yet apparently unchallenged. No longer did this arena appear untenanted. In every part there was movement and confusion of Lilliputian figures. Far away, three tiny ammunition wagons raced toward a battery. Closer at hand, grey-clad infantry dashed in sections along the shell-swept road from Flers. They tugged low bomb carts on long hand ropes. He knew subconsciously

that they were going to reinforce the great trench line that stretched east and west from Martinpuich to Lesbœufs. Farther afield, other bands of grey midgets, scarcely visible, were rushing forward. Everywhere from the rim of battle pressure, grey figures were filtering in ragged streams down toward the lower ground. A long way off, on that rim, his glasses revealed a nodal point of confusion. He focused on it. There were tiny grey figures, grouped, in quick movement to and fro. Little smoke dots were all around them. Then the confusion cleared. He saw darker figures running forward, the twinkle of sun on a distant bayonet. For a moment he held them under view anxiously. Then with an impatient movement he swept his glasses round. Not there was the target that he sought.

Suddenly he arrested his sweep. To his left, much closer to him than he had been looking, a field battery topped a little rise, retiring at full gallop among a welter of shell smoke. It passed down below his vision. His glasses remained steadily focused on the rise over which it had come, fascinated by the abnormality, expectant of the cause.

It appeared. Slightly to the right of the course of the retreating battery, something emerged over the crest—something slow, ponderous, shapeless—drawing itself up. The silhouette of a gun projecting from its flank barred the sky. Swiftly he replaced his glasses by the range finder. As he twisted the thumbscrew that brought the inverted vision into

juxtaposition with the normal, he saw a group of grey soldiers surround the monster, hurl little puffs of smoke at it. He saw the gun slue, spit; saw soldiers who waved white rags tripping over those already fallen. The double visions met; he read the range. The thing drew itself up, turned slightly, creeping on its belly, snout in the air, like an uncouth saurian from the prehistoric slime. It was moving more quickly than he at first realised. In another instant he had taken the angle to the aiming post, plotted another, and was shouting orders to the telephonist:

“All guns 28.3 degrees left! Right-half section, No. 1 gun 980 metres; No. 2 gun 960 metres! With percussion! One round! Fire!”

Through the range finder he saw the burst of the two shells at the same moment that the detonations of the guns came to his ears. One fell full in the midst of the group of grey soldiery, whelmed them in black smoke. The other burst beyond. The thing paused not, nor hurried. At an even pace, it drew its low bulk along, dipped now for the descent.

“Right half section 970 metres! Left-half section 960 metres! With percussion! Twenty rounds battery fire! Fire!”

Spout upon spout of black smoke heralded the explosions of the guns. The monster was blotted out. Feeling like one engaged in a struggle with a creature born not in our time or space, of another world, Von Waldhofer prayed for a direct hit. The smoke

cleared. He looked for what should be its ripped and stationary bulk. It was not there. The thing had passed onward, dipped into the hollow, out of sight.

He was suddenly aware that the enemy shell fire, always heavy, had increased in intensity. The smoke spouts shot up more numerous, grouped themselves more densely. Gradually they extended to new areas, abandoned those already covered. He realised in a flash that the monster was moving behind its special barrage, aeroplane directed from above. He shouted fresh orders, altering the range. Blindly he hurled his shells into the hollow behind the screen of smoke.

If only he had direct observation! He shouted to the telephonist:

"Ask if communication has been made with Lieutenant Eberstein."

The reply came: "Nothing has been heard of Lieutenant Eberstein. Six men have just been killed in the battery."

Von Waldhofer's exclamation expressed rather annoyance than grief at the loss of his subordinate. He turned again to look through the observation slit. There was a blinding crash——

When he came to, he found himself gazing at the blue sky. The deep breath he drew half choked him with the fumes of burned explosive. Shaking in every limb, he struggled to his feet. Before him lay his two orderlies, dead. The dugout was wrecked

and roofless. The telephone instrument was strewn in fragments on the floor. He himself was unwounded.

He listened, with a sudden anxiety, for the detonations of his guns. The general uproar had diminished not at all, but the familiar crashes were wanting in the din. How long had he lain there? A wild fear seized him. Scrambling out of the ruined dugout, he ran breathlessly toward the battery.

The enemy fire was as intense as ever. The air was filled with the whine and scream of arriving shells and the heavy crashes of their explosion. From somewhere behind came the rattle of rifles and machine guns and the dull thud of bombs. Grey-clad men in swarms were running across the open ground athwart his path. He heard them shouting, saw officers gesticulating, realised as in a dream that they were running from the battle. But their fear touched him not. He was enveloped in concern for his beloved battery.

He arrived on the lip of the depression where it lay. In a surge of joy, he saw the four guns lying in the familiar places, saw them strangely naked, their protective veils ripped and hurled aside, saw barely sufficient crews standing at their posts, saw the position gashed with shell holes and littered with prone grey bodies, shattered limbers, and dead horses. Even as he looked, a salvo of shrapnel burst with deafening cracks above them, and white,

fleecy clouds floated over the battery. On the near flank, in the position of command, stood Oberleutnant Schwarz, rigid and precise as on the parade ground.

Von Waldhofer ran down the slope toward him.

"Schwarz! Schwarz!" he called.

The oberleutnant advanced to meet him, and, looking calmly at his chief as though his smoke-blackened face and torn clothing were in no way out of the normal, saluted with perfect gravity.

"What has been happening?"

"We have been under heavy fire, Herr Hauptmann. All the wires are cut in many places. The telephone dugout has been blown in. We are absolutely without communications. The battery has fired whenever there was a chance of a target. Your orders have been obeyed. The battery has stood its ground. We have only three rounds per gun left. I am waiting now for an opportunity to fire."

Listening to the cool report of his subordinate, Von Waldhofer recovered his soldierly poise.

"Excellent. You have done well, Schwarz. And the casualties?"

"I regret, heavy." He waved a gloved hand toward the bare dozen standing by the guns. "All that are left."

There was the loud, hissing, nerve-paralysing rush of a shell at arrival. Simultaneously with the shattering crash that leaped from the fountain of black smoke, Oberleutnant Schwarz put his hand to his

breast, performed a sharp half turn, and fell—dead.

The reverberation yet rang when a second rush and crash followed the first. A third and fourth shook the air almost too quickly for distinction. The battery commander's brain worked with the timeless speed of a great crisis or a dream. In an in-computable fraction of a second he saw the heavy barrage which had preceded the slowly crawling monster, was conscious of an aëroplane overhead, saw his opportunity and his plan. He ran toward the guns, shouting: "Lie down! Lie down!" The crews obeyed. Standing among the strewn corpses, the guns seemed manned only by the dead. He flung himself prone on the flank of the battery.

Shell after shell swooped and burst on the stretch of ground in front of him. Fed by the constantly spouting black geysers, an ever-thickening, dark mist drifted across, blotted out the distance. Through it he saw the freshly thrown edges, brown and white, of unfamiliar shell craters pocking the undulating ground. The worn, smooth greensward that he had known was being churned into loose clay and chalk, mingled haphazard in their fall from the fierce upward gush. The reiterated crash upon crash of near explosions all but obliterated the far-flung din of the general battle, but through them he caught waves of an appalling uproar welling out of Flers. Slowly, riving, crashing, upspouting its black fountains of smoke and earth, the barrage marched on—

ward, passing across the battery front. Now! Through the mist he saw the directing aeroplane swoop down in front of him, absurdly low, rattling its machine gun. A group of grey figures sprang up beneath it, both arms high above the head, tumbling among the shell holes as they ran. A temptation flitted across his mind. One round gunfire, and that aeroplane was blown to fragments. His lips tightened. He did not move. The battery seemed abandoned by all but its dead.

Age-long seconds passed as he watched, peering through the thinning mist. Save for one little group of hasty, self-obliterating men, his immediate front was a deserted waste of churned earth, sloping gently upward away from him. Once, over the low near sky line seen from his prone position, he thought he saw the spurt of a bomb. But he could not be sure. And a bomb did not necessarily betoken the presence of the—thing. Yes! What was that? Something was lifting itself slowly and with jerks beyond that near sky line. Ponderously, with the efforts of a limbless living thing, it drew its bulk up, seemed to step, nosing the air with its blind snout. Now! Not yet! He had only one chance—certainty. The monster moved on again, downward now, lurching and wallowing among the shell holes like a ship in a heavy sea. He saw the gun swinging in the side turret as it rolled, the bright-splashed colouring of its flank. It was passing diagonally across his front. It must climb to escape. Now!

He sprang to his feet, shouting with all his lungs: "To the guns!" The crews leaped up, resuscitated. "Point-blank! At the devil! With percussion! All guns! Fire!"

But, quick as he and his men had been, the monster was quicker. At his first movement, with a mighty jerk, it had slued itself nose on to the battery. Ere a hand could clutch a firing lever, a storm of small, violently exploding shells burst right in among the guns, a hail of whip-cracking machine-gun bullets smote on men and metal. Von Waldhofer looked toward the monster lurching heavily toward him. A paroxysm of suspense held him rigid. To his horror, he heard—not four—but one detonation. The thing dipped. He saw the shell burst—over! He glanced toward the guns in speechless agony. The last gunner was in the act of falling, lifeless, across the trail.

High-nosed, seeming to smell its enemies rather than to see them, like an uncouth, blind monster of the rudimentary past, the thing crept on, its speed as surprising as a reptile's. Viciously, with unallayed suspicions, it spat its missiles at the dead battery. Von Waldhofer stood alone, erect, praying that one might strike him.

Suddenly its fire ceased. He heard the loud clatter of its machinery as it approached, saw the rolling bands on which it moved. He felt that it was coming to mark its triumph over his beloved guns, felt its disdain for him, their helpless master. An in-

sane hatred for it gushed up in him, swept away his conscious self. For once a well-schooled German lost his head. He whipped out his pistol, ran like a madman toward the devil wagon. He fired again and again, desperately seeking the eye, the brain, like a hunter at bay with a crocodile. He heard cries of agony from inside the monster. Some of his shots had registered. But blindly the thing rolled on, ponderous, invulnerable. It bulked huge above him. He heard a shriek. It was his own.

V

THE SPY

THERE is only one Paris in the world!" murmured M. de Marieux in a sudden soliloquy as he glanced round him from the rear cushions of the luxurious car that rolled silently along the boulevard. The broad street was flooded with morning sunshine, brightly reflected from the splashes of broken colours on the kiosks under the fresh green foliage of the long-ranked trees. The open fronts of the cafés were already shaded by their awnings; but the elderly waiters stood idly, white napkins in hand, by the green-bucketed shrubs that flanked them. The habitués would not arrive for some time yet; were only sparsely replaced by the somewhat diffident men in khaki and other strange uniforms, who sat awkwardly at the little tables and gazed, fascinated, at the never-ending streams of bare-headed, well-dressed young women which flowed past them from each direction.

Barrows loaded high with flowers were borne on the lakelike level asphalt; were in pleasant exotic contrast to the long motor busses, the vivaciously busy cars which darted and swerved past them. M.

de Marieux sniffed at a mass of roses, with a voluptuous trembling of the nostrils above the ultra-black moustache, as his car dodged round a crazy creaking vehicle in answer to a deft touch of the chauffeur at the wheel.

"Paris!" He murmured the word, like a summary of a multitude of exquisite sensations, with the ecstasy of an Epicurean satisfied. He chuckled to himself. "*Tiens! Je deviens plus Parisien que les Parigots!*" he murmured aloud.

Then he smiled suddenly at his unconscious use of the soldier slang taught him by his son, a slang he had often reprovèd with that worthy dignity which befits a highly successful man in his intercourse with his offspring. Simultaneously a cold unmoved contra-self in him remarked on his growing and dangerous habit of speaking his thoughts aloud. . . . Mental strain! He accepted the diagnosis with a sense of justification. His smile was renewed, less pleasantly, at an obscurely linked thought; became grim and mocking.

He found himself looking at a picture familiar to his childhood, a lavishly coloured oleograph illustrating the triumphal march of the conquerors into Paris in 1871; heard his father reiterating with pride that the Bavarian battalion in the foreground was his own. He remembered that, as time passed, his father insisted on a personal identification with the pompously strutting private in the front rank.

That was long ago. Few—he hoped none—could

identify him as the little boy who had emigrated with his father into Switzerland during the bad time of economic reaction in 1873, and thence into France. The double naturalisation of the parent, the death of a son born in the last-adopted land, had left M. Victor de Marieux with papers in perfect order, except for a discrepancy between the fact that the record of his birth, and a confusion of first names with his brother. Mardorf had become Marieux almost before his memory. The "de" had slipped in imperceptibly, comparatively recently. M. Victor de Marieux would have become quite French except for his father's passionate tutelage, reinforced at the right time by a period at a German university.

Since then—well, many things had happened that M. de Marieux was quite content to forget. The early stages of that remarkable financial enterprise, the Société Universelle d'Economie et de Prévoyance, which from its palatial headquarters in Paris controlled a multitude of branches in the provinces and had most important foreign relationships, were well left in obscurity. The dazzling figure of its plutocratic chief—the husband of a beautiful Frenchwoman of unimpeachable race, unhappily now deceased; the father of a brilliant young artillery officer, who romantically and absurdly preferred his battery to a staff appointment; the host, since many years, of *tout Paris*; the dimly apprehended power behind much contemporary politics—was surrounded with such an aureole that none could look beyond it

into the past. Fragmentary outlines of this career flitted through M. de Marieux's brain as he leaned back in his car and smiled at the memory of that German oleograph. The retrospect increased the pleasant sense of self-satisfaction with which he had set out that morning. He reinforced it by a glance at the folded newspaper he held in his hand.

His car swung onto the pavement in front of the large-windowed granite façade of the Société Universelle d'Economie et de Prévoyance. An elderly porter, superb in a uniform whose richness was enhanced by its aristocratic restraint, stepped forward to open the door for him, bowed as he passed up the white marble steps into the entrance hall with its checkered black-and-white marble pavement.

M. de Marieux glanced, through the great glass doors at his right, into the vast counting house under the lofty semi-Grecian ceiling, whence artistic bronze bowls, containing electric-light bulbs, were pendent on long chains. At row after row of desks, beyond the polished oak counter, blue-jumpered girl clerks were busy, white papers fluttering in their hands. He could imagine the rustle of countless documents, the murmur of many voices earnestly conducting his—M. de Marieux's—business.

It was a glance that was habitual to him and one that never failed to gratify. The premises of the Société Universelle were a monument to the success of its founder, a success that was always freshly pleasant to the impressionable artist who lurked

somewhere in the many-chambered soul of the great financier.

Smiling—he had many reasons to smile that morning—he entered the lift, open and waiting for him. An instant later he was shot up to a higher floor.

As he entered his large luxuriously furnished private room, M. Jocelyn, his elderly secretary, rose respectfully from the desk at which he had opened the morning correspondence. The financier replied cheerfully to the diffident greeting; addressed his secretary as "*Mon cher Jocelyn!*" The day had opened well.

M. de Marieux walked across to the magnificent piece of furniture that served him as his working desk, carefully deposited the folded newspaper, glanced at the pile of letters whose superscriptions and heavy seals announced that they were for his eye alone, and sat down. His secretary approached with a sheaf of opened correspondence. The morning's work began—M. Jocelyn marvelled once more at his chief's unerring judgment and instantaneous decisions.

The routine work finished, M. de Marieux leaned back in his chair, tapping the desk with the exquisite silver paper knife with which he would open his confidential letters. It was the signal for the departure of the secretary. M. Jocelyn, however, lingered.

"*Et Monsieur Henri?*" he asked, diffidently smiling over his sheaf of papers.

"Excellent! I thank you, my dear Jocelyn," replied the financier with unforced sincerity. "He arrived on leave this morning. He is enjoying himself—killing boches by the thousands, if one may believe him." He looked up, smiling under his black moustache.

The worthy M. Jocelyn showed his clenched teeth and shook his head, terrierlike, in earnest ferocity.

"*Ah, ces boches!*" he said. "*Mais on les aura, Monsieur de Marieux! On les aura!*"

"Of course!" replied the financier, blandly benignant. "Your son is still at Verdun, I see." He smiled at his own perspicacity.

"Yes, Monsieur de Marieux. It is of him that I would speak to you. He has just been nominated *sous-lieutenant*." M. Jocelyn was radiant with paternal pride.

"A thousand congratulations, my dear Jocelyn!" said M. de Marieux warmly. "He is an excellent young man. Ah—he will need money for his new equipment. Bring me a check for five hundred francs to sign this afternoon—that will help him."

The elderly secretary stammered in delighted surprise: "Monsieur is too good! If monsieur will pardon me, I have always considered monsieur as the type of a true patriot."

For M. Jocelyn this was the summit of compliment. Anything less would have been inadequate to this occasion.

"One does what one can, my dear Jocelyn," said

the financier with a negligent wave of the hand.

He picked up one of the heavily sealed envelopes. It was a hint that was not to be disregarded. The secretary tiptoed out of the room.

M. de Marieux, however, did not at once open the letter. He looked up under his eyebrows as the door closed, assured himself that it was firmly shut, and then put down the envelope. He took up the folded newspaper, spread it out. The main feature upon the *Dernière Heure* page was a column headed *L’Affaire Valrouge*. There what had evidently been a journalistic scoop ended, however. The censor had been at work and the remainder of the column was blank from top to bottom.

M. de Marieux’s mouth twisted itself into a wry smile as he gazed at the significantly blank column, headed with the name of one of the most notorious Parisian journalists, pregnant with startling scandal. Whatever of the mysterious this suppressed column might have for the general public, to M. de Marieux its purport was evidently clear enough. His smile broadened to one of unpleasant satisfaction.

“The end of Valrouge!” he murmured. “It was quite time!”

He rose from his chair, walked across to a wall hung with several artistically spaced-out pictures, and stopped before a Degas study of gauzy ballet dancers, ethereal in a blaze of limelight beyond the near crudity of the *coulisses*. He pressed an unmarked spot on the wall and a heavy door swung

silently open, carrying the picture with it, revealing a cabinet of drawers labelled alphabetically. He opened one marked "V," took out a bundle of correspondence, glanced at it, and swung the door back into its place.

Then he walked across to the empty fireplace, laid the bundle in the grate and stood over it, pondering with bent brows, match box ready in his fingers. His hesitation finished with a reversal of his previous decision. He picked the bundle of correspondence out of the grate and stuffed it into a capacious brief pocket inside his coat. It marred his elegance and he frowned as he patted it down.

"I must take care of it," he murmured—"or Valrouge will have a companion."

He went back to his desk and commenced to open his letters. He went through them swiftly, brows bent in concentration of thought, made notes on some, locked away others. At the reading of one of them his features relaxed into a smile that hinted at relief from pressing anxiety. The postmark and stamp were Swiss. The heading on the note paper was Adolphe Lammartin et Cie., Banquiers, Berne. The letter ran: "In answer to your telegram of the twenty-second, M. Olivier Lammartin, of our house, will be in Paris on the morning of the twenty-fifth. His address will be the Hotel Triest. He is fully empowered to negotiate all matters affecting our interests——"

M. de Marieux leaned back in his chair and his

eyes narrowed. He was extremely well acquainted with the financial house of Lammartin et Cie.—better acquainted, he hoped, than any one save themselves and a certain bureau in Berlin would ever appreciate; but he did not remember the existence of M. Olivier Lammartin—had certainly never met him. He pondered doubtfully. Then he held the sheet of note paper to the light and nodded in recognition of a not apparently noteworthy watermark. This was no trap. In his reassurance he unconsciously whistled a few bars of a cheerful tune—he stopped, suddenly perceiving it to be the Marseillaise. He had heard a band playing it at the head of troops marching to the station as he came to the office that morning, he remembered. He picked up the receiver of the telephone upon his table.

“Monsieur Laporte there?” he queried. “Ah—good day, Laporte! Come up to my room if you please.” His tone had the decision with which he usually addressed the general manager of the Société Universelle—a decision that clearly indicated the master.

In an incredibly few moments there was a knock at the door and M. Laporte, a tall myopic man, with a bald patch on the crown of his head, entered the room. He looked nervously over his pince-nez as he approached M. de Marieux, seated at the table.

“*Eh bien, mon cher Laporte,*” he said with crisp geniality; “and what is the situation to-day?”

The general manager shook his head dolefully and exhaled a heavy sigh.

"Bad, Monsieur de Marieux. The deposits you expected have not been made. The bills of Delafosse will be protested. Our collateral is down an average three points this morning. We have not a centime more of security to give. We have those heavy liabilities to meet——"

M. de Marieux leaned back in his chair and smiled as he rubbed his hands together.

"My dear Laporte," he said in half-humorous reprehension, "you are incurable."

The general manager stared at him, with a short-sighted pucker of the brows.

"But—if I may say so, Monsieur de Marieux—you do not realise! This is the twenty-fifth of the month. Unless a miracle happens before the thirtieth"—he waved his hand expressively—"crash!"

M. de Marieux still leaned back in his chair, smiling.

"My dear Laporte," he said, "how long have you been in my service? Ten years! And how many times in that ten years have you come to me to warn me of the crash within a week?"

"Many—I must confess, Monsieur de Marieux," stammered the manager.

"Well you will probably come many more times in the next ten years. And each time, my dear Laporte, you will see the miracle happen, as it is going to happen now."

Perplexity and relief struggled in the manager's face.

"Monsieur's private account——?" he ventured, hazarding a solution.

"Don't be a fool, Laporte!" said his master severely. "You should know me better than that. . . . You will have a blank transfer of the Moroccan concessions made out at once."

M. Laporte's eyebrows shot up in surprise. The eyes beneath them blinked behind the pince-nez as though uncertain that they saw accurately a normally smiling man in the seat of the master.

"The—the German concessions we took over from Mannesmann, monsieur?"

"Precisely."

"But—but they are worthless——"

"Don't try to understand, my dear Laporte. Have that blank transfer on my desk within half an hour and get the concessions out of the safe."

"*Bien, monsieur!*" The manager obviously renounced the attempt to comprehend. His eye fell upon the newspaper spread upon the desk, the significantly blank column prominent. "This *Affaire Valrouge*, monsieur—it is evidently a terrible scandal; everybody is talking about it—they say it is a question of military secrets."

"Indeed!" said M. de Marieux coolly. "They say all sorts of things—but no one knows anything. Don't listen, my dear Laporte; or, if you do listen—don't repeat."

"I pay no attention, monsieur, I assure you; but if it is true what they say, then shooting is too good for the scoundrel! I have a son at the Front, monsieur; I am anxious enough about him—the grand offensive is certain to begin soon; and if there is treachery—— But monsieur also has a son at the Front and can understand my feelings."

"Quite! Quite! But don't believe half these silly stories of espionage. There's no truth in them. . . . Er—what do you estimate the deficit at the end of the month?"

The manager's face resumed its expression of lugubrious alarm.

"Fifteen million francs, monsieur!" he announced solemnly, looking as though he expected M. de Marieux to jump out of his seat with horror.

"Good!" said the financier equably. "Go and have that transfer prepared."

M. Laporte left the room—to gesticulate with both hands above his ears in the solitude of the corridor.

M. de Marieux turned to the telephone. He asked for a number.

"Hello! The Hotel Triest? . . . Put me through to M. Lammartin. . . . Yes. Telephone in his room—*n'est-ce pas?* Yes." He waited. "Hello! M. Olivier Lammartin? . . . M. de Marieux speaking. Can you come and see me—now? . . . Yes. In my office. You have the address?" He glanced

at his watch. "In half an hour. Half past eleven. *Bon! Au revoir!*" He shut off.

M. de Marieux leaned back in his chair and tapped his teeth with his gold pencil.

"The grand offensive!" he murmured, and smiled. "Poor old Laporte! But I must get Henri away from his battery——" His cogitations relapsed into silence, prolonged. They rose again into the soliloquy, tempted by the hush in the room, with an exclamation: "If only he were not so obstinate!" He frowned, thinking hard.

M. de Marieux sat alone in his silent room, high above the roar of the Paris boulevard, as upon the summit of his career, and looked down vales of thought into a distance where the imagination was unhampered. The possessor of a secret—he felt it symbolically in his clenched fist—that was decisive of the fate of nations, his egoism was flattered with the consciousness of power. He smiled grimly. At the back of his mind was a certain loyalty to his employers; but they would have to pay—pay heavily—for the priceless information he would give them.

He had reason to be pleased with himself. Few secret agents had had so long a career of success as he; few, indeed, had extracted such lavish rewards, both pecuniary and social, from a hazardous profession; none, he thought, was less suspected. Ministers were deferential to him, for M. de Marieux was a power in that half-hidden world of

finance where the destinies of unconscious peoples are plotted out. He was not merely a paid agent—he was a semi-independent adventurer on the modern equivalent of the Spanish Main.

The risky speculations in which he chanced the funds of the Société Universelle were uncontrolled by any brain save his own; but always, as now, he called in the assistance of his shadowy backers when they were endangered. Always he gave good value for the enormous sums he drew. He had no fear that he would not be supported. In countless ways the existence of the Société Universelle, as directed by its founder, was of incalculable value to those scarcely human intelligences that he, with all his subterranean information, knew only as numbers prefixed with an initial.

He looked up startled as the door opened suddenly. A young artillery captain, elegant in his sky-blue uniform, entered with a boisterous good humour that shattered the conspiratorial quiet of the financier's private room. M. de Marieux smiled tolerantly.

"Business hours, Henri—business hours!" he said, shaking his head.

"Pardon, father—but I was passing, and—— I must tell you! I have just heard that this scoundrel Valrouge has been betraying the plans for the grand offensive!"

"What?" M. de Marieux wondered whether he

had kept down his nervous start. He reassumed control of himself.

"My dear Henri, wherever did you get that absurd story?"

"At the club, father."

M. de Marieux smiled.

"It was a canard, my dear boy—*histoire de rire*. M. Valrouge had been dabbling in air-craft specifications. That is the truth of it; but keep it to yourself."

He said this with such quiet certitude that the young officer glanced at his father with a sudden curiosity.

"But how do you know?"

"I know many things, my dear Henri—more than I discuss."

"What has happened to him, then?" cried the young man, disregarding the hint in the final clause. "All Paris is talking."

M. de Marieux shrugged his shoulders.

"I don't know," he said, meeting his son's eyes without flinching.

"*Mon Dieu!* Father, I hope he is shot—though shooting is too good for him. Anything more despicable, more hateful than a spy——" He could not finish other than by a gesture of fierce contempt.

"Agreed, my dear boy," said the financier. "But—well, no nation can exist without them——" He stopped, checked by the virgin wrath in his son's face. "Personally I should have no mercy for such

canaille!" His smile was, somehow, incongruous with the energy of his statement.

"Mercy!" The young officer laughed bitterly. "When I think of all the splendid lads gayly risking their lives to free their country, and think that they might be murdered—murdered!—my gunners!—for that is what it comes to—by a treacherous dog in a Paris office—*mon Dieu*, father, mercy is out of the question! The severest justice is too weak!"

"*Accordé,*" said M. de Marieux, looking down at the gold pencil he tapped upon the white blotting pad of his desk. "Now Henri, I want to talk to you about that staff appointment. I have arranged everything——"

The young man interrupted him:

"Pardon, father; but it is useless. I shall not leave my battery. Soon—I don't know when, but all the world knows—the grand offensive will commence and we shall sweep the boches back across the Rhine into the sties they came from. I have been with my battery since the first day. I shall be with it to the last if I live. I would not miss the great time before us for life itself!"

"*Parfaitement,*" agreed M. de Marieux, without lifting his eyes from the desk. "I quite understand and sympathise with your sentiment. But," here he raised his glance to meet his son's, "I will guarantee that your staff appointment is in the attacking army. You will see more—find it infinitely more interesting.

You will have a front seat, in fact. And your career will be assured."

The young man shook his head firmly.

"Pardon, father; but I know myself. I have no talents for the staff. I am an artilleryman. I know my seventy-fives. Serving them, I am useful to my country, to this poor France of ours; you cannot realise it, father—you have not seen the desolation, the havoc, they have wrought—these swine! I kill Germans, father—that is my one glory, my one excuse for being a Frenchman and still alive. I kill Germans!"

M. de Marieux's eyes sank before those of his son, flaming as in the exaltation of a crusade. The young man continued:

"France! That is all I live for—to feel that I am usefully helping to rid our country—for it is ours, father; it became yours long ago, before I was born—think of our house, mother's house, in the Argonne, and how you love it!—to rid it forever of these vermin! I declare to you, father," he finished passionately, "that if you intrigue behind my back to put me into a safe place in the staff, I shall never speak to you again—will cease to be your son! I should feel myself dishonoured. Others are useful, necessary, on the staff. My place is with my cannons! Let me hear no more of it, father!"

M. de Marieux raised his head slowly.

"You are scarcely just to me, Henri."

"Pardon, father! I know I said absurdities. You

are incapable of intrigue. You are as French as I, as my mother—she would not have loved you else. Forgive me!”

M. de Marieux drew a long breath.

“Very well, Henri. It shall be as you wish. You shall go back to your battery.” He glanced at his watch. “Now you must leave me. I have a most important appointment. Come back and lunch with me at twelve o’clock.”

“Thanks, father—thanks!” cried the young man, seizing his father’s hand. “I knew I should make you understand—you are French, father, more even than I, for you have lived longer than I have in this dear France of ours; and no one can live as we three lived, mother, you and I, *dans le pays*, and not become French to the bone! Of course you are! I know you do your part—helping the government—finding the money—all sorts of ways, I don’t understand—making it possible for me to kill Germans. I am proud of you, father, because you are so French—I often talk about you; but then a Swiss is already half French, isn’t he?”

He laughed. “All right, father, I’m going. *Au revoir—à midi!*”

He went out of the room as boisterously as he had entered it. M. de Marieux sat pondering, with bent brows, his mouth troubled. Could he change his plans—now—at this last moment? Yes; it was possible! He saw himself forced to relinquish his dream of retirement, forced to continue, with failing

nerve, on his hazardous path. As an alternative, he glanced at Henri, dying amid the wreckage of a battery on a day of appalling disaster. It decided him.

He looked up at a soft tap on the door. M. Jocelyn entered, bearing a visiting card—M. Olivier Lammartin. In the short interval of solitude before the entrance of his visitor he braced himself for a contest with an unknown he suddenly felt to be an adversary.

The stranger entered—tall, with a clipped ruddy beard, faultlessly dressed, silk hat in hand.

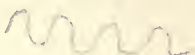
“M. de Marieux?”

The financier stared like one incredulous. M. Jocelyn retired softly behind the closed door.

“Conrad!”

“The same, my dear Victor! Messrs. Lammartin could not refuse to render us this little service!” He smiled. “Many years since Heidelberg!” He released his grip of his old student comrade’s hand and threw himself into an armchair, like one at home. “*Ach! Sprich Deutsch, alter Kerl!* I am sick of this *verdammte* French—I have not been in the country for twenty years. I am surprised at your recognising me—the police did not; but you always had a good eye, *lieber Victor—nichtwahr?*” He laughed. “I remember your first success—the woman——”

He desisted at M. de Marieux’s gesture of the hand.



"*Genug!*" He laughed again. You have gone far since then. *Gratuliere!*"

M. de Marieux leaned back in the chair at his desk. His eyes hardened as he caressed his chin.

"You come fully empowered to negotiate as from Lammartin?" he asked.

"*Ganz, lieber Freund! Ganz!*" The German's blue eyes smiled at his old comrade—smiled with a slight change of expression as they slid toward the open newspaper on the desk. "That poor Valrouge!" he said. "What has happened to him?"

"Shot this morning!"

The brows over the blue eyes lifted slightly.

"Why?"

M. de Marieux's mouth thinned as it tightened.

"These subordinate agents sometimes become too exacting."

The German's eyes rested full on the financier in a moment's silence.

"So! And you"—he waved his hand—"without any suspicion?"

"I obtained authority from the French Government to tempt him into selling me specifications of the new aircraft now being made in a factory of which he was director. It was simple. He knew his only chance of pension for his wife and children depended on his silence. It will be paid."

The German smiled.

"The orthodox way—but very effective, *lieber Victor*; very effective!"

The financier responded by a grimly humorous twitching of the mouth, a gleam of the eyes. He shrugged his shoulders.

"One has perhaps to be trained to a sense of values," he said, by way of epitaph.

"*Ja wohl*—Valrouge is not the first to miscalculate them; nor will he be the last. . . . It is a delicate balance between price and usefulness, my dear Victor," he added, smiling through the clipped ruddy beard.

A little alarm bell rang suddenly somewhere in the recesses of M. de Marieux's consciousness. His eyes narrowed slightly, imperceptibly, as he contemplated his old college friend. Then he dared a provocative phrase, by way of reconnaissance.

"We shall all come to it one day, I suppose," he said lightly, "if we continue long enough in the *métier*. The bureau makes no pretence to gratitude."

"Nor any other virtue—save that of efficiency," laughed the German. "Yes; it is an ungrateful profession. I wonder you have kept at it so long, *alter Kerl!*" His eyes swept carelessly over his friend's face. "I should have expected you to retire long ago."

M. de Marieux shrugged his shoulders.

"It is difficult to retire," he said. "And then, I have had important work to do—for the Fatherland," he added hypocritically. "But I will confess that sometimes I look forward to an unharassed

old age—I am not so young as once—to make way for others perhaps more useful; not, of course, now, in the great time,” he interjected in cautious parenthesis, “but when the victory is won. To go down to my little country place and live with my pictures, and, I hope, see my son happily married—that is my ambition, Conrad!”

“To live in France?”

“Why not?”

“Why not?—I agree,” suavely concurred the German. “France is a charming country—for those who love it.”

“I adore it!” murmured M. de Marieux, half unconsciously, seeing his Argonne château, set like an exquisite jewel amid autumn-tinted woods. He suddenly perceived his friend’s eyes piercingly upon him.

“Your son?” said Conrad. “Shall he succeed you?”

M. de Marieux laughed.

“He is the most fervid of Frenchmen!”

“So! Well, it has its advantages at the present time. A useful camouflage, Victor.”

The little laugh that followed this remark was unpleasant to M. de Marieux.

“Suppose we come to business, my dear Conrad,” said the financier. “I will put it tersely: I have the opportunity to purchase a controlling interest in *La Feuille du Jour*.”

“A useful newspaper to capture,” commented the

German. "Valrouge had opened up a connection with it, had he not? Yes. The price?"

"Twenty million francs—at once," said De Marieux calmly as he leaned back in his chair.

The German raised his eyebrows.

"A large sum," he said. "You can guarantee—everything—for that?"

"I can guarantee a subtle discouragement in the country—well-concealed propaganda for the peace by understanding so urgently desired—and, of course, much valuable private information. But the offer must be seized at once. There is one more point: To establish my bona fides in case the check is traced, I propose to transfer my Mannesmann securities to the Lammartins against their check for this amount."

The German cogitated for a moment.

"And this is the big deal about which you telegraphed?"

"It is," replied M. de Marieux, awaiting the result of the emissary's deliberations with an outward coolness that gave no hint of the desperate anxiety within. Would he succeed? He saw his son's face, heard his son's voice—and tried to obliterate the hallucination, lest it should shake his nerve.

"H'm!" said the German. "We had hoped for something of more precise and immediate value. But we have confidence in you. I agree to this proposal. Twenty million francs! Your sense of values is very acute, *lieber Victor!*"

The financier smiled to cover his deep exhalation of relief.

"Very!" he said. He pressed the bell on his desk.

M. Jocelyn appeared at the door with a bundle of papers.

"The Mannesmann concessions and the transfer, M. Jocelyn, if you please."

"They are here, monsieur."

M. Jocelyn deposited them on the desk and withdrew.

The German laughed.

"*Ein echter Geschäftsmann!*" He produced a check book from his pocket and advanced to the table. "I shall not be less prompt." He drew up a chair, sat down and filled up a check, already signed by Messrs. Lammartin, for twenty million francs. "I congratulate you on your deal, Victor!"

M. de Marieux smiled as he signed the transfer of the concessions and pushed the bundle of documents across to his friend.

"*Voilà!*" he said. "*C'est tout!*"

"Not quite all, *lieber Victor,*" replied the German. "One moment."

He took a sheet of note paper from the desk and wrote rapidly: "I—undersigned—Victor de Marieux, acknowledge to have received twenty million francs [F'cs 20,000,000] for the purchase of the newspaper *La Feuille du Jour*; and I undertake to direct the policy of the said newspaper in conform-

ity with whatever directions I may receive." He handed the document to M. de Marieux.

"Sign it, please," he said calmly.

M. de Marieux signed. He placed the check under a paper weight on his desk as the German rose from his seat and strolled toward the big bay window, high above the boulevard. He stood there, looking down upon the streams of traffic passing between the green trees, the striped awnings of the cafés. M. de Marieux joined him, contemplating the scene below with that enjoyment which the view never failed to produce in him.

"*Il n'y a que Paris*——" he murmured to himself.

Conrad half turned to him.

"*Vous devenez tout à fait Parisien!*" he said suddenly, his tone bantering.

"*Plus Parisien que les Parigots!*" replied De Marieux with a happy little laugh; the memory of his son did not now clash with the phrase.

The German saw a face at a window level with him on the other side of the boulevard. He stared at it fixedly. M. de Marieux returned to his desk, bent over some documents. He looked up suddenly to see his old friend standing by his side—and was startled at the expression of grim Satanic humour on the blond face.

"Hand them over, De Marieux!" said the German. "The farce has gone on long enough!"

"I—I don't understand," stammered M. de Ma-

rieux, losing his self-control almost for the first time in his life. "What is it you want?"

"The plans for the grand offensive. The plans Valrouge stole for you and of which you cheated him. The plans you meant to sell us for twenty million francs to bolster up your bankrupt business—until you changed your mind and fancied you could play a trick on us!"

M. de Marieux tried to laugh.

"My dear Conrad——"

"Enough!" said the German in a voice that smote him speechless. "Obey!"

He handed him a card on which was a letter and a number, authenticated by mystic initials in the corner.

M. de Marieux's face went deathly pale. He sprang from his seat as a slave might at the entrance of a barbaric despot, bowed low, his hands trembling at the end of his pendent arms.

"^{But} *Aber, Excellenz*—I—I—had no idea——" he stammered.

"Obey!" thundered his master.

M. de Marieux raised his eyes, met for one brief instant the blazing cruel blue eyes above the square ruddy beard—and faltered.

"You are losing your sense of values, De Marieux! Remember Valrouge! You, too, have a son! Be careful he is not involved in your ruin! Produce the plans—I know they are in this room!"

"My son! My son!" murmured De Marieux.

Once more he tried to challenge the fierce blue eyes. "And if I refuse?" The voice sounded strange to him—not his own.

"You know our power, De Marieux. Obey! You are a German. Germany commands you. And Germany dishonours the son of the executed traitor!"

Something in the voice of the master was greater than the master himself; something that called up a flitting vision of a Bavarian soldier; something that summoned into activity omnipotent racial instincts of obedience, of solidarity, in this German who had been half metamorphosed into a Frenchman. Individuality collapsed in him.

"*Zu Befehl, Excellenz!*" he stammered, and went falteringly across to the Degas picture.

The heavy door in the wall swung open at his touch. He took out a thin envelope, glanced to see that it was filled with flimsy sheets of paper, and handed it to the chief he had so long obeyed, now for the first time an identity to him. The German buttoned it up in an inside pocket.

"So!" he said. "I see we can no longer trust you, Mardorf."

The financier trembled at the ill-omened name. He threw himself on his knees.

"Pardon, Excellenz! Pardon!"

The German looked down at him with an enigmatic smile. Then he walked across to the window, fixed once more that distant face level with him

across the boulevard, and nodded quickly and decisively. He turned to De Marieux.

"Get up!" he said brutally.

The financier obeyed.

"And—and the twenty million francs, Excellenz? You—you shall have good value. I swear it!"

"You can keep them," said the German contemptuously. "The plans are worth that to us."

De Marieux stammered his thanks. He began to recover his poise.

"I regret that I cannot offer you lunch, Excellenz. I have an appointment at twelve o'clock."

The memory of his son was now flooding back on him. He craved to finish this sinister incident before the young man returned. Already a part of his brain was beginning to scheme to detach Henri from his battery; to put him somewhere safe.

"*Danke*," said the German curtly. "I, also, have an appointment at that hour." He looked at his watch. "It wants two minutes only——" He smiled. "You have delayed me longer than I anticipated, De Marieux."

"Pardon, Excellenz!"

At that moment the door was flung open. An officer of the gendarmerie, followed by several men, entered the room. He walked straight to the financier and laid a hand upon his shoulder.

"Victor Mardorf, *dit* Victor de Marieux, I arrest you, in the name of the Republic, on a charge of conspiring with the enemy!"

M. de Marieux stood, white and speechless, swaying on his feet.

The officer turned to the man with the ruddy beard.

"You have the proof, M. Lammartin?"

"*La voici, Monsieur de Capitaine!*" replied the agent.

He handed over the sheet of paper on which M. de Marieux had undertaken to obey the orders of a person unnamed. The officer put it in his pocket. He turned to two of his men and pointed to the financier.

"Search him!" he said.

Perspiration broke out on De Marieux's forehead as the packet of Valrouge documents was taken from him. He met the eyes of the man who had betrayed him.

"Valrouge did not implicate M. de Marieux, I think, M. le Capitaine?" said the German pleasantly, in suave French. "Doubtless he had his reasons."

A wild revolt surged up in the wretched man. He pulled away one arm from the detaining grasp of the gendarme and pointed at his betrayer.

"That man is a German!" he shrieked. "I swear it! Arrest him! Arrest him! He has a most valuable military secret in his possession. I swear it! Arrest him!"

The German smiled.

"*Mon cher Capitaine*, I am M. Olivier Lammar-

tin, a Swiss banker. My papers are in perfect order. I can produce them now or wherever you wish. I have a special safe-conduct from high authority—*voici!*”

He produced a piece of paper, signed and sealed, and gave it to the officer. It was returned with a polite bow.

“*Parfait, M. Lammartin.* No one suspects you.”

He turned to his prisoner, was about to order him to march, when once more the door was burst open. The young artillery officer dashed into the room—stopped in amazement.

“Father!” he cried in an agony of apprehension. “Father! What is this?”

M. de Marieux heaved a deep sigh as he stared at his horror-stricken son; snatched at a desperate resolve.

“Henri!” he said. “That man is a German, a spy! He has betrayed me!”

“Betrayed you?” echoed the young man incredulously.

“I am a German, Henri—I cannot help it; but you are French. That man has the plans for the grand offensive in his pocket—they will not believe me. Don’t let him escape! Shoot him—for the sake of France!”

The young officer whipped out a revolver. There was a deafening detonation in the room—the man with the ruddy beard plunged face forward to the floor.

"Father!" cried the young man, a poignant cry of intolerable shame.

There was a second detonation.

The spy was led out over the dead body of his son.

"Thank God!" he murmured.

VI

Toward NACH VERDUN!

IN the long luxuriously furnished saloon car of the special train an officer, clad in the field-service uniform of a southeastern Power, sat in conversation with a colonel of the German General Staff. The deference shown to him made it immediately obvious that he was a distinguished personage representing a neutral whose friendliness was important. His dark, clever eyes rested thoughtfully upon the groups of officers with whom the car was overcrowded. All round was a buzz of talk, of suppressed excitement. The air was thick with cigar smoke.

"Ja, Excellenz," said the German colonel, pudgy little fingers drumming the table between them; "the secret is out. You have rightly guessed our objective." His eyes were those of a rather clumsy and not too scrupulous diplomat. His smile was deliberate flattery. "Allow me to congratulate you upon your good fortune. You will see the machinery of our *Kriegswirtschaftlichkeit* (War Economy)"—he throated the word impressively—"at the moment when it works at its highest power to shape for Germany her final victory."

The distinguished neutral smiled also, perfectly courteous. He spoke with a faint Austrian accent.

"I can understand your desire for the *final*"—he emphasised the word ever so lightly—"victory, *Herr Oberst.*"

The German stared at him, suspicious of the nimbler brain.

"Who would not desire it, *Excellenz?* This awful slaughter——" He waved a deprecating hand. "It is terrible that our adversaries do not recognise they are already beaten."

The neutral nodded. "Bar-le-Duc and the Upper Marne, I suppose—Paris!"

The German colonel's eyes went dead.

"*Excellenz*, I believe the supreme command reserves to itself the honour of enlightening you on its plans."

The conversation languished. The train rolled on, heavily comfortable. The staff officers talked earnestly among themselves, the word *Majestät* oft repeated. Orderlies, garbed as soldiers, but obviously royal *Kammerdiener*, stole noiselessly in and out of the car, went frequently into the car beyond. On those occasions the distinguished neutral had a glimpse of a world-familiar figure, upturned moustaches on a tired face, a uniform of grey hung with many decorations.

The train rolled into a station, stopped. The blare of a military band started on the precise instant of its arrival. The platform was thronged

with officers, bright with the red of the General Staff.

The distinguished neutral took little interest in the ceremony outside. He busied himself with collecting the small articles of his kit. Through the large windows he glimpsed the salutes of the rigidly erect officers. Above the noise of the band he heard the repeated *Hoch! Hoch! Hoch!* of soldiers, who cheered as they drilled, exactly synchronous.

He stepped onto the platform, followed by the colonel appointed to be his conductor. *Majestät* had already departed. Officers were thronging to the exit, laughing and talking, much excited, revealing, despite the grey and red of the staff uniform, the essential childishness of the crowd-mind. "*Nach Verdun!*" said one of them, very close to the distinguished neutral, nudging another in the ribs. "*Nach Verdun!*"

He repeated the just given watchword of victory as a schoolboy repeats the latest smart expression. The officers round him laughed. The crowd buzzed with high spirits.

Outside the station the roadway was choked with waiting motor cars, lined with soldiers readjusting their helmets after tumultuous *Hochs!* Some cars—those containing the highest personages—had already departed. One after another those remaining were filled, swerved out and sped away. The distinguished neutral and his companion found a vehicle reserved for them. The colonel led him to it

with an air that suggested: "See how the smallest details are thought out!" They, too, sped away.

Behind the soldiers were a few listless French inhabitants; from the windows of that French town hung German flags; but no French faces looked out. The shops were open, but their owners stood not at the doors. The neutral noted these things. The complete apathy of the population was in contrast to stories his companion had related in the train. In many of the side streets long convoys of ammunition and ration wagons were halted to allow them passage. On one of those foremost wagons was scrawled in big chalk letters: *Nach Verdun!*

Nach Verdun!—that was the leitmotif underlying all the intense military activity that filled the town and, as they shot out beyond the houses, the countryside also. Every road was choked with columns of marching infantry, with endless trains of wagons, of limbers, of ambulances. Even cavalry was in evidence, riding with tall lances and saddle-hung rifles on wretched-looking horses. *Nach Verdun!* The German colonel, though he warily gave no information, could talk of nothing else. Under that grey February sky pulsed and boomed the distant detonations of artillery. The neutral listened to it with a professional ear, was puzzled. It was persistent enough, but it was certainly not the prolonged roar of a preparatory bombardment.

The car swung into the drive of a park. A tunnel of winter-stripped trees, brown above, green

streaking the bark, and then a large château drew itself across the vista. Thither the other cars had preceded them. They stood now, ranked in a mass. There was a throng of officers round the great doors, the buzz awakened by the recent passage of the All-Highest. The neutral was shown to his room, the German colonel volubly regretting that exigencies of space forced him to share it.

Some hours later the neutral was ushered into a vast lofty apartment whose tapestried walls were almost completely rehung with the huge maps pinned upon them. On easels stood other maps, strange diagrams in curves and slants of red, green and black ink. On a large table was a horizontal relief model of hills and woods, a river with tributary streams, a splash of red in the valley, thin lines of red converging upon it, passing through, opening out again. On all these maps, on the splash of red in the relief model, the name Verdun was repeated again and again.

All these things the neutral officer noticed with the corner of his eye—the large writing tables behind which sat officers of high rank, other officers grouped in a corner. His direct gaze was held by the figure he saluted. Spare, of medium height, in the grey field-service uniform of a general, gold cord looping across his right breast, a star upon the left above collar, the would-be conqueror of the world stood stiffly erect and graciously acknowledged his salute. The brushed-up moustache was still dark, though

the short hair on the head was grey—almost white. The face was deeply furrowed with endless anxieties; but the blue eyes—pouched though were their underlids—gleamed with excitement. He spoke in a jerky but distinct manner that betrayed a temperament of long ill-controlled impulses.

“*Guten Abend, Herr Generäle!* Welcome to Germany’s greatest hour! You shall see our sun mount triumphantly to its zenith, breaking through the dark clouds of foes who cluster over against us in vain!” The tone was that of a rhetoric practised until it has become a habit. The right hand gesticulated with quick motions; the left arm was conspicuously still. “General”—he turned to one of the officers sitting at the tables—“be so good as to explain everything to our friend here.”

It was to be clearly understood that the All-Highest was flatteringly gracious. The neutral officer bowed, expressed his thanks courteously, and ventured a request:

“May I be allowed to admire your War Machine in all its work, *Majestät*—go where I will?”

“By all means, general. We have nothing to hide. You will find much to interest you, much to relate to our well-wishers in your country. General, see that a pass is given to our friend that will give him the fullest freedom.” The All-Highest answered the neutral’s salute in a maner that terminated the conversation.

Seated at the huge carved writing table with the

officer to whom he had been addressed, the neutral found himself looking at a pair of keen grey eyes that peered through pince-nez under bushy white eyebrows. The German spread out maps, indicated positions. He drew notice to the fact that all roads squeezed through a bottle neck over the river at Verdun, spread out in a fan on the east bank to a long line of positions that climbed from the river over the Heights of the Meuse, and fell into the plain of the Woevre, across which they bent southward.

“Die Sache ist äusserst einfach!”—“The thing is absolutely simple!”—he said with the air of a man explaining a chess problem. “The French have three divisions of Territorials in front of us to hold the entire sector. That force is not strong enough to defend it, and certainly too weak to have kept the trench systems in good repair; in fact, we know that they have been allowed to fall into ruin.”—Vide Mr. John Buchan’s *History of the War*, Vol. XIII.—“We have fifteen divisions in our front line, fifteen divisions in reserve. We do not intend to fling those divisions away. No. Step by step our artillery will blast a passage for them—see, here are our artillery positions.”

He showed concentric lines, one within the other, on the map, round the doomed sector.

“It is the greatest artillery concentration the world has ever seen. Even our concentration on the Donajetz last year is surpassed. We shall obliterate

the positions in front of us—other batteries will drench the only avenues of supplies with shells; they must all go through the town—our infantry will merely march into the devastated position, wait for the clearance of the next step. I may tell you that the French have only one small branch railroad line which is safe from our fire. We have built fourteen new lines, besides those already existing. In the great problem of supply we have an overwhelming superiority. We believe we have the advantage of surprise. Certainly the French have no concentration within easy reach. In four days we shall be in Verdun. The Western Front will have been broken.”

“In four days!” The neutral officer looked at the map as a chess player looks at the board. “And—if I might ask the question—suppose you do not take Verdun in four days? There is said to be an enormous Allied force somewhere in France.”

“We have yet another day,” said the German a little wearily, as though resenting the effort to explain the unnecessary. “We have five clear days before any re-enforcements can be brought up against us—all the chances have been calculated, you see. If we are not in Verdun by the evening of the fifth day—well, the battle will continue. But I repeat, we shall be in Verdun within four days. The thing is certain!”

“Of course it is, general,” said another voice above their heads. Both officers looked up, rose to

their feet. "In four days we shall be in Verdun. In a fortnight—Paris!"

The speaker was a youngish man with a long nose in a long face, somewhat bald upon the brow, a clipped moustache above a long, thin mouth. There was something in his manner that suggested not too reputable finance, doubled with Monte Carlo and the coulisses. He repeated, smacking his hand familiarly upon the back of the distinguished neutral:

"In a fortnight—Paris!" He named the famous city with a smack of the lips.

"Undoubtedly, Highness," said the German general, his professional manner replaced by the obsequiousness of the courtier. "The army led by Your Highness cannot fail to conquer."

"Verdun—Paris! This time it will not fail, general." He walked across the room, smacking a riding switch on his tall patent-leather hussar boots, and chanting: "*Nach Verdun! Nach Verdun—Paris!*"—*Nach* means "to, toward," and also "after"—"To Verdun! After Verdun—Paris!"

The morning of the twenty-first of February, 1916, opened damp and bleak. Over the heavy clay fields of the Woevre plain the mist hung persistently, inclosing all vision in a few hundred yards. Through the obscurity the poplars lining the roads loomed up like ghosts, dripping moisture from each bare twig. In the copses and the larger stretch of woodland known as the Forêt de Spincourt the conglobulated mist fell like rain. From each of the high knolls

known as the Twins of Ornes, just southwest of the Forêt de Spincourt, the wooded slopes of the Heights of the Meuse—Herbebois and the Bois de Wavrille—rose dark and indefinite, discernible only when a little puff of the raw east wind, coming up the valley of the Orne, broke a rift in the fog.

The neutral and the German *Oberst* who was his inseparable companion stood on the more southerly of the twin heights. About them was a group of artillery officers. In their immediate front was the deep dugout, sod-roofed, where telephonists sat and waited. It was an artillery observation post. The light was yet dim, though the wet fog was white. It had been quite dark when the two spectators had made their way over roads deep in mud to this position of vantage.

The journey had been long, for their car had to squeeze, lurching and slithering, past endless columns of infantry plodding over the atrocious roads. In the darkness those thousands of men had been scarcely more visible than phantoms, who sang continuously as they marched, chorusing to the tune set by picked singers at the head of each company. Those who were merely the chorus broke off frequently to shout witticisms at the labouring motor car. In high spirits they wagered that they would be the first, after all, to arrive in Verdun.

On the hilltop of the Twin of Ornes, where the officers clustered, was tense expectation. The fog did not lift. Only at rare intervals was there a faint

glimpse of the wooded heights toward which all gazed with thrilling fore-knowledge. As yet all was a quiet, broken only by an occasional isolated detonation that rolled heavily down the Orne Valley. It echoed in a dull repercussion from the mist-filled woods upon the great scarp that was the far-flung rampart of the doomed city. An officer looked at his watch. The example was infectious. The minutes passed slowly. It was like waiting for the curtain to go up. The watches marked 8:13—German time—8:14—8:15!

There was one simultaneous vast roar, which leaped from an arc stretching from far in the northwest and passing round behind them to the south. It did not cease. Minute after minute it continued, unabated, prolonged. In the first sudden shock it appeared one colossal bellow of sound, evenly maintained. But as the ear became accustomed to it, instinctively analysed it, it was possible to distinguish spasms of even fiercer sound than the general welter—the ponderous concussion of specially heavy ordnance; the frenzied hammering of the quick-firing field guns. The sense of hearing was overwrought, but the view changed not. The mist still hung over the landscape, was a curtain before the straining eye. Only down below them, on the right, a howitzer battery, adventurously pushed forward, rent the fog with stabs of orange-red flame.

It seemed, in the overpowering blast of the German guns, that the French artillery was making no

general reply. From time to time a shell came whining over toward them, finished in an ugly rush and a crash somewhere upon the knoll. They scarcely noticed these occasional jinns of death, so ineffective were they by contrast with the whirlwind of destruction that swept the other way. The habitual ear could now pick out the rumbling tramcarlike progress of the heavy shells overhead, the fierce rushing drone of the missiles from lighter guns, mingling interwoven with the uninterrupted sheet of sound.

What was happening over there among the dank wooded hills? Nothing could be seen; but the experienced imagination sketched, conscious that it fell below the reality, fearful havoc distant in the fog. Trees suddenly blasted, toppling; parapets leaping into the air—horrors in the spout of earth that had been a sheltered dugout; trenches whose walls fell in; men who cowered, fear-paralysed, in a shambles; overhead a ceaseless cracking that rained down death; shock upon shock; chaos—such flitted through the minds of those who strained their eyes at the fog. An artillery observation officer turned to the neutral.

“Five hours of this, *Excellenz*,” he said with a smile—“and then the first step to Verdun!”

The *Oberst* expatiated on the wonderful German system for supplying all these batteries indefinitely at this intensity of fire. “Who can resist us?” was the implied corollary to his dissertation. The neutral was duly impressed, his dark clever eyes serious.

The bombardment continued, became monotonous.

The fog thinned somewhat, but permitted no clear vision. The batteries were firing by the map, according to a prearranged programme. The *Oberst* suggested to his distinguished guest that further stay was useless.

"I should like to see your guns at work, *Herr Oberst*," said the neutral, and the colonel saw himself forced to put aside his hopes of returning to Corps Headquarters for *Mittagsessen*; he speculated on the Divisional Messes in their vicinity as he replied:

"By all means, *Excellenz*."

They scrambled down the rough path of the knoll, through a thin growth of birch, passed into the denser mist below.

They found themselves suddenly among long ranks of resting infantry squatting and lying in close proximity to their piled arms. The *feld-grau* uniforms merged, were lost in the fog; but there was an indefinable suggestion of the presence of many thousands. The *Oberst* and his guest might walk where they would—the shadowy grey forms still loomed up out of the fog. All were cheerful and confident. The officers in little groups, smiling as they conversed, bent over a map. The men were grinning. They were waiting for the guns to level the path for their promenade.

At last the ranks of infantry ceased. They came upon a field battery that was firing furiously. The guns were in the open, their upturned caissons—lid

upright to form a shield, exposing the pigeonholed bases of the cartridges—close against the left wheel. Grouped behind each were the busy gunners, in rapid movement of arms and torso, crouching, labouring with swift concentrated intensity as they passed the long gleaming projectile from hand to hand, thrust it into the breech, closed and fired. Behind them was a heap of brass cartridge cases, the flat compartmented baskets that had held three rounds. The watching officers, helmeted, in long closely buttoned coats, stood behind their sections. The battery hurled out its stream of death in absolute immunity. No enemy shell came to seek it. The fog veiled its target.

Beyond that battery was another, in the open like the first, almost wheel to wheel with it. And beyond that, another, and yet others—an endless chain of them, all scorning concealment; all firing as fast as sweating, straining men could load and pull the lever. From behind came the prolonged, heavy, linked detonations of yet other batteries of more weighty metal. Overhead the rumble and rush of hurrying shells was as the sound of heavy traffic.

The neutral and his guide turned eastward toward the zone of the great howitzers. Once more they were entangled in waiting masses of grey-clad infantry. The mist had thinned, permitting quite long vistas. Everywhere there was infantry, battalion upon battalion, regiment on regiment, brigade after brigade. The time had passed almost unnoticed—

by the neutral at least—so much was there for his brain to register; it was now almost noon. The infantry was standing to its ranks, forming into column of route, marching forward with songs and shouts, their spiked helmets decorated with sprigs of fir. "*Vorwärts!*" came the sharp, barking commands of the officers. "*Nach Verdun!*" shouted the excited men, drunk with the prospect of superbly easy victory.

And ever the indefatigable batteries hammered and crashed, spewing forth death in volumes that the men they served might live. From behind every hedge, every hillock; in long lines across the open—so many that they could afford to neglect the enemy's reply—their tongues of flame shot out, flickered indefinitely repeated into the distance. Their infinitely reiterated detonations smote splittingly upon the ear, were gathered into one overpowering roar.

The dark mass of the Forêt de Spincourt was riven by red flame that lit and was gone momentarily in every part of its recesses. As the two officers approached it they saw a faint film of smoke hanging over the treetops, saw the quick flashes gleaming through the undergrowth of the verge. They entered its obscurity. The air choked one with the fumes of burnt explosive, beat against the face in gusts with the disturbance of the multiplied discharges. The wood was a nest of howitzer batteries. On platforms of concrete and timber the monsters squatted, bowed their heads to receive

yet another shell, raised them again with slow, determined movement, the great round jaws gaping upward to the sky; belched with a sudden eructation of vivid flame, a tremendous shock of which the stunning noise was only part.

The spectator behind the gun, looking upward, saw a black object speeding high into the air, rapidly diminishing, the while a rain of twigs pattered down upon his face.

As the barrel was lowered again, the breech opened; slow curling tongues of flame licked round the muzzle. Behind each weapon were great stacks of shells. Hurrying men, two at a time, with a tray supported on two short poles between them, carried more food to the iron monster, fed its fuming breech for yet another roar.

Farther within the wood were still greater monsters, so huge that their aliment was trundled to them on light rails, swung into their maws by overhanging cranes. The earth shook, the trees rocked with the vehemence of their discharge.

"Frau Bertha has a most persuasive voice—*nicht wahr?*" said the *Oberst* to his guest.

The neutral agreed as courteously as was possible in this chaos of bludgeoning noise. His dark eyes rested a little contemptuously on the dapper, somewhat pudgy colonel, whose soul, even in this crisis of nations, was still essentially the soul of a commercial traveller. The order to Krupps was not yet given.

It was one o'clock—noon to the anxious French

general far over there in the terrible distance. As suddenly as it had commenced, the vast bombardment ceased. There was an uncanny silence. All knew its significance. The German infantry was advancing to the assault. With what resistance would it be met? Every ear was at strain—machine guns? There was no sound. Suddenly the bombardment opened again, as violent as before. The German guns were putting a screen of death behind the doomed positions, barring off all help. Far away huge shells were crashing down from a curve that was four miles high at its zenith, making an inferno of a once quiet cathedral town, wrecking the bridges across a flooded river, blocking every avenue of supply to the defenders agonising on the plateau.

That night in the Army Headquarters was a night of jubilation. Courtier soldiers—who none the less laboured into the small hours at the intricate calculations and orders that would improve the victory on the morrow—glanced at a youngish, very exalted personage, and murmured platitudes about the pardonable intoxication of success. An even more exalted personage strode from general to general in the great tapestried, map-hung apartment, and gave instructions that were received as the inspiration of genius, and then merged, lost sight of, nullified in the mass of orders that emanated from those fiercely toiling brains.

The distinguished guest sat at the table with the

keen-eyed, white-browed general, and had everything patiently explained to him.

"All has gone exactly according to schedule," said the German. "The first line positions are ours. There has been a counterattack in the Bois de Caures; but we have stemmed it. Elsewhere there has been no serious opposition. The first day has been a brilliant success. We have pierced the line where we intended to pierce it. If the French maintain their flank positions their disaster is certain. The battle will be developed to-morrow. We shall drive right through to the Ornes-Louvemont road. The French defence is dead; was annihilated by our bombardment. To-morrow disintegration will set in and our progress will be rapid. On the third day we shall take Fort Douaumont—the key to Verdun."

"And on the fourth day?" queried the neutral, his dark eyes gazing at the map in front of him.

"We shall be in Verdun!" said the German.

"*Verdun! Verdun! Nach Verdun—Paris!*" chanted an unsteady voice across the room, and finished in a suspicious resemblance to a hiccup.

There was a moment of tense, awkward silence in the great apartment, and then a buzz of low voices earnestly discussing technicalities.

Day followed day, surcharged with fateful issues. Men who flung themselves down, utterly wearied, to snatch a brief sleep, woke from it with an oppression of the breast, a tremor of the nerves. Their fiercely

excited brains begrudged an instant's unconsciousness where every minute was a vehicle of destiny—once ahead, never to be overtaken. Strenuously, night and day, laboured the staffs in the Army Headquarters, in the corps, divisions, artillery groups—desperately; for after the second day they were behind their time-table.

On that second day the French defence they had fondly thought annihilated woke to sternly resisting life. There had been terrific fighting on the whole front from Brabant to Ornes. Once more a frightful bombardment had opened with the dawn. Once more the German infantry had advanced in masses. They found the trenches in front of them weakly held; had occupied them. But en route a storm of shells had rained down on the swarming columns, had strewn the ground with dead and dying. Farther advance was barred by sheets of rifle fire, torrents of machine-gun bullets. There were ugly rumours as to losses. The day's objective had not been reached. Counterattacks had flung the grey infantry out of positions already conquered.

During the black night between the twenty-second and twenty-third, while the gun teams of the German batteries strained and stumbled forward over shell-torn ground to new positions, the French left flank had fallen back from Brabant. The German guns hurled an avalanche of projectiles blindly upon the new lines of defence, more or less at hazard, since no longer did they have them accurately

marked upon the map. Once more the grey masses swept forward; once more the hail of shells beat them down. The end of that day saw the centre pushed in with wild confusion; but the French resistance, still alive, determined to perish rather than break. Once more the objective had not been attained. Douaumont was not even menaced. The time-table was hopelessly out. That night the French fell back on both flanks and withdrew from Ornes.

The fourth day dawned—the appointed day for final victory—and still the struggle continued, fiercer than ever. Slowly, slowly the German infantry pressed forward, leaving behind them a sea of helpless bodies—a grey carpet as perceived from a distance. The artillery fire swelled and mounted in paroxysms of incredible violence, the German guns hammering in savage persistence; the French batteries, lurking for their target, overwhelming it in a deluge.

On and on pressed the grey infantry, thrust dangerously, as night fell, straight at the heart, toward Fort Douaumont. A fierce conflict—body to body, rifles that flashed in the face of the victim, bayonets perforce shortened for the thrust, gripping fingers clutching at the throat as men wrestled and swayed—roared in an indescribable tumult upon the Ornes-Louvemont road.

The defenders had made a supreme rally. The Germans fought like men who grasp at victory, maddened that it is withheld. The French fought like

heroes, desperately outnumbered, who know their duty is to die. When night fell the defence was still intact; but the French had withdrawn to their last line, covering Douaumont.

"We still have one more day," said the German general to the distinguished neutral that night in the great map-hung apartment. "We allowed that margin of time. To-morrow will see our greatest effort, Douaumont in our hands, Verdun untenable."

The dark eyes of the neutral read a certain nervousness in the German's face, despite the confident tone.

"It has proved rather more difficult than you expected?"

"The French field guns have been terrible—terrible!" replied the German. "Without them——" He waved an expressive hand. "But to-morrow we shall deliver the *coup de grâce*. We have not boasted idly, *Excellenz*." His eyes looked searchingly through their pince-nez at the calmly interested face of the neutral. "When Germany threatens she performs."

On the morning of the twenty-fifth the German guns roared over white fields of snow, through veils of the softly falling flakes that fluttered inexhaustibly from the leaden sky. Their thunder swelled louder and ever louder as the batteries, which had changed position consequently upon the French withdrawal during the night, got to work, searching for

their target, more or less accurately finding it, despite the difficulty of observation.

Not a minute was to be lost. The anxious German Staff knew that the re-enforcements of their foes must be hurrying—hurrying. Some perhaps had already arrived. If night fell without definite victory the morrow would surely see fresh masses against them, reinvigorating the defence. Victory to-day—complete victory—Douaumont captured, the pursuit pressed into the streets of Verdun—meant victory indeed.

Mighty, therefore, was the effort. By noon every German battery was firing at its maximum. Under the leaden sky, over the white ground, in the still cold of a bitter frost, their thunder swelled and crashed, roaring in a never-ending frenzy. Eighteen German divisions were massed to break down all opposition. Already they had attacked—again and again. Again and again the rapid detonations of the French guns had leaped into the din, smiting desperately, frantically, to stay them. Over there, in the mist-hung gullies of the plateau, on its bare open spaces between the woods, the snow had ceased to be white—save where it fell freshly upon the huddled bodies of the fallen.

In the afternoon the weather cleared somewhat. More distant views were possible. On the higher of the Twins of Ornes, the knolls just southwest of the Forêt de Spincourt, stood the figure who, more than any other individual, would have to dare the

answer for all the agony rolled out there before him; for all the agony that no eye could measure, spread over continents, crying to strange stars.

Spiked helmet on his head, a long grey cavalry cloak wrapped about him, his field glasses held to his eyes by the right hand only, he gazed upon the now distant conflict. At his side stood a younger figure, his face masked also by a binocular. Behind them were a group of dignitaries, generals of high position, the distinguished neutral and the *Oberst* who never quitted him. All gazed on the scarp of the Heights of the Meuse, their glasses pointing south-south-west.

The great masses of woodland rose dark from the snow of the plain, a long stretch of undulating climbing treetops. Beyond them the bare bulk of the plateau humped itself yet higher, dirty grey against the sky. It rose to a culminating knoll—Douaumont! All that bare plateau was whelmed in a drifting reek; but the highest point was like a volcano in eruption. Great founts of smoke shot up from it incessantly, spread in the air in heavy plumes that overhung.

It was the objective of the Third Corps—Brandenburgers—attacking under the eye of the Kaiser, so particularly their chief. Their orders were that Douaumont was to be taken at all costs. On the Twin of Ornes operators from army headquarters had taken over the telephone dugout. Behind them the line was clear to Berlin—waiting—waiting for

the triumphant announcement that should thrill the world.

Somewhat impatiently the neutral scanned the lofty distances where the great drama was being enacted. Innumerable puffs of bursting shells indicated the conflict, but gave no hint of its varying fortunes. The professional instinct was strong within him; the report to his government an ideal to which it strove. To perfect that report he must see the fight at closer quarters; must describe the effects of the French fire as a complement to the already written minute on the German batteries.

His keen eye picked out a position of vantage on the Heights. Then he waited for an opportunity, alert for the moment when the eye of Majesty should rest itself from the distant view, and should fall upon him. The opportunity occurred. The glance of the All-Highest swept over him, preoccupied. The neutral stepped forward, saluted, and indicated the far-off point.

"Ich bitte um Erlaubnis, Majestät"—"I beg permission, Your Majesty"—he said.

A frowning glance rested upon him for an instant, intolerant of aught save the mighty contest whose issue was the fate of nations.

"Gestattet"—"Granted"—was the curt, indifferent reply.

The German *Oberst*, standing behind the neutral, changed colour. He had no option but to accompany this damnable foreigner in his mad adventure

into unnecessary danger. He, too, saluted *Majestät* and followed the neutral to the spot where a number of orderlies stood at the heads of saddled horses. They had been sent forward in case the dignitaries should require them.

In a few moments the two officers, followed by mounted attendants, were slithering down the snowy side of the knoll, were cantering across the valley toward Ornes.

High above them towered the dark Bois de la Chaume as they threaded the débris-covered street of the wrecked village. It was packed with Brandenburger infantry waiting to advance. They followed the road southward, at the foot of the hills, toward Bezonvaux. Everywhere the infantry stood thick, waiting. The cannonade mounted to a frightful intensity, appalling even the ears now habituated to it, bewildering the senses, troubling the sight.

French shells came whining, screaming, rushing, to burst with loud crashes in the woodland rising on their right hand, on the road and in the fields through which the infantry passed. Domes of dark smoke leaped upward from the earth, preceding the stunning, metallic detonation. White shrapnel puffs clustered thickly above the trees.

Bezonvaux was a ruin. They turned off from it to the right, up a rough track that climbed into the woods. The snow on the track had been trampled into a dirty slush. All about them lay bodies, grey and blue; weapons pell-mell as they had fallen from

suddenly opened grasps. Their horses shuddered, whinnied, jerked nervous ears, moved disconcertingly sidewise from red stains soaking deep into the snow.

Just under the edge of the plateau the neutral stopped, dismounted, threw his reins to an orderly. The *Oberst* followed his example. His face was blotchy white; he trembled in every limb.

"We shall see nothing, *Excellenz*—absolutely nothing," he asseverated appealingly.

"We can at least try," replied his guest. "Something is happening over there."

Above them, some distance ahead, was a tremendous uproar, a chaos of violent thudding slams, splitting crashes, a faint troublous murmur of human voices. Behind them, up the rough track, a column of infantry was advancing, overtaking them. They ascended with a steady progress, splashing through the slush; officers waving swords, shouting; rank upon rank of tense faces that had lost their humanity in the tremulous brute; glazed staring eyes under the spiked helmets; singing, singing like drugged doomed gladiators marching to the arena. They passed upward.

The neutral, to whom his conductor had nervelessly surrendered the initiative, led the way. They left their horses behind them, struck off at a tangent on the right, through the woods, climbing always. They emerged upon the plateau, in a clearing. Across the open space, from a whelm of smoke and

noise in the distance, groups of grey men were running swiftly toward them, shouting inarticulately. Along the edge of the woods was a line of pickets. Their weapons rose to the shoulder. Sternly every fugitive but those wounded was driven again into the fight. Those who hesitated, screaming under the menace of the rifle, dropped, shot.

The neutral hurried along the verge of the wood, scanning every tall tree carefully, expectantly. "Ah!" He had found what he sought. Against the green bark of a lofty beech dangled a rope ladder. It was an abandoned French artillery observation post. He scrambled up the ladder, followed by the trembling, shivering *Oberst*. High up among the topmost branches was a little platform.

The neutral settled himself, adjusted his binocular, pushed aside the twigs. He looked out over an undulating terrain, dark with woods that ceased raggedly in deep indentations short of a bare hogback which gathered itself into a hump. That bare ground was smothered in a turmoil of smoke that fumed to the grey sky, far to right and left. But through it, in chance rifts, his glasses revealed a dark mass upon the highest point. A reek of white smoke drifted away from it, as from burning buildings, mingling with the darker clouds of incessant explosions. He had a glimpse of a rounded cupola. It was Douaumont!

The snow on the open space between the fort and the woods was grey. It was moving with crawling

life, like the festering of a stagnant pool. Over it burst occasional puffs of shrapnel.

"Ah!" The cry was involuntary from both the watching men.

From the woods emerged masses of running tiny grey figures—running, running toward the fort. The open space was covered with them. A moment of tense expectation, when the heart seemed to stop—and then, as by a terrible magic, great fountains of dark smoke and darker objects leaped up among those running figures; countless explosions.

A canopy of vicious little shrapnel bursts in thousands spread itself over them. Under it men sprawled in great patches, seemed to be fighting the air ere they tumbled and fell. A horrid screaming came faint through the uproar. More masses rushed out, were beaten down. There was a running to and fro of men bewildered—a headlong flight.

The storm of fire did not cease. It rolled over the plateau toward the woods, remorselessly following the fugitives. Louder and louder, nearer and nearer, the crashes, the fountains, the puffs—the great mingled reek of the inferno—rolled toward the two men in the observation post. The *Oberst* clutched the neutral's arm.

"*Excellenz!*" he shouted stammeringly. "We must go! I insist! I have superior authority—written authority—my discretion—I insist!" he almost screamed. His hand groped for a scrap of paper,

which he waved. "Arrest!" he cried like a maniac. "Arrest if you do not come!"

The storm of French shells was a very near menace. The neutral acquiesced with a shrug of his shoulders. Nimble they descended the ladder.

On the ground they found themselves among a swarm of slightly wounded, terror-stricken men. One of them, a tall, bearded Brandenburger, his clothes torn to rags, was shrieking and laughing in a manner horrible to hear. His comrades drew away from him as he clutched at them. He was insane.

"Only I am left!" he cried. "Only I! They are all dead—dead—out there. They were meant to be dead. They were dead men before we attacked—all dead men, running on; I could see it in their faces—only I was alive! And now they are still crawling—crawling—dead men!" His tone emphasised the horror of his words, struck a chill. A sentry lowered his rifle irresolutely.

The maniac turned, waved a hand to the westward. The sun, on the point of setting, showed itself in a rift of the threatening snowclouds; sank, a great ball of glowing fire, over the rim of the plateau. Its last rays were lurid on the face of the madman as he stood, arms outstretched, his eyes flaming, his tangled beard falling upon his rags, like some antique prophet of the wilderness.

"Woe! Woe!" he shrieked. "*Nach Verdun! Nach Verdun — Verdunkelung!*" — "To Verdun! After Verdun—Eclipse." He finished in a scream of

maniac laughter, glorying in the crazy assonance of the words. "*Nach Verdun—Verdunkelung!*"

The neutral and the *Oberst* hurried through the woods to their horses.

A rapid ride, with the German always in front, and once more they ascended the Twin of Ornes. As they arrived at the summit they found themselves among wildly cheering men.

"Douaumont! Douaumont is taken!"

Far away to the south-southwest rocket after rocket shot up into the darkening sky. Already the great news had gone—electrically—to Berlin.

The crowd of dignitaries descended the steep path in the gloom to where the motor cars were ranked in waiting. Along the road passed streams of wounded who could walk, phantoms half distinguished in the dim light. Joyous were the voices of the War Lords. One, in a familiar tone, chanted:

"*Nach Verdun! Nach Verdun—Paris!*"

Out of the darkness came a screamed reply, a burst of insane laughter:

"*Nach Verdun—Verdunkelung! Nach Verdun—Verdunkelung!*"

It was the voice of the crazed Brandenburger. There was a scuffle—the sound of a man hurried away, resisting.

All through that dark journey, as the car bumped and lurched over the atrocious roads the words beat in a refrain through the mind of the neutral. "*Nach Verdun—Verdunkelung!*" He wondered. Eclipse?

Was it the sun of Germany that set on the French position? The *Oberst* was loquaciously cheerful.

That night, in the great map-hung apartment, the War Lords received the news that their farther advance was barred.

Next morning a furious counterattack surrounded a handful of defenders in the fort for which they had paid so much. The French reënforcements had arrived.

VII

THE CONQUERORS

PARIS! Paris is taken!

The crowd of citizens lining the pavement of the main street of the little German town turned with a buzz of excited voices to the bareheaded shopkeeper who had just dashed out with the news. A babel of questions arose, conflicting ejaculations, women's tones shrill above the masculine bass.

"*Wie?* Is it official?" "Are the papers in?" "*Ach, kolossal—kolossal!*" "Six weeks! Russia, England, Belgium and France defeated! Brussels taken, and now Paris!" "Where did you hear it?"

"The Justizrat Kramer's servant has just told me!" answered the shopkeeper, full of importance as he looked round the ring of eager faces which surrounded him. "He should know, for his son is with the Kronprinz's army—doubtless he has had a letter." The shopkeeper was a member of the town council and phrased his thoughts with some pretensions as a public speaker. "These doctors find many ways of sending back news. *Ach, Gott sei Dank* that I persuaded them to keep the flags out!"

"The Justizrat Kramer! There he is, *doch!*"

With Herr Hartmann and Fräulein Minna. Ask him if the news is true, some one!"

The group turned their heads to where, just behind the rank of people lining the curb, a tall, intellectual-looking old man in a tight-fitting frock coat and silk hat stood in conversation with a well-dressed and handsome young woman. There was an aloofness, an austerity in his manner—an obvious disdain for the crowd—that held in respect those eagerly curious citizens who now stood contemplating him. The Justizrat Kramer was more than the chief local lawyer: he was the oracle, the intellectual aristocrat of the town. His dry tone, his contemptuously critical eye, were terrors the average citizen stood in awe of.

"Better not!" said one, who for an instant had betrayed an irresolution by which his companions had endeavoured to profit. "Not now. The Herr Justizrat is telling the events to his son's betrothed. It would not be polite to interrupt him. Besides, the morning paper will be in presently."

"Paris taken!" cried another. "Then perhaps the Reserve Battalion will not march off after all, this morning! The war is over!"

"*Doch nicht!*" replied the man at his elbow sentimentally. "We have still to capture London!"

"How long? Two months! The end of the year? 1915, perhaps!"

"*Ach, nein!* So long as 1915 can it not last!"

said a woman. "Our husbands and sons will all be killed!"

"The losses are frightful," agreed another. "So they say. Twenty at least of the town will never come back. *Nein*, so long can it not last!"

"Look!" cried a voice. "Here come the *Polizei!* The battalion is starting."

From both sides of the street, which, clear of traffic, stretched under its decoration of flags and evergreens from the squat, antiquated fort on the elevation at one end of it to the tall, smokeless chimneys of the Hartmanns-Fabrik which closed the view at the other, long lines of eager faces craned out to watch the group of mounted policemen trotting down toward the railway station.

"The prisoners will be coming through, at any rate!" said a man, shading his eyes from the mid-September sun as he peered down the thoroughfare after the clattering patrol. "Cursed Frenchmen! The faces they'll make when we shout the news at them!"

"*Jawohl!* The camp is all ready for them—plenty of barbed wire, but not much else!" said another with a laugh. "Their train must be almost due—yes, look, there is the Herr Major von Toplitz, the new commandant of the fort who will be in charge of them! Talking to the Herr Justizrat there! He is evidently going down to the station to meet the prisoners."

The crowd turned once more in the direction of

the Justizrat. The little group had now been joined by an elderly officer, spruce in a new field-grey uniform, sword dangling. He was screwing his monocle into his eye and smiling under his white moustache while he exchanged a remark with the rotund proprietor of the factory at the end of the street, and his handsome daughter. It was evident from the stiff precision of his gestures that he had just been introduced.

From somewhere in the direction of the squat brown fort came the faint notes of a distant military band. A stir ran through the people, who were now repeating to each other all along the street: "Paris taken! Paris is taken!" as they closed up more densely to the curb to get a better view.

A narrow-browed, full-faced, corpulent little tradesman, apron about his waist, spectacles on his nose, stepped out into the empty street and gazed myopically at the vista of flags which transformed its familiar drab dulness into an avenue of triumph.

"*S ist doch schön!*" he repeated to himself. In his tone was the naïve awe of a *Sancho Panza* contemplating in his secret moments his incredible splendour. "*Ach, we Germans!*"

He dodged back with a cry of alarm as a mounted policeman, disdaining to swerve his horse, nearly rode him down.

A little farther down the street Major von Toplitz was still in conversation with the little group. He was discussing strategy with the Justizrat, and

the deep blue eyes of the girl were fixed attentively on the two men, colour high on the cheeks under her massed fair hair.

"*Ja, Herr Kramer!* So we made war in Seventy with the Archduke Charles; so now—time-table!" He spoke in a clipped military fashion which accorded well with the fragmentary nature of his mental processes. "To-day—hurl ourselves across the frontier; to-morrow—take Brussels; day after—Verdun; day after that—Paris! Date for Paris secret—can't tell you—in time-table—punctually to the hour—march down Champs Elysées. Tell you this, *lieber Herr*: our Kaiser has left Berlin—triumphal entry!"

At that moment the rotund little factory-proprietor caught the rumour being passed from mouth to mouth among the crowd. He questioned the nearest man, shouted an inarticulate cry.

"Paris!" he yelled, waving his hat. "Paris is taken!"

"So," observed the Major, drawing himself up with dignity. "What did I tell you, Herr Justizrat? *Ach*, those cursed Social Democrats! See, there is some use in our German army, after all—*nicht wahr, Herr Hartmann?* No more trouble in your factory! Brussels—Paris! Moment of time-table!" He twisted his white moustache with a fatuous complacency, his bleary old eyes looking as fierce as he could make them, self-consciously personifying the victorious German army.

"It may well be so," said the Justizrat. "I had a letter from Otto this morning. He expected to be in Paris in two days. What a victory! What a victory!" His keen old face was lighted up as by a personal triumph. "My friends, this is the moment for which I have longed all my life, the moment for which I have worked—I also, Herr Major" (the lawyer had received his distinction of "Rat" in recognition of some Pan-German pamphlets he had written), "inculcating our German virtues, preaching our right to a place in the sun! This is 'the great time,' the time when our German *Kultur* triumphantly reveals its superiority in the capitals of the effete civilisation we shall replace! Brussels! Paris! London next!"

"You must write to Otto, Minna," said the factory-proprietor pompously to his daughter, "and tell him how proud you are of him."

"Proud?" said the girl, a sudden, not-to-be-repressed bitterness in her tone. She flushed at its escape. "*He* is not fighting! He is just a doctor—he does not thrill with glory at our victories. He thinks only of new scientific ways to bind up wounds. His letters are full of it." She hesitated, her bosom heaving; then in a flash of vicious contempt, she added: "I have written to ask him how many Frenchmen he has killed!"

The three men stared at her, startled by this outburst.

"Minna!" cried her father, glancing nervously at

the Justizrat. Otto Kramer was a good match—one who would help the frequently perilous fortunes of the Hartmanns-Fabrik. “But you love Otto! You know it well—you know it well!” The eyes in the little rotund face were wide with anxiety. “Did you not cry all night when he went away?” Nothing was sacred to Herr Hartmann when his material interests were at stake.

The girl flushed up again at a snicker in the crowd behind her.

“It is because—because Otto is to be my husband that I feel ashamed, bitterly ashamed, he is not a soldier. My—my husband—— Oh,” she broke off, “when I used to listen to you talking of the coming war, Father-in-law, I used to think of Otto—I used to see him with a shining sword, conquering the enemies of our Fatherland—winning the victory—alone, almost—coming back decorated, a hero, famous. And now, in this great time, when all the world is winning glory, when every one is talking of the bravery of their sons and husbands, he—he——” She stopped, very near tears. Then drawing herself up with a deep breath, her eyes flashing through their moisture, she cried: “Oh, if only I were a man!” Her hand seemed to clutch a weapon.

The Justizrat sprang forward: his old ascetic face lighted up, and he laid his bony hand upon her shoulder.

“Ah, there speaks the true German woman!” he cried. “The woman of Tacitus—of the Niebelun-

genlied! The wife and mother of heroes! You are right, Minna, our *Kultur* can only grow from seed sown among the ruins. The duty of a German to-day is to inflict wounds—not to heal them! *Ach! Hartmann,*”—he turned to the vulgar little manufacturer,—“what a grandson I shall have!”

Hartmann grinned—relieved that there was no hint of breaking the marriage.

At that moment an irruption of little boys, bundles of newspapers in their arms, shouting inarticulately at the top of their voices, dashed along the pavement behind the backs of the crowd. Where they passed, a sudden turmoil, papers waved on high, fresh cries. The Major snatched a copy from an urchin who continued to yell with all his lungs while he waited for the nickel.

“*Sieg!*” cried the Major, glancing at the fat Gothic headlines. “Yet another victory! *Sieg! Sieg!*”

“Where is it?” shouted the Justizrat, above the clamour of voices which arose all around them. “France? Paris?” He grabbed at a paper for himself. “Ah—Russia!” He scanned the thickened type of the communiqué. “Not a word about France—the communiqué is late, is dated the 9th of September—to-day is the 11th. They are waiting to be able to announce the final victory.”

The yelling newspaper-boys pushed their ways through the throng. In the midst of the uproar came the blare and thud of a military band approaching

from the direction of the fort. The crashing rhythm of a lively tune mingled with the excited shouts of the crowd.

"The battalion!" cried the Major. "Must go—railway-station—see them off—prisoners arriving too. Wounded—don't know what I shall do with them—no doctors. Come to supper at the fort to-night—bring your wives. You'll come, Herr Kramer? You, Herr Hartmann? Bring the Fräulein—celebrate the victory, ha! Good-bye—*auf Wiederseh'n!*" He saluted the young woman with a click of heels and strode off through the crowd, which made way for him respectfully.

The blare of the band increased. They could distinguish the tune—"Püppchen, du bist mein Augenschatz! Püppchen, du bist——" A roar of cheers drowned it. The spectators crowded up to the edge of the pavement, craned their necks to see into the still empty street. They could hear the voices of the soldiers singing as they marched toward them.

The band ceased for a moment; then as its leading ranks passed with a tap of drum, a dazzle of brass instruments in the sunshine, it burst out into the stirring strains which all Germany had been shouting for the past six weeks:

Deutschland, Deutschland über Alles—über Alles in der Welt!
Wenn es stets zu Schutz und Trutze brüderlich zusammenhält.

*Von der Maas bis on die Memel, von der Etsch bis on den
Belt
Deutschland, Deutschland über Alles—über Alles in der
Welt!*

They passed, rank after rank in their field-grey uniforms, flowers in the muzzles of their rifles at the slope, flowers wreathed about their spiked helmets, flowers flung into the air about them, falling like rain. They passed, sturdy German figures, pack high on the back, singing as with an antique religious fervour exactly in time and tune, their faces red with pride and pleasure, faces of ploughmen, of factory-hands, of clerks, of petty tradesmen, of all the drudging occupations that had ceased, their paltry civilisation forgotten, their eyes bright in a triumph of primitive instincts sanctified by the clamour of the crowd. They passed, yesterday the drab workers of a narrow horizon, to-day the panoplied foemen—spectacles from the unremembered desk still on the eyes that would so soon gaze at Death in a strange landscape.

They passed, imposing in their ordered strength, and with them passed the wild romance of war, the romance of lives at plenitude that have no sure continuance. They passed endlessly, rank after rank of faces that lost their individuality in one common flushed brutishness where thought was quelled, flower-crowned, purposeful, like the exodus of Gothic warriors setting out amid tribal cries to the sack of a doomed epoch.

The splendid choral, rhythmic to the tramp, roared up from the dense ranks streaming under the festooned flags that seemed to flutter in the waves of sound. "*Deutschland, Deutschland über Alles—über Alles in der Welt!*" The crowd caught it up, roared it back at them: "*Deutschland, Deutschland über Alles!*" mingled with shouts of uncontrollable enthusiasm, the certainty of victory, shrill female voices high above the rest.

"*Hoch! hoch! Hurra! Sieg! Sieg! Paris! Paris genommen! Noch ein Sieg! Hurra!*" And then again the dominating melody of the intoxicating chant, swallowing up all other sounds:

Deutschland, Deutschland über Alles—über Alles in der Welt!

The girl stood gazing at the steadily flowing ranks, at the endlessly passing soldier-faces, so masculine, so indescribably thrilling under their spiked helmets. Voicelessly she followed the lilt and beat, the uplifting surge of the battle-song of her race; voicelessly, but with parted lips, she echoed the farewell cries, the shouts of triumph, the roar of cheers on cheers with which her countrymen sped their heroes on to certain conquest. She stood fixed, oddly chilled, tears springing to her eyes in the intensity of an emotion that was suddenly poignant. She saw the heroes passing, rifle on the shoulder—passing, passing to some grand unimaginable climax of effort, to a transcendent apotheosis far away—

and then she saw Otto, Otto in his white surgeon's dress, in a hushed hospital ward, his calm, keen face bent over a bed. She had often seen him so.

"Victory! Victory!" shouted the crowd. All that was not part, active combatant part, in this mighty conflict where Germany—her Germany—wrestled against a world in arms, seemed despicably mean, unworthy of a man's strength. A burning resentment filled her, mingled with the warrior impulse of remote ancestors buried with their helm and spear. The volcanic hysteria which underlies the surface phlegm of the Teutonic temperament surged uppermost. She uttered a wild, inarticulate cry.

The Justizrat turned to her, thinking she was ill. She clutched his arm.

"Oh, if only I were a man!" she said, her eyes meeting the flame in his. "If only I could do something splendid—heroic—for the Fatherland! Something that would be Otto's part and mine together! *Ach!*" She broke into sobs against the old man's breast.

"You will, *Schätzchen*, you will," said the old lawyer, soothing her. "You will be the mother of heroes who will conquer Asia in the next generation, as those gallant lads are conquering Europe in this. Our German *Kultur* is born of such women as you—for you incarnate the irresistible will to power, the recognition of the moral majesty of war, which is our *Kultur* itself. Ah, *Schätzchen*," he murmured, "promise me—promise me that you will marry Otto!

My grandsons will be of the race of world-conquerors!"

She looked up.

"Conquerors!" she cried. "Oh, if I were a man, I could be a conqueror—but," she smiled, with a shake of the head, "I am only a woman, *Schweiger-vater*."

The last of the troops had gone. Her father turned to her, still excited.

"Come, Minna," he cried, "let us see them off at the railway station!"

He stepped out with an absurd little strutting imitation of a martial step. His daughter and the Justizrat followed him. They had not gone far through the swirling eddies of the dispersing crowd when there was again a clamour far ahead in the mass of people, a shout that was no longer the pæan of enthusiasm which had roared up from the route of the marching soldiers, but a shout that checks the heart, the ugly shout of a mob perceiving its prey. A quick commotion among the multitude followed, a rush to line the curb once more. The word was passed along: "The prisoners! They are coming!"

Borne off their feet in the scurry of eager sight-seers, Minna and her two companions found themselves pushed out into the street, into the front row of spectators that now squeezed back before the menace of the sidling, back-stepping horses of the police.

"The prisoners!" The cry was repeated, domi-

nant, an explanation, over the confused, vaguely vengeful murmur of the mob that had lost its individual sensibilities in the primitive instinct of the pack. It massed itself in a blind, collective hostility. The cynical authorities who, far away, had arranged—with the sureness of long practice in playing upon the passions of the multitude—that the two columns should pass in dramatic contrast, would have been well pleased with the success of their stage-management.

Minna was jostled by a big red-faced peasant who elbowed his way to the front and stood, with snarled upper-lip over discoloured teeth, gazing fiercely toward the railway station whence the prisoners were coming.

“Cursed Frenchmen!” he cried in the uncouth, elided syllables of his dialect. “Only wait—I’ll tear the heart out of you!” He gripped with his bony hand in the air before his eyes. Then turning to his neighbour he asked in a tone of naïve simplicity: “Are they white, these Frenchmen?”

The girl shrank from the ignorant brutality of this old savage who was of her race, speaking a language that was, though deformed, her own. She felt bewildered, buffeted, stunned by the surge of malevolent passion that welled, hot-breathed, from the crowd. Meek shopkeepers, docile workpeople, women whose familiar talk was only of children and clothes—they were all transformed, magicked into sinister beings, where the soul of humanity was ab-

sent from its image. This crowd-mind that had no thought and but one single impulse, appalled her with its reckless ferocity. She glanced about her for an avenue of escape. Her father was laughing excitedly, senselessly. The Justizrat stood pale and grim, his lips tight, his eyes flaming.

The clamour close at hand leaped to the howl of hatred that swept along the street toward her. They were coming! She forgot all in an impulse of curiosity. The bulk of a prancing horse, hindquarters close, dangerous, obtruded itself for an instant. Then she saw the prim figure of the old Major von Toplitz, monocle in his eye, mouth stern under the white moustache, marching with stiff, precise step down the centre of the roadway, as indifferent to the shouts of the crowd as though he were solitary on a parade-ground. Behind him came a squad of *Landsturm*—old men with rugged faces under the shakoes of a bygone day, in old blue uniforms with red epaulettes, antique rifles at the slope, fixed bayonets glittering in the sun. The veterans marched with conscious pride, in level ranks and heavy step. There was the sketch of a cheer as they passed—and then, immediately, the howl of execration burst forth in full intensity.

Minna stared, expecting she knew not what of repulsive, of hate-compelling. Behind the squad of *Landsturm* soldiers marched a solitary figure in tight-fitting black tunic and red breeches. As one looks, fascinated, to the face of a condemned, the girl

gazed eagerly at the countenance of this lonely man whose passage evoked such a storm of vituperation. It was white but calm. A soft brown beard lent a maturity to the quiet dignity of the poise of the head. The forehead was swathed in a bandage, but a kepi with a red velvet band was in exact military position.

"A doctor," she heard the Justizrat remark.

The prisoner turned his head indifferently toward her as he passed. For one moment she met his eyes full. They swept over her.

He passed out of sight, was succeeded without pause by a column of haggard men in an ill-kept formation of fours who stumbled and blundered along at a pace that was evidently too fast for them. The girl shrank at their aspect. Not a man but was bandaged somewhere, but the bandages were stained, clotted and dirty. Their uniforms were torn, caked with mud or grey with dust. Their eyes looked white out of faces that were grimed with filth and drawn with suffering. They passed, hobbling with sticks, supporting each other, swaying like drunken men with hands pawing the air in front of them blindly as they lurched, gasping with open mouths in the dust of the street. A long-strung file of *Landsturm* soldiers marched on each side of them, shouted harsh injunctions to keep place in the column, shepherded this mob of broken men with the butts of their rifles as a shepherd pushes his blind flock with the crook. And on either side of the street the crowd of civil-

ians, hardly kept back by the mounted police, raved at them, shook their fists, screamed like demons. A hail of small objects, bits of vegetables, garbage, small stones, fell upon the miserable hurrying column.

"*Paris kaput! Paris kaput! Paris kaput!*"¹ shrieked the crowd in monotonous repetition. "*Paris kaput!*" It was as though they expected the captives to be annihilated with this announcement of the final disaster. Few, only, in the hurrying stream turned their heads. The crowd screamed the louder, like red Indians insulting the prisoners borne to the stake, raging to find some word that would pierce to the heart. Failing, they surged, in ugly rushes, in a rain of blows from stick and umbrellas, onto the column feebly protected by the cursing, overwhelmed *Landsturm* veterans. A howl that was the howl for blood of a pack in cry resounded down the street.

"Useless mouths, useless mouths," Minna heard the Justizrat repeating as he was pushed toward her in an eddy of the crowd. His old face was like stone.

A string of wagons followed the column on foot. She saw that they were laden with men who could not move. Grey faces, bandage-masked, looked listlessly over their sides. There was another rush of the mob. She saw men and women trying to clamber

¹"*Kaput*"—a slang word in common use which corresponds roughly to the English "done in," the French "*fichu*." Everything enemy was "*kaput*" in the early days of German victories.

onto the wagons, trying to find a foothold on the spokes of the slowly revolving wheels, slashing with sticks at the helpless passengers within. A policeman plunged his horse vainly among the crowd, amid a frightful outburst of cries. She turned sick, dizzy—reeled fainting into the arms of the Justizrat—felt herself lifted out of the throng.

They were a merry company seated round the supper-table in the Commandant's quarters at the fort. The Major, cheeks flushed above the white moustache, had almost ceased his attempts to replace the monocle, less and less permanent in its position with each succeeding glass. He sat now with the muscles of his eye screwed up to hold it, unconscious that it dangled on his breast, and smiled stupidly at Minna, who was seated modestly at the extremity of her side of the table. The Justizrat was attentive to her—but with a sedulous, impersonal care she obscurely resented. She felt she was being watched over, not for herself but for her potentialities—like a stud-animal. Her mother, at the other side of the Justizrat, turned her strongly featured harsh face toward the lawyer and endeavoured to force his attention to herself by continual appeals to his judgment on matters of general interest. Frau Hartmann was a woman of much force of character and powerful though limited intelligence. She was the real head of the Hartmann factory. Scarcely concealing her contempt for her insignificant husband, she habitually talked with the old lawyer as

though in him alone she had found her peer. The Justizrat irritated her by obstinately retaining his air of cool superiority and reserving his admiration for his own wife. Frau Kramer sat opposite, next to the bibulously excited factory-proprietor. A meek, unsoured little woman, she smiled to see her idolised husband paying attentions to the future daughter-in-law she cordially loved. The Major, a widower since many years, made gallant remarks to her at intervals. She smiled sweetly, only half comprehending them, in the happiness of this unclouded moment. Was not her boy safe—the war as good as won?

“Fill up, Kramer! Fill up, Hartmann!—Frau Kramer, you permit?—Frau Hartmann?” cried the Major, brandishing the champagne-bottle. “Paris! Don’t take Paris every day! *Ach*, what a war! what a war!”

“*Jawohl!*” cried the manufacturer. “It’s a good war—a good war! At first I was frightened, I will confess, Herr Major. The seas closed to us—all our foreign trade gone—so it looked. But it was a good thing. I shut down the factory at once—that was my wife’s idea, was it not, *Schatz?*—for we had been overproducing heavily. Now our stocks are nearly all worked off at good prices, and we shall start again with the world’s markets clamouring for our goods. *Dank sei Gott*, the French and Belgian competition have been killed for years. Most-favoured-nation terms everywhere and ruinous indem-

nities on our rivals, *nicht wahr*, Herr Kramer? *Ach*, it is a good war—a good, quick war!”

The Justizrat looked up.

“It is the end of the first phase only, my friend,” he said. “We are supreme on the Continent—a homogeneous Central Empire that will force its way to the Mediterranean with the terms of peace, a Central Empire that will dominate Russia in the east and Asia Minor in the south, but we have yet to win world-power. *Ach!*”—he filled his glass—“we shall win it. With all these resources at our command, we shall fling ourselves on England and crush her! Her colonies will fall away at the first disaster. She has no army; the war will be over before the half-million men Kitchener has called for are in uniform. She has a strong fleet, yes—but we shall hurl ourselves across the North Sea despite all opposition, and capture London as we have captured Paris. The British Empire will pass to us. That will be the end of this war—the end for a generation, perhaps. Then, with new, with overwhelming strength, we shall conquer America; they will never wake up from the blind dollar-worship until we are at their throats,” he added contemptuously. “They are utterly defenceless. America, Asia, the world!” He raised his glass. “To German *Kultur!* The *Kultur* of conquerors! *Prosit!*”

“*Prosit!*” echoed the others, only half understanding this exposition of their creed, but wholly ap-

proving its tendency. Frau Kramer alone commented.

“So long as Otto comes back to us!” she said with a sigh.

Minna remained silent, thoughtful. She was proud, very proud, of the Fatherland. The shock of war had stirred her emotional nature to its depths, had awakened the full power of the unquestioning patriotism native to the German temperament and sedulously fostered by every influence, scholastic, literary and religious, that had affected her young life. She thrilled with a vivid sense of the victorious might of the race to which she belonged. Then the thought of Otto came to her, linked with a regret at his slight share in the military glory with which the country was intoxicated, but less poignant than her bitter outburst of the morning. She had wept, solitary in her room that afternoon, ashamed of herself, realising how deeply she loved her doctor-lover, trying to find a justification for him as a non-combatant. Then she thought of the other doctor, the lonely prisoner marching at the head of that melancholy procession, saw his eyes turn toward her—sweep over her. She banished the thought. It returned, metamorphosed, in a vague vision of the wretched prisoners, cowering, faint with their wounds, behind the barbed wire. She shuddered at the recollection of prolonged, hopeless groans which had emanated from a tent behind the barrier when she was passing the prisoners' camp on her way to

the fort. In a sudden revulsion she came back to the light, the optimism, of this little feast to celebrate her country's victory.

"*Ja—Paris—first stage only!*" said the Major. "London next! Paris! *Ach! 'S ist doch prächtig!*" Then suddenly remembering: "Haven't seen the communiqué yet! Be in to-night—certain." He turned to the soldier-servant who stood like a statue behind his chair. "Joseph! Papers in yet?"

"*Ja, Herr Major—glaube wohl.*"

"Fetch one!"

The servant went out.

"Fill up, *meine Herren!*" cried the Major. "Full glasses—finest communiqué of the war—drink to it, eh!" The wine foamed up in the glasses.

The servant returned, laid a folded newspaper before his master. The Major opened it, scanned it with puzzled brows, felt for the monocle that had once more slipped from his eye—scrutinised it anew.

The Justizrat tapped impatiently on the table.

"The news, Herr Major—the news! Let us have it!"

The Major shook his head with a bewildered expression and threw the newspaper across to the lawyer. "*Mein Gott!*" was all he could utter.

The Justizrat snatched at the sheet—stared at it, startled, as he read the emphatically thickened type of the communiqué.

"Read it, Kramer!" cried Hartmann from the other side of the table. "What the devil——"

The Justizrat drew a deep breath.

“‘*Communiqué of the 10th September,*’” he read. “‘*The portions of the army which had pressed in the pursuit as far as and across the Marne east of Paris have been attacked from Paris and between Meaux and Montmirail by superior forces. They resisted the enemy throughout two days of heavy combats, when the approach of new strong enemy columns was announced, and their right wing was withdrawn.*’—*Mein Gott! It is defeat!*”

The hush which fell upon the company at this startling news—this incredible confession of defeat, the first in the war—lasted through minute after minute while none could find a word to say. It was broken by a knocking at the door.

Joseph went to open it. He returned with an envelope in his hand.

“A telegram, Herr Major—for Herr Kramer.”

The Justizrat tore open the envelope—uttered a wild cry.

“Otto! Otto is missing!”

His wife shrieked and collapsed in a faint. Minna rose to her feet, stretched out her hand for the telegram.

“Missing? What—what does that mean?” she asked unsteadily. “Not—not——”

“Prisoner,” said the Major with impatient decision, his mind preoccupied with the communiqué into

which he was trying to read another meaning. "Kramer, this isn't so terrible, after all!" His tone was plaintive, appealing, his pose of clipped speech forgotten. "They do not say defeat!"

"Prisoner," echoed Minna. "Then there is hope—hope still?"

"Hope still! Of course there's hope!" exclaimed the Major. "They don't say a word about the left wing of the centre. It's only the right wing that is withdrawn. Withdrawn! Withdrawn—not retreat!" He reassumed his habitual manner. "Battle proceeding. See! Made prisoners too, and guns! Only a setback—a check. Go forward again. Never fear, Fräulein—Paris ours! To-morrow's communiqué—certain!"

"Oh," cried Minna, "but I want to know about Otto! Does it mean he has been left behind—a prisoner—perhaps wounded, Father-in-law?"

The Justizrat had gone round to his wife, was bending over her. He looked up.

"It may be so, Minna," he said.

Frau Hartmann was bustling round the stricken woman.

"Be quiet, Minna!" she snapped. "Heinrich, go and fetch my smelling-salts."

Her husband obeyed meekly. Minna sank down in her seat, hid her head upon an arm flung on the table and burst into tears.

The Major strode up and down the room, newspaper in hand, making a disjointed but more and

more hopeful commentary upon the communiqué. He was quite blind to the human distress of his friends in his absorption in the gigantic event of which these few lines of black type were the first intelligence.

"*Natürlich!* Not a word about centre—left wing. That's the battle—real battle—east of Paris—fighting to cut French from eastern frontier—still proceeding. Break through—Paris ripe plum! *Ja, da ist's!* Withdraw right wing—good strategy—occupy French—strike elsewhere." He stopped for a moment. "Not defeat! No! Impossible! Impossible! Ridiculous—ridiculous, Herr Kramer!" He strode fiercely up to the Justizrat, who had revived his wife and was now supporting her, soothingly, with his arm. The poor woman, conscious anew of the calamity, was sobbing, "Otto! Otto!" in tones of heartrending despair. Her husband was endeavouring to persuade her that it was still possible that they would receive good news.

"Good news!" cried the Major. "Of course we shall get good news!"

At that moment Herr Hartmann returned with his wife's smelling-salts.

"Herr Major," he said, "the French doctor is outside and wants to speak to you."

"*What?*" almost screamed the Major. "French doctor? What is he doing here? How—how the devil did he escape? How?"

"He is with an *Unteroffizier,*" explained the manu-

facturer, shrinking back from the wrath of the commandant. "I don't know anything more."

"He can't see me!" cried the Major. "Won't see him!"

"Pardon, Herr Major," said a strange voice quietly in a good German accent, "but I must see you!"

"The Major turned to see the French doctor standing in the room; behind him the gaunt figure of a *Landsturm* soldier filled the doorway. Every one in the room looked up, at this intrusion, stared at the stranger. He stood calm and dignified, the mouth under the short brown beard firmly set, the eyes under the bandaged forehead looking unabashed at his jailer.

"Out!" cried the Major, choked with rage at this audacious invasion of his private quarters. "Out! At once!—Gunther," he shouted to the *Landsturm* soldier, "take him away! You are under arrest yourself for bringing him! Throw him out!"

"Pardon, Herr Major, I come to inform you that typhus has broken out among your prisoners. I have just come from a dying man. Perhaps it would be inadvisable for any one to touch me?" The Frenchman smiled, sure of safety from molestation. The *Landsturm* soldier and the servant shrank horrified from his neighbourhood.

"Typhus!" screamed the Major. "Out! Out! Go out at once! Don't bring your filthy diseases here."

"I might point out," said the Frenchman calmly, "that the disease is due to the shockingly insanitary conditions in which the German government has seen fit to transport its prisoners. Those men were picked up a week ago on the battlefield; they have been travelling for days in filthy cattle-trucks—they have had no attention but what I could divide among five hundred of them—they have been starved. Until their arrival here, they had not eaten for four days. You have provided them with a little thin soup, I will admit. In these circumstances, I must refuse to go until my demands have been complied with." He took a step toward the Commandant.

The Major dodged back in terror.

"What do you want? What do you want?" he cried.

"I want a proper isolation hospital for the infected cases, medical stores,—for there are none in the camp,—proper food for the sick men, beds for the wounded who are now lying on the ground, and medical assistance."

"I cannot!" snapped the Major. "The prisoners' quarters are arranged for by high authority. You are their medical attendant—no other!"

"I am aware," replied the Frenchman, "that in defiance of the Geneva Convention I am detained as a prisoner, and I desire nothing better than to care for my unfortunate countrymen. But it is necessary that while I am attending to the typhus cases some other doctor should visit the wounded who are

not yet infected. I wish also," he said with a glance at the women in the room, "to appeal to the women of the town to assist in nursing the wounded. Nurses are essential—at once!" He ended with a tone of authority.

"*Verboten!*" snapped the Major. "Absolutely forbidden for civilians to come in contact with the prisoners.—Gunther!" He turned to the *Landsturm* soldier. "Double the guards round the camp. Shoot any prisoner who approaches the barbed wire. Forbid any man to enter the camp. The prisoners' rations are to be put down inside the gateway and left."

"Do you condemn these men to death?" cried the Frenchman, anger mastering him.

"Cursed Frenchmen!" said the Major. " *Sie mögen krepieren!* Go away!"

"*Væ victis!*" murmured the Justizrat, his face grim and pitiless. "We may have a long war—so many useless mouths the less. You are right, Herr Major," he added in a louder tone. "The German population must run no risk of infection. Our *Kultur* must not be endangered as a result of sentimentality!"

Herr Hartmann had retreated to the farthest corner of the room, whence he stared, in the fascination of terror, at this man who carried death in his clothes. The sweat pearled upon his forehead. Frau Hartmann and the wife of the Justizrat clasped each other, frightened and trembling, stood speechless.

At a little distance, Minna contemplated this fearless captive, who held his ground, head high, eyes flashing contempt. She could not take her gaze from his face.

“Herr Major,” said the Frenchman, “I cannot be dismissed thus. These cursed Frenchmen, as you call them, are men—men even as your sons, the sons and husbands of your friends here, sons and husbands that may be lying even now, wounded and prisoners, in French hands. Would you wish that they should be inhumanly condemned to death—as you condemn these soldiers now? They have fought for their country as yours are fighting for theirs! I appeal to you. Think of one dear to you—of whose fate at this moment you are ignorant—before you commit this inhumanity, this crime for which you will have to answer before the tribunal of the nations!”

The eloquence of his tone was more powerful even than his words. The eyes above the brown beard were a flame that none could meet.

“Johann!” cried Frau Kramer, looking at her husband.

The face of the Justizrat went a shade harder.

“The German conscience is its own tribunal!” he said.

The girl shuddered. A vision, the vision of Otto “missing” with all that it implied, rose before her. An obscure combat raged somewhere deep within

her, filled her breast. Suddenly she sprang forward.

"Herr Frenchman," she cried, "I will help! I can nurse—I passed my examination."

"*Minna!*" The cry was one simultaneous chorus of horror, its gesture a simultaneous movement to restrain. The Major clutched vainly at her as she passed him. She ranged herself by the side of the Frenchman, seized his hand.

"Now!" she cried. "Touch me who dare! These men shall not die without at least one to care for them!"

"Minna!" screamed her mother. "Come away this instant! Drag her away, Heinrich! *Ach*, she has dishonoured us!"

Her father, paralysed at the mere idea of contact with the infection, did not move.

"Minna," said the Justizrat sternly, "come away! Think of Otto!"

The girl stood firm.

"I stay with this man—in the camp," she said. "You cannot, dare not, touch me. I stay with him because Otto, in his place, would do as he does!"

"*Unerhört!*" cried the Major. "She cannot stay! The camp is isolated. I have given the order."

"Will you dare to remove me?" flashed the girl at him. "You will provide the necessities this doctor demands, Herr Major, or there will be such a scandal at my death in your neglected camp that you will be disgraced!"

The Major swore in his most vehement parade-ground manner.

"Some straw is essential at once," said the Frenchman with a quiet smile.

The Major swore again. "Get it, Gunther!" he barked. "Straw! At once!"

The *Landsturmer* saluted, went out. The Justizrat groaned.

The girl turned to the French doctor who reminded her so much of Otto.

"You will have me help you, Herr Frenchman?" she asked.

The Frenchman's eyes looked into hers. They communed in a flash that transcended the cloaks of nationality and sex, approved each other.

"Willingly, Fräulein," he answered. "Let us go, for there is much to do."

They moved toward the door. The Justizrat sprang at them, muttering to himself: "My grandsons—my grandsons!" He barred the way.

"You shall not go!" he cried.

The girl held up a warning hand, while with the other she retained the Frenchman's grasp.

"Stand back, Herr Kramer!" she said. "You must run no risks. I am possibly infected." She smiled. "There are perhaps other conquerors than yours. I go with this one. Were Otto here, he would go too!"

They passed out.

VIII

THE SEA DEVIL

IN the vicinity of the submarine harbour at Wilhelmshaven, a strong cordon of Landwehr infantrymen, helmeted, greatcoated, with fixed bayonets, kept back with much show of authority a meagre crowd of sightseers. Few men were among the little throng that shivered in the chilly wind of a February morning; those that stood there were workmen in dirty overalls, obviously lingering for a moment or two on their way home from a night shift at one of the great machine shops whose forest of chimneys in the background overlaid the grey sky with a whelm of brown fumes. But these workmen, roughly garbed and with the pallour of fatigue visible through the smeared dirt of their faces, offered an immediate contrast to their fellow spectators, the silent, shawl-clutching women, the restless, sharp-featured children, even to the stolid, grey-clad soldiers in their serried rank. By comparison, they were plump, well nourished. Their voices, as they shouted witticism or coarse repartee, rang strangely loud and sonorous over the hushed, almost plaintive, murmur of the crowd.

Dark-ringed eyes staring out of white faces, thin under the close-drawn shawls, for the most part in black dresses of wretched quality, the warped soles of their boots betraying the paper composition, the women conversed with one another in low voices. The bony hands of each and all grasped firmly a little packet of cards, clutched to the breast with the twist of the shawl—their passports to the necessities of life. Their demeanour was listless, apathetic, here and there convulsed, suddenly and without warning, by the querulous, exaggerated anger of thin-sheathed nerves. But the high-pitched cry hushed abruptly as the infantry officer, pacing in front of his men, turned his head toward it. Dodging around the skirts of the women, peering under the elbows of the soldiers, the pinched faces of the children, their high cheek bones purple with the cold, were vividly eloquent of privation. Their eyes, preternaturally large, roved restlessly alert, as if questing a prey for the furtive hands to snatch. Thin wrists and knees protruded, sticklike, from their thread-bare, outworn clothing. None played. On all was an uncanny expression of premature age. A baby hugged in a woman's shawl whimpered hungrily.

Along the roadway behind the little crowd, a heavy military motor lorry lumbered noisily, its rubberless tires ringing on the cobbles. It left behind it a suffocating stench of "petrol substitute."

From the adjacent buildings hung many flags,

the red, white and black of Germany predominant among the colours of Austria-Hungary, Bulgaria, and Turkey. Stretched across one of the houses, in large white letters on a red ground, grimly significant above that pinched throng, were the words: "*Gott strafe England!*" A little farther on, similarly displayed, was the antistrophe "*Unsere U-Boot-Helden! Gott schütze sie!*"¹ And, explanatory of this assemblage, a third house announced: "*Der Rache-Tag! 1 Februar, 1917!*"²

A couple of official motor cars swung through a soldier-walled opening in the crowd and sped down the wide, paved roadway of the dock. Where they stopped, a guard of honour presented arms with swift, precise movements, and a military band struck up the air: "*Lieb' Vaterland, magst ruhig sein.*" A group of naval officers saluted as some thick-coated dignitaries descended from the cars. There was much stepping forward, heel-clicking salutes, shaking of hands, more salutes, and a backward step. The dignitaries were plump and affable. The naval officers, tanned of face and alert of bearing, were naval officers all the world over.

On the side of the dock was an alleyway of young fir trees in tubs. Their branches were arched over a red carpet that led to the waterside. There, closely ranked, lay six submarines, the black-crossed white flag, eagle centred, of the imperial navy flut-

¹ "Our submarine heroes. God protect them!"

² "The day of vengeance. 1st February, 1917!"

tering from their short masts. The dignitaries and their satellites passed down the corridor of trees, boarded the vessels.

The dock gates of the submarine harbour were decked with evergreen also.¹ Half an hour later, they opened to allow the passage of six long bodies slipping through the water, with high superstructures and conning towers manned by sailors who waved and cheered. From the dock came the brass and drums of the military band—“*Deutschland über Alles!*” From behind welled the fierce, speeding shouts of a hungry race that saw, in a vision of hatred, fat corn ships wallowing through the sea toward a gluttonous England—saw them clutched one and all, from this day forth, into the swallowing deep. The plump dignitaries had made impressive little speeches, full of “frightfulness.” “The whole world shall stand aghast at the exploits of our sea devils!” one of them had announced. “Generations yet unborn shall remember with a shudder the anniversary of February the First!” The naval officers had listened with straight faces. In long file, the “sea devils” slid out through the calm waters of the harbour, their oil engines silently pulsing them onward to the mist-hung arena of their war.

They were sped by the vindictive hatred of a misery that, hopeless of relief, craved savagely to inflict an equal suffering on the scatheless enemy.

¹ Vouched for by the *Frankfurter Zeitung*.

Kapitän Leutnant Karl Hoffmann, commander of the U-026, joined his second in command in the narrow, canvas-screened navigating bridge on the summit of the high conning tower. Behind them, around the steersman, rose the tall tubes of the three periscopes. In front of them stretched the long, narrow, railed deck—little wider than a gangplank—featureless save for the battened hatchway marking the lair of a 14-pounder gun. Running “light,” the U-026 was butting into a fresh southwesterly gale with all the force of her two-thousand-horsepower, eighteen-knot engines. The high, bluff bows that flared away to the junction of the superstructure, and the humped, porpoise back of the hull, crashed incessantly into long rollers that lifted themselves wall-like, hung poised for an instant, and then were divided in flying spray and a thud of green water resolved into foam upon the deck. The lift of the brown-grey carcass, as the wave rushed aft, left two long cascades of sea water pouring from the superstructure to the hull. She ducked and rolled, every now and then sliding to take a vicious header into the green seas that hurried and jostled one another, eager for her destruction. To windward, ragged strips of cloud, dark under a grey sky, were reaching out from the coming squall. To the north and east the gust that had passed heaped itself rounded into the heaven, intensely black, the sea beneath it copperas streaked and crowned with vivid white. Within the circumscribed horizon of trailing

cloud and tumbling, hurrying waves the U-026 was the only thing at variance with the gale.

"*Gott sei dank!* This is going to last!" shouted the commander, as the two officers suddenly turned their backs to a flying scud that smote hard upon their oilskins. "No chance of their damned aircraft to-day!"

Leutnant Wohlsinger grinned all over his wet, weather-reddened face.

"We shouldn't be here long!" He clutched at the rail as, with a lurching, sideways dip, the U-026 threatened to bury herself completely under a suddenly towering wall of water. Recovering his breath and wiping the salt from his eyes, he added: "I hate these confounded shallow seas."

"Yes," replied the commander, pulling the sagging canvas "dodger" higher upon its supporting stanchions. "If only one of the others can catch the *Lithuania!* We shan't stop long in this trap!" He glanced behind him, where, in response to a previous order, several men were rigging the wireless mast. "We may get some news."

Wohlsinger glanced also at the aerials, now being hoisted.

"Hope we shan't have to wait long for it!" he shouted. "Bad place to advertise one's self!" His eyes swept the misty horizon anxiously. "We're on the Holyhead route."

His superior nodded.

"Can't help it. It's eight bells. Commodore

should be talking." He also scanned the waste of tumbling waters topped with streamers of flying spin-drift as the squall rushed down upon them. It was empty of any ship but their own.

A man's head emerged from the half-open cap of the conning tower, was touched by outstretched fingers in a sketch of a salute spoiled by a violent roll of the vessel.

"A message, Herr Kapitän!"

Hoffmann waved him out of the way and swung himself down to the control platform within the conning tower. He switched on the electric light, took the paper from the sailor, and read the message. It was prefaced by the code letters of the transmitting ship and his own.

V-198 reports *Lithuania* sighted 12:38 p. m. 50 miles N. W. Cape Clear steaming 24 knots course S. E. escort two destroyers beat off attack one destroyer believed damaged. V-198 out of action repairing rendezvous. No communication with V-56 or T-29. Feared loss. Am taking up position 7.20 W. 51.59N. Maintain your station.¹ Communicate 8 a. m. to-morrow.²

"What news?" called a voice from the ladder at his feet. Hoffmann looked to see the round, pasty face of the engineer officer, Marine Ober-Ingenieur Wolff, staring up at him. The engineer officer

¹V before a submarine's number indicates that she was built in the Voos yard. T similarly indicates the Tecklenburg yard. U stands for the Urania yard as well as, generally, for "Unterseeboot." It is alleged that there are, or have been, at least two hundred of each of these marks.

²German time.

scrambled up to take the message he held out. His dark, beady eyes scanned the paper, looked up to Hoffmann.

"It falls to us, then?" The curse which followed the question was a measure of his gratification at the prospect.

"Unless the commodore catches her," replied Hoffmann shortly. A fortnight of close confinement with Ober-Ingenieur Wolff had induced an almost physical antipathy in his commanding officer. He was impatient of even the briefest conversation with him, and meals were a torture. At the uncalled-for curse, a sudden disgust rose bitter within him. "We shall do our duty, cost what it will," he said harshly, and bent over the chart, pricking out the commodore's position, pencilling a calculation.

"It will cost our lives!" said Wolff, not to be silenced, as he turned to go.

The U-026 was one of the squadron of six boats under the orders of a commodore. For a week after arriving at their cruising grounds, they had raided the incoming merchant shipping, sinking by torpedo and gunfire. In these operations one of their number had been lost. Then the commodore had called them together for a great, concerted operation. The British Government had chartered the mammoth transatlantic *Lithuania*, had filled her to the brim, staterooms, cabins, dining halls included, with wheat. Her cargo would feed the British Isles for a fortnight. It was known that she had left New York,

and the German admiralty was making a great effort to intercept her. Out in the Atlantic was a flotilla of large-ocean-keeping submarines. The *Lithuania* had eluded them. On the north of Ireland route another flotilla lurked. On the ordinary southern route—which the liner had chosen—the flotilla to which the U-026 belonged lay in ambush. So far the luck had been with the English. The outpost boat was crippled. Two others had disappeared in the mysterious silence that was only too common an end. The great liner had still to run the gauntlet of the commodore's boat in the St. George's Channel and the U-026 off Anglesey. She was rushing toward them now at twenty-four knots an hour. Hoffmann finished his calculation. It was four-fifteen p. m. Allowing for a divergent, zigzag course, she should pass about eight to-morrow morning.

Hoffmann climbed again to the grey cold of the navigating bridge. He had scarcely drawn himself erect when the *hochbootsman* (boatswain), peering over the dodger by Wohlsinger's side, uttered a sharp cry:

"Steamer on the port bow!"

As the U-026 lifted herself askew on a great wave, Hoffmann had a glimpse of a smudge of dark smoke mingling with the streaming cloud curtains of the horizon. The glance was sufficient. The necessity of avoiding discovery was imperative. He shouted an order. The *hochbootsman* blew a pierc-

ing blast upon his whistle. Men came scrambling up from below in quick succession.

A few busy minutes, and the wireless mast was stowed, the navigating bridge cleared, the steersman installed at the wheel within the conning tower. High up between the oval steel walls Hoffmann sat perched on a little seat, his head in the lookout cap which surmounted the tower. For yet a moment the U-026 lay bare upon the surface. In her buoyant roll and rise the rounded back on either side of the superstructure lifted itself, glistening under the rush of water pouring on it from above. Then the rise became less and less pronounced, the settlement deeper, heavier at each dive. The rounded back showed itself no more. The long superstructure wallowed in the surrounding water, was engulfed. A long line of white foam, of convergingly striated turmoil, as above a submerged reef, marked its position. A wave rolled straight, without obstacle, to the conning tower and broke in dark-green translucence over the lookout cap. The boat rolled somewhat, pitched scarcely at all. The pulse of the oil engines changed into the fast whir of the electric motors. The U-026 was running awash.

Through the thick glass pane of the lookout cap, Hoffmann gazed earnestly at the distant smudge of smoke, just discernible over the leaping, spume-torn wave top on a level with his eyes. On what course was the danger moving? Discovery would be almost certainly fatal to their chances, but, unless

forced, he did not wish to dive. Of the surface mine fields he had, thanks to an admirable intelligence service, a good chart, and could avoid them. Of the deeply anchored submarine mines—and other unpleasantnesses—that must protect the port of Liverpool against such as he, he had no more than a shrewd suspicion. He had no wish to bump into a sudden explosion. The hostile ship was steering directly athwart his bows. Hoffmann thanked vague divinities that they were to leeward of it, veiled by the cloud of her smoke. He turned his gaze from left to right—and shouted a sharp order suddenly.

Away on the starboard quarter, still far distant in a smother of spray, a destroyer was racing toward them. Even as he looked, he saw a spurt from her bows—saw a column of water leap straight up from a lifting wave, just short of them. Green seas rolled over the glass of the lookout cap. In obedience to his order, the U-026 had submerged, was diving downward under the guidance of her deflected horizontal rudders. He dropped to the floor of the control platform, seized and twisted the two handles of the periscope tube, gazed into the binoculars at the bottom. He had one last glimpse of the pursuing destroyer, saw two more shell spouts leap from the sea, and then the periscope also was submerged.

He took his gaze from the periscope to see Wohlsinger smiling at him.

“Destroyer?” queried the lieutenant, with an experienced air.

"Yes, confound it!" said the commander, leaning over the chart. He put his finger on their approximate location, noted the fathom figures—here all too small—glanced at the depth-indicator dial. The needle turned steadily toward greater figures. He shouted another order. The movement of the needle was checked—recovered. It swung gently up and down over double figures. The commander ran his finger over the chart, stopped. "We'll go to bottom here for the night," he announced. He gave an order to the steersman, changing the course. The boat pitched as she swung round, seemed to float in as easily disturbed an equipoise as a toy balloon's in the air. In this shallow sea, the gale above stirred the depths appreciably. The boat "pumped," rose and fell vertically—a sickening sensation, with the floor dropping sheer away beneath the feet—and rolled violently. At the full ten knots an hour of her whirring electric motors, the U-026 ran for safety.

The commander doffed his stiff and dripping oilskins, stood erect in the close-buttoned blue jacket with the two gold bands and crown upon the cuffs. Freed from the sou-wester, his head was revealed as young, purposeful, well balanced. The grey eyes had a humorous twinkle.

"The sea will be alive with them now," he said to his sub, with an upward gesture of the head and a grin. They stood together on the control platform of the conning tower, Wohlsinger likewise divested

of his oilskins. "Can't you see 'em—cursing us for bringing 'em out on a day like this? But I think we've dodged 'em. They'll probably think we've run to earth—here!" His left arm flung amicably over the shoulder of his junior, he drew him to the chart, pointed a locality. "Thank God, they can't use their aircraft to-day!"

"You don't think they'll stop the *Lithuania*?" queried Wohlsinger. There was an untrammelled freedom in his tone that was eloquent of the good relations between him and his chief. Quite obviously friendship born of many perils, surmounted in common, linked the two young men.

"No. She's too far on the southern course. They might divert her to Southampton—they can't dock her anywhere else in the Channel. But I don't think they will. They'll have a swarm out to protect her to-morrow and try to run her through. Our best chance is that they think we have run farther afield."

He glanced up at the depth indicator and again at the chart. Then he shouted an order to the man at the horizontal steering gear and clanged the engine-room telegraph to half speed, to "slow." Another order filled all the diving tanks to their extreme capacity. The depth indicator that had leaped upward sank slowly. There was a bump, a jar, a gentle grating along the bottom. Once more the engine-room telegraph clanged. "Stop!" Rocking a little, the U-026 lay lightly upon the sea bed.

"There we are till to-morrow morning!" said

Hoffmann. "Come and have a hand at piquet. Pipe to *abendessen*, boatswain!"

They descended into the interior of the boat. The arch-roofed chamber, lit by electric light, a polished, gleaming torpedo lashed against each wall, bulk-headed aft for the engine-room, was being set out with trestle tables. Blue-jumpered men, panikin in hand, were settling themselves around them. A cook entered with a steaming dish. The commander and his junior turned in to the tiny officers' quarters, switched on the electric light.

They opened up the little table which, extended, filled nearly all the available space, and squeezed themselves round to the cushioned seats which sprang from the bulkheads. As calmly as though seated in the Officers' Club at Wilhelmshaven, instead of resting on the sea bed twenty fathoms below the patrol boats of their foes, with instant death as the penalty of discovery, they cut for the deal.

"You have the devil's own luck, Hoffmann!" grumbled Wohlsinger amicably, as he totted up the figures of the second rubber of six hands.

"I hope he's got enough to go round for all of us. We need it all." Ober-Ingenieur Wolff had entered the little cabin. He also squeezed himself round to a seat. "Still at that infernal game!"

Neither of his comrades so much as looked up. Imprisonment for a long period of time with an alien temperament is apt to sour the amenities of intercourse.

A frown lowered on the engineer's heavy, pasty face, scarred with an ugly reminiscence of his student days.

"We're nicely in the trap, it seems to me," he grumbled. "They've spotted us. If the weather clears, they'll have an aeroplane out for a certainty. We shan't have a dog's chance in these shallows. I believe the gale's blown itself out already." He finished with desperate pessimism, glaring at the card players. "I wish I had never volunteered for this cursed submarine service."

Hoffmann raised his head.

"So do I, Wolff," he said quietly.

Wohlsinger murmured something about a preference for Kiel and "Nachtleben."

Wolff turned on him furiously, the saber cut across his face livid with the rush of passionate blood.

"Do you suggest I am a coward?" he shouted, his self-control, sapped by long-continued nervous strain, utterly gone. "You shall give me satisfaction for that when we get back—you shall! Do you hear me?" Wohlsinger was imperturbably shuffling the cards, not even looking at him.

Hoffmann interposed.

"That will do, Wolff," he said, looking straight at the twitching face. "Remember you are a German officer on board a boat that I have the honour to command. It is unnecessary to take the crew into your confidence, and I forbid it. Your courage is not in question. The suggestion—made originally

by yourself—was that there are other spheres of naval activity more congenial to you. We agree.”

“I’m just as eager to drown these Englishers as you are,” grumbled the engineer. “Only I don’t see the necessity of committing suicide to do it. Nobody will be more pleased than I if all their food ships are sunk and all the *schweinhunde* starve—every dog of them!”

“I wonder how short of food they really are?” remarked Wohlsinger, feeling the danger of the engineer’s bad temper and trying to induce an amicable conversation. “The *Hamburger Nachrichten* was positive before we left that they had not got a week’s supply in the country. Did you read that account of the food riots in London, Hoffmann? If they lose this cargo, their game’s up.”

“It may be so,” agreed Hoffmann. “But one reads so many silly stories in the papers.”

“I believe they’re starving already,” said Wolff fiercely, determined at all costs to hostility toward his superior. “I don’t see why you shouldn’t believe the papers. They must be starving. They don’t grow anything, and we’re sinking all their ships. Good thing, too! I hope every pig dog of them—man, woman, and child—starves. That’s the way to serve the enemies of Germany—Belgium, Servia, Poland—and now England. *Die sollen alle crepieren!*”

Hoffmann leaned his chin upon his hand, looked thoughtful. He saw as in a vision the pinched

throng of women and children near the docks at Wilhelmshaven on the morning that they had started. That kind of thing—only worse—Belgium, Servia, Poland, England! He drew a long breath.

“Well, one must do one’s duty. War is a terrible thing. I like torpedoing battleships. I don’t mind a fight. But I must confess I don’t like sinking liners and I don’t like making war on women and children.”

“England started it!” said Wolff brutally.

“Yes,” chorused Hoffmann and Wohlsinger, with complete conviction. “England started it!” Wohlsinger cut the cards upon the table. “Well, destruction to the *Lithuania!* Come on, Hoffmann—there’s time for another game.”

Presently a man entered, laid the table. The three officers ate.

Not without some bickering, the weary hours of inactivity passed. At last they turned in. The U-026 gently cradled her crew as they slept peacefully at the bottom of the sea.

The next morning Hoffmann and Wohlsinger were sitting at their coffee. Wolff had already finished, had gone to his engines.

“I shan’t rise till the latest possible minute,” Hoffmann was saying. “They are certain to have patrols out. Eight bells, the commodore said. We shall have to rise then.”

“I wonder what the weather’s like this morning?” queried Wohlsinger.

"Yes." An expression of anxiety passed over the commander's face. "That's what has been haunting me. Please God, the gale is continuing! What's that?"

Both officers jumped up in sudden alarm. Overhead there was a grating, scraping noise, resonant on the metal hull.

"Dragnets!"

Both stood, stock-still, listening to the dread sound. Wohlsinger's eyes held his commander's face. The scraping noise continued, with heavy bangs where the net tore free of an obstacle on the hull. They strove to determine the direction of the movement of the net. It seemed to be passing aft.

Followed by his junior, Hoffmann dashed out, shouted quick orders to the fear-paralysed crew, sprang up to the control platform. Fortunately for the U-026, the dragnet had come in contact with the nose and not the stern. As yet it was scraping only over a part of the foredeck. The engines of the submarine awoke—half speed astern! The bottom bumped and grated on the sea floor. Every ear was at strain to follow the scraping of those deadly steel links, unseen, but vividly imagined, overhead. The friction was quicker; they could hear the folds of the net slipping. Hoffmann clanged the engine-room telegraph. Full speed astern! He ordered a deflection of the horizontal rudders that inclined her, tail up, nose down, from the sea bed. Overhead the steel links rattled and slipped, sonorously metallic on the

deck. There was a last quick rush, and then silence, save for the whirl of the electric motors. For yet an instant or two the backward run of the submarine continued. The bows rose to a level keel. Then Hoffmann switched her violently round to starboard, clanged the telegraph to full speed ahead. As she pitched and swung round, leaped forward, a violent shock smote her, flung her over on one side, threw every man on board off his feet. There was a muffled detonation.

"Just in time!" cried Wohlsinger, as he picked himself up. The submarine righted herself in heavy rolls. All knew the meaning of the shock and detonation. A charge of high explosive had been slid down one of the hawsers of the dragnet.

"Quick!" shouted Hoffmann. "The oil!"

Wohlsinger leaped into the interior of the vessel, ran to where the air-lock hatch protruded slightly downward from the steel roof. It was the means of escape in case of accident, but not of that did the lieutenant think now. Summoned by his orders, one man unscrewed the fastenings of the hatch. Another opened a drum of oil. The hatch was opened, the drum thrust in, the lock fastened again. A lever was pulled, opening the outer lid. Haply the keen-eyed foe above, searching the sea for signs of his success, would perceive the air bubbles, the oil upon the surface. In face of this accepted evidence of their destruction, he might renounce further efforts.

Ere Wohlsinger returned to his commander on the control platform, he smiled grimly at the scared, round face of the engineer thrust through the open door of the bulkhead. He reassured him with a word.

He found Hoffmann anxiously meditative. The crux of his mental debate was the condition of the weather. Was the gale continuing? Ignorant of that, he could not be sure whether they had been spotted from an aeroplane as they lay on the sea bed, and their destruction deliberately planned, or whether a sweeping dragnet had caught them in blind chance. If aerial observation was possible, it would be safer to lie on the bottom, simulating wreck. If the gale continued, he could slip away from this dangerous area, rise cautiously. It was seven-thirty. In any case, he was due to communicate with the commodore in half an hour. To do this he must come to the surface.

The commander decided to risk the weather. Consulting the chart, he set a course. Blindly, at fifteen fathoms, the submarine ran on.

For twenty minutes her totally submerged progress continued in a direction that should take her as far as possible from sight of land when emergence became necessary. Then, in obedience to his order, the deck inclined, bows up. She was rising. He stationed himself at the periscope.

When he first looked he saw only dimly translucent green; then quick, intermittent flashes of white

light; then a dark, vitreous, highly mobile surface of water at close quarters, suddenly and completely blotted out at intervals. Peering down into the binoculars, his vision emerged into a pale-blue sky, under which leaped, flashing and foaming, blue-green waves whose tops were on a plane with his sight. He turned the periscope by the side handles, scanning the entire narrow horizon, sixty degrees at a time. He saw neither sail nor smoke above the leaping wave tops. Overhead? He could only hope that the fresh wind kept the aeroplanes in their harbours. For a few minutes he held on cautiously just below the surface. Then the U-026 rose, blowing out her tanks.

As she rocked and pitched, light upon the waves, her deck was busy with men rigging the aerials in feverish haste. Hoffmann stood on top of the conning tower, anxiously searching the distances. The sea was empty, the sky also, the horizon misty. To the east, the sky was bright with the coming sun. He looked long and keenly at the southwest. There was no sign of the smoke he looked for.

The minutes passed. He glanced at the aerials now, humming like a harp in the wind. They should be talking. But no messenger came to him. He was already impatient when a man emerged from the cap of the conning tower, saluted.

"The operator reports that no communication can be made with the commodore, Herr Kapitän!"

Wohlsinger, curious, had followed the man. His

eyes exchanged a significant comment with his superior.

"Tell him to try again!" ordered Hoffmann curtly.

The man disappeared, and the two officers waited. But it was in vain. No contact could be established with their consort. In a voice of ice-cold decision, Hoffmann ordered the aerials to be taken down.

"Only we to stop her!" said Wohlsinger. His tone, that implied the epitaph of the other boat, was tinged with a doubt.

"It will be done," replied Hoffmann, with grim emphasis.

Once more the diving tanks of the U-026 were filled. Once more her hull sank below the waves, only her periscope projecting. In the oval conning tower, Hoffmann and Wohlsinger stood side by side, peering into the binoculars. Her engines were running slow, keeping only enough way on her for steering. They were on or near the course of the great liner hurrying toward them, as yet unseen. At any moment she might lift above the horizon.

Suddenly Hoffmann gave a quick turn to his periscope. Some distance away on the port bow something emerged from the mist. It was a small steam trawler, the red bottom under her bows lifting clear out of the water as she rose to the waves. He considered her anxiously. An armed mine sweeper? Heavily down at the stern with the weight of the dragging trawl her appearance was peaceful enough.

Apparently she was alone. She held on her course. Hoffmann's mouth set tight. It was possible she might not notice the periscope—or, if remarked, consider them British. He resisted an impulse to dive. The periscope swept round again. A low cry came involuntarily from his lips. Away on the southwest horizon was a heavy blur of dark smoke—the *Lithuania!*

In compliance with his order, Wohlsinger leaped down from the control platform, called for the torpedo crews. They assembled at their stations, bow and stern. A thrill of excitement pervaded the vessel. Quick, loud voices—a merry laugh—came to Hoffmann's ears as he gazed into the periscope, watched the blur of smoke, ever more distinct. If the liner held her course, she would cross his bows. He began to calculate whether he should run forward. His vision was annihilated with a loud crash and a shock that numbed his arms from his grip on the handles.

He sprang to the other periscope—saw a faint spurt from the trawler, now very close—and that periscope also was shattered. The third had been caught and bent by the same shot. The U-026 was blinded as a submarine. Hoffmann looked up, his face set, his eyes ablaze. His brain worked with a timeless speed. He shouted order upon order. The needle of the depth indicator dipped. The engines hurried in a feverish whirl. The U-026 swung round, dived, dashed forward. The conning tower

was suddenly packed close with men who waited.

The commander stood, grim, calculating the seconds. The thought to dive for escape did not so much as occur to him. The great prey they had already risked so much to await was rushing ever nearer to them, coming on at the speed of a railway train, unconscious—he prayed—of the danger. He saw a swift fight with the trawler—haply alone—a victory that would give him a few minutes' respite. One last dive—the prey in flank—and then come what would! So he saw, with narrowed eyes, into the future. He shouted an order.

The blast of compressed air blew out the water from the ballast tanks. Like a cork the submarine shot straight to the surface. Ere the white light flooded in through the plate-glass windows of the conning tower, the hatch was unscrewed, the close-packed men scrambling out above in furious haste.

The commander glanced through the windows at his enemy. He had dived right under her, had come up at a greater distance than before on her port quarter. He saw the run of men on her deck, the group round a weapon in the bows. She must turn to use it. His own men were working like maniacs at the fourteen-pounders fore and aft. Already both guns were up from the wells that had contained them.

The trawler brought her weapon to bear first—a light quick-firer. It spat rapidly, viciously, and on the instant his two fourteen-pounders replied with

sharp, splitting cracks. He saw the quick spurts of explosions on the trawler's deck, saw her funnel suddenly awry—heard yells of pain from his forward gun crew, the hammering of projectiles on the hull. Fiercely rapid the interchange of shots continued through immeasurable seconds. He saw that his gunners were obeying orders—one gun firing at the enemy's weapon, another at the trawler's hull. A tangle of wrecked rigging fell over her side, but the gun in the bows still spat.

He glanced at the approaching liner, now behind him, over his left shoulder, startlingly close. Her colossal bulk towered high from the water, the four enormous red funnels glowed in the sun. He cursed in an agony of impatience. She had changed her course. Yet another few minutes and she would escape. Far distant, on the port bow of the liner, away from him, a smudge of smoke betrayed the escorting destroyer. He looked again at the trawler—saw the gun crew in her bows vanish—saw her flank roll upward in a great cloud of steam. She swung back in a return roll that did not cease. There was a glint of red among a turmoil of water. Where she had been was only a commotion of the waves.

Now! He glanced once more at his majestic prey. She was about two miles distant—extreme range. He must dive, dash forward at an angle to her course. The orders were already on his lips when a man leaned over the hatch of the conning tower.

"We are badly hulled, Herr Kapitän! The after gun is out of action."

Hoffmann sprang up to look over the rim. He saw a great gash aft. Each wave that splashed upon her hull there was weakened, engulfed.

While he looked he heard the bow gun crack rapidly behind him. He turned his head to see something rushing across the water at a tremendous speed, hidden behind sheets of flying spray, coming straight toward them. A shower of machine-gun bullets whip-cracked around his head. Like some fierce spirit of the sea, the spray-scattering craft came on—zigzagging to avoid the shells that spouted up all around her—bore down upon them with incredible velocity. He saw some of his gunners fall, the gun fire again and again. He saw the great liner, gleaming in the sun—three thousand yards away.

He dropped into the conning tower, a fierce resolve dominant. He could not dive. Come what would, he would torpedo! He clanged the engine-room telegraph—shouted an order to the steersman. He must get way on the boat. She could only discharge her torpedoes directly fore or aft. She lay now broadside on to her target, wallowing in the waves. He shouted an order through the speaking tube to the bow torpedo crew, gave a range. Then he waited for the boat to turn. She did not move. He saw, with fierce impatience, the liner change her course a point or two to port—away.

The seconds were precious. Still the submarine wallowed, broadside on.

Why had the engines stopped? He clanged the telegraph again furiously and bent to peer through the windows at his prey. Behind him he was conscious of a rush of men who clambered through the hatch. A hail of machine-gun bullets beat on the wall. He turned in mad anger, seized a pair of dangling legs, pulled them down. A white-faced, panic-stricken man panted in front of him, stammeringly answered his passionate question:

"Der Ober-Ingenieur! Der Ober-Ingenieur!"

The commander released him, sprang to the hatchway, looked out. He saw, on a deck littered with bodies, Ober-Ingenieur Wolff standing with a white handkerchief fluttering from his outstretched hand. He heard an agonised voice shriek: *"Rettung! Rettung! Kamerad! Kamerad!"* He saw the hydroplane motor boat swing round alongside with a great swash of water that leaped over the deck of the submarine. *"Kamerad! Kamerad!"* shrieked the engineer.

He glanced toward the liner. She had turned her stern toward him, was already out of range.

Kapitän Leutnant Hoffmann dropped down to the control platform once more. His face was set in the grimness of a judge who condemns. "One minute more, and we should have got her!" beat in his brain, remorselessly reiterated.

He shouted into the interior of the submarine:

"Abandon ship!" He waited, grim and silent, while the men rushed up, clambered into safety. Wohlsinger pressed his hand speechlessly as he passed. The last man gone, the commander pulled a lever. Then he, too, scrambled out.

Quiet, self-controlled, he walked along the deck to where the motor boat lay, her crew grinning. He saluted her commander, a lad in oilskins.

"I am your prisoner, sir," he said in perfect English.

The survivors of the crew were already on board the motor boat. Ober-Ingenieur Wolff sat in the stern sheets, his face like cheese, his eyes fixed on his commander.

"Look out!" shouted some one in the motor boat. The U-026 was sinking fast. The Englishmen who had boarded her leaped back to safety. There was a gurgle of water over her deck. The German commander sprang on board the hydroplane, just in time. The little craft sheered off, tossed in a turmoil of waves.

Kapitän Leutnant Hoffmann quietly took a revolver from his pocket, looked Ober-Ingenieur Wolff between the eyes, and shot him dead.

Some two hours later, Hoffmann, prim and dignified, sat in the rear seat of a motor car that sped through the streets of Liverpool. On one side of him was Wohlsinger, contentedly smoking a cigar; on the other, a British officer. Hoffmann was im-

pelled to speech, feeling it incumbent upon him to unbend graciously.

"It is fortunate for you that your great ship escaped, sir," he said.

"Oh, yes," the British boy answered in a casual tone. "The underwriters would have been very sick if you had got her. You had a jolly sporting try, anyway," he added, in really sympathetic consolation.

Hoffmann stared, not quite understanding.

"But her cargo—you would be starving in a fortnight, would you not?"

"Oh, rot!" said the boy. He waved his hand, indicating the busy life of the street. "Do we look like it? Everybody has to be beastly careful, of course—but starvation!" He laughed. "Bally rot!"

Hoffmann looked at the well-filled shops, the throngs of well-dressed women, the laughing children playing on their way from school—and he suddenly saw the pinched crowd shouting them off near the docks at Wilhelmshaven. He passed his hand over his eyes, shutting out a sudden doubt of the indubitable. No—it could not be—the Fatherland must win!

IX

THE IRON CROSS

IT was blue twilight in the wide sandy trench. Little groups of German soldiers moved about freely, chattered and laughed without the least restraint on their voices. Some of them emerged from or disappeared into dugouts in the base of the parapet, but the majority of the inhabitants of the trench had evidently abandoned their cave dwellings for the primitive lean-to shelters—a sheet of corrugated iron or a few boards which partially roofed the trench here and there. More complete protection was superfluous in this Russian summer.

Under them men divested of accoutrement sat watching the cooking pots on fires which smoked with impunity into the clear sky. No sound of gun or rifle disturbed the evening stillness. Only the sentries standing on the fire step at long intervals from each other, in a languid observation of a landscape invisible from the bottom of the trench, were evidence that this was the front line, that an enemy was in proximity.

A soldier with a packet of letters in his hand approached a group which had plenished its mess tins

from the cooking pot and with Teutonic avidity was severally intent upon the serious business of food. The half dozen faces looked up in a sudden transformation to eager intelligence.

"The post!"

One of the men sprang up and hurried toward the soldier.

"Is there one for me?" His tone was so plaintively anxious that the rest of the group burst into laughter.

'*Ei*, Salzmann! You'll know soon enough that the *Schätzchen* has thrown you over!" "He's afraid some one has told her about him!" "That's what going home on leave does for you, Salzmann! You get caught by a girl, and then no more peace of mind!" "Don't give him *his* letters until the last, Mayer!"

Ribald variations upon the theme of the foolishly enamoured followed in a rivalry of coarse sol-datesque wit, each trying to think of some more comic allusion than his neighbour. Salzmann, a blond, simple-faced young man, whose eyes were wide in a permanent expression of alarm, was the habitual butt of his squad; his betrothal when last on leave was a novel and still unexhausted source of mocking gaiety. He hurried now at the side of the approaching postman, imploring a sight of the letters, which was grinningly refused.

"One for you, Mendell!" said the soldier, sorting out his packet. "Two for you, Schmidt! Here,

Grünbaum!" He pushed the eagerly clutching Salzmann to one side. "Wait!" he said roughly. "Here, Bürger! Weissenbach!" He distributed the letters; stood with empty hands.

"None for me!" cried Salzmann in such forlorn disappointment that his comrades laughed again.

"For you?" said the postman, as if trying to remember. His face was perfectly serious, his wink of intelligence to the others almost imperceptible. They rocked in their mirth. "Yes—I think there was one for you. I must have lost it."

"Give it me! Give it me!" cried Salzmann almost tearfully, like a child whose plaything is withheld by a teasing senior.

The soldier made a show of going through his pockets.

"I certainly had it," he said. "No; nothing here." Pocket after pocket was examined. He came to the last. "Ah! Is this it?" He produced a letter. "Johann Salzmann? Yes; this must be yours!"

Salzmann snatched it from him with an angry curse, which added to the merriment of his comrades.

There was a silence while the group perused their correspondence. Salzmann left the circle to seat himself upon a balk of timber where he could read his precious letter in quiet.

"*Lieber Johann,*" it ran, "I am shame-red to write you this letter." The soldier's eyes opened a shade wider, his jaw dropped at this inauspicious beginning. He read on, tortured by apprehension. "The

*Löwenwirt's*¹ Franz is back in the village and is no more a soldier. Since he lost his right arm they let him go. The *Löwenwirt* and my father have been laying their heads together and they want me to marry Franz. The *Löwenwirt* wants to hand over the inn to Franz and me. *Lieber Johann*, I do not want to do this, for Franz has only one arm and cannot even dress himself properly, but he has the Iron Cross and everybody says he is a hero. My father says I ought to be proud to marry him, for, except the *Schäfer's* Reinhart, Franz is the only man alive of the village who has the Iron Cross. Father says he cannot understand why you, who have been at the Front so long, have not won the Iron Cross."

Salzmann's expression changed slightly as he recalled the dour old miller, who had himself been decorated in the war of 1870.

"The parson preached a sermon last Sunday when Franz came back to the village and he said that the Iron Cross was the symbol of the iron but modest bravery of the German people, and that every German soldier ought to have one. My father was there and he said afterward that every German soldier who had just done his duty had got one; that it was not like the days of 1870, when you had to do something fine to win it, and that it was a disgrace

¹ *Löwenwirt*—the keeper of the Lion Inn. The innkeeper is a person of much importance in German village communities. He is never referred to by his own name, but always as the keeper of such and such a house—the *Löwenwirt*, the *Sonnenwirt*, and so on.

not to have one, and that he would not marry his daughter to a man who had been all through the war and was not decorated. So, *lieber Johann*, you must win the Iron Cross quickly, because they say the war is going to end, and my father will marry me to Franz almost at once."

"*Ach! Unglücklicher!*" exclaimed Salzmann in a tone of heartfelt self-commiseration. Long humbled as he had been by the scorn of his quick-witted comrades he was intelligent enough to appreciate his betrothed's naïve recommendation as a bitter irony.

The Iron Cross! He had no illusions as to his own military virtues; was, in fact, emphatically certain that nothing would induce him to risk his skin beyond the common everyday perils he could not escape. In battle his one thought was to get into a place of safety as soon as possible. No one looked for deeds of valour from him; least of all, himself. He was forced on by an even greater fear than that which he stumbled to encounter—the fear of his officer's pistol, of certain death if he wavered. As for awarding him the Iron Cross, the entire battalion would have shouted with laughter at the mere suggestion. He was only too acutely aware of it. The pitiful swagger with which he bragged of his ability to look after himself was the last cloak he could wrap about his ragged self-esteem.

If the miller's Gretel could be won only by the Iron Cross, then his suit was hopeless. And it was such a splendid mill! How often had he visualised

himself as the flour-dusty proprietor—for surely Gretel would inherit—smoking the long pipe of worthy contentment on the little bench which overlooked the dripping water wheel, indefatigable in grinding out wealth for him! Gretel was pretty, too, and her simple-minded pride in her soldier lover had been particularly precious to him. He sighed heavily as he renounced all this. The Iron Cross! He cursed bitterly and comprehensively.

His gloomy disappointment was relieved only by his betrothed's mention of an early peace. He seized on that hopefully. Certainly the fighting here had long since ceased. Up to a week before, the Russian soldiers had been fraternizing between the lines. Since, though they had remained in their trenches, no shot had been fired. Possibly a general peace was really in discussion; 1914, 1915, 1916, 1917—the whole world must be as tired of this as he was. Gretel or no Gretel, it was something to come out of it alive! He cheerfully abandoned the Iron Cross in the prospect.

At this point the course of his meditation was interrupted. The wail of an approaching shell startled the entire trenchful of idling men; sent them dashing to cover as its note changed to the hissing rush of its arrival. It burst with a metallic crash. Before their ears had lost the sound the wail of a second shell rapidly descended from its distant high note to the ugly menace of its fall, the viciously vio-

lent detonation of its impact. A third—and a fourth!

What was happening? The German soldiers, habituated to the informal truce, asked each other the question angrily, wild-eyed. In a telephone dug-out an artillery officer spoke irritably to his battery:

“X 25; C 2, 4. These people are forgetting themselves. Give them a dozen rounds battery fire.”

A moment or two later a run of dull reports behind them told of the answer of the guns. Almost simultaneously with the sound the shells rushed overhead, one after the other at the briefest interval, vindictively hastening to silence this presumptuous Russian battery. That battery, however, declined to be overawed. Its shells continued to fall in the trench or its near vicinity, arriving with a deliberate regularity which hinted at a definite purpose.

Other batteries, veiled in the deepening dusk of the east, awoke as if in sympathy, their quickly reiterated reports strangely impressive after the silence which had been maintained so long. Their shells fell more and more frequently over a fairly wide sector of the trenches. The German battery having discharged its dozen rounds ceased fire. But the bombardment of the trenches continued, became more and more intense. It was as heavy a bombardment as the poorly supplied Russian artillery could ever pretend to.

In his dugout the battalion commander, annoyed and puzzled by this unexpected revival of an enemy

he had grown accustomed almost to ignore, took counsel with the artillery officer.

"What are they playing at?" he asked. "Surely they can't be going to attack!"

"Probably they have found a few rounds of ammunition and are getting rid of it, *Herr Major*," replied the artillery officer. "They can't keep it up long, for they certainly cannot have much. As for attack"—he laughed contemptuously—"the Russian infantry will not attack again in this war."

"*Gewiss nicht*," agreed the major. "Only a week ago they were out between the trenches selling their rifles to our men. But still"—he stopped for a moment, listening to the persistent slamming of the Russian guns, the heavy crashes of the repeated shell bursts near at hand—"this sounds as though they meant something."

"I will soon stop it," said the artillery officer, picking up the telephone. "Hello! Give me artillery headquarters. . . . Hello! . . . Eh? . . . Yes; speaking. . . . Yes; that is just what I was going to speak to you about. They've gone mad, I think. . . . Oh, all right, I'll speak to the *Oberst*." His tone changed to one of subservient respect. "*Ja, Herr Oberst*, almost all their batteries firing. . . . No, I don't think so. They have lost their heads over something. I suggest a drastic lesson, *Herr Oberst*. Show them our guns are still here. . . . *Ja, ja—famos!* A few salvos on the trenches might be useful—make trouble between their infantry and their

gunners. *Ja—jawohl!*” He laughed. “*Vortrefflich! Gute Nacht, Herr Oberst!*”

He put down the receiver and turned to the battalion commander.

“You are going to see the surprise of your life, *Herr Major*. Every gun we’ve got. Let them have it all at once. Teach them politeness. They will not worry you again for a long time.”

“Good,” said the battalion commander. “But I hope they are not going to attack. The sector is very thinly held.”

The artillery officer laughed.

“Their generals may order an attack, *Herr Major*, but their men simply refuse to fight. We’ve seen it often enough. Of course,” he added in a tone of mockery, “there’s that battalion of women which has been parading Petrograd; perhaps they are going to try with that?”

Both officers laughed at this reduction to absurdity. For a long time the chief danger from the Russian Army had been excessive fraternisation. The German authorities were very nervous of the anarchic propaganda enthusiastically preached by the Russian soldiers, however contemptuous they might be of them in other respects. Every German officer on the sector had been glad of the recent cessation of intercourse.

The fighting power of the Russian Army was notoriously a thing of the past. This fantastic bom-

bombardment was merely another symptom of the madness to which it had succumbed.

The two officers listened for the opening of their own artillery.

In a dugout of the trench parapet Salzmänn interrogated his companions between the crashes of the Russian shells.

"What is it?" he cried. "Are they going to attack? I thought they had no more shells? The *Leutnant* said so the other day! *Ach!* There's another! Where did that one go? That's in the trench, that one! Do you think they are going to attack, Weissenbach?"

"*Natürlich!*" said Weissenbach, grinning at his companions despite the uneasiness which they all felt. "Haven't you heard about it? This is the preliminary bombardment for a great offensive. The Russians are going to bombard us for a week like this and then they are going to march through to Berlin and set up a republic like their own. The muzhiks were all talking about it last week; *nicht wahr*, you others?"

There was a chorus of laughing assent.

"*Ach!*" cried Salzmänn in genuine alarm. "They can do what they like about their republic; it's all one to me. But bombard us like this for a week! *Aber*, Weissenbach," he said with serious solemnity, "we shall all be killed!"

The others forgot the bombardment in their laughter. Salzmänn was priceless.

"More than that," cried Grünbaum; "the *Hauptmann* said he was going to see to it that this time Salzman won the Iron Cross—or was killed in the attempt. He says it's a disgrace to the regiment that a man who has been in it since 1914 has not won the cross. So you are certainly going to get the Iron Cross, Salzman; or else a wooden one!"

The squad shouted with delight, all eagerly corroborating this happy invention, adding confirmatory details.

"To the devil with the Iron Cross!" cried their butt, frantic with fear at the possibilities which opened up before him. He broke into a flood of foul curses, in which the *Hauptmann*, his comrades, their decorations, were all equally vituperated.

His tormentors wiped tears of laughter from their eyes. Suddenly they ceased in their mirth, looked up, startled.

"Listen!" cried some one.

In one long rolling crash hundreds of guns had opened fire, were maintaining it in rapid repetition. Overhead, flights of shells howled on their way to the Russians.

"Our guns!" cried another in relief. "The muzhiks will soon remember they have an appointment to make a speech at their Soviet!"

"*Gewiss!*" said a third. "Besides, they can't have much more ammunition."

"So long as they cease shelling!" cried Salzman,

who had retreated to the farthest corner of the dugout.

But though the thunder of the German guns continued unabated, the stream of their projectiles tearing across the sky undiminished, the Russian batteries still persisted in their fire. The crashes of their shells followed one another with unflinching regularity.

The din of these warring artilleries had lasted for some time when suddenly whistles shrilled in the trench above. The group in the dugout looked at each other in surprise. It was the alarm!

"An attack!" cried some one. "After all! *Heraus*, Salzmänn! Go out for your Iron Cross!"

The speaker saw to it that the unhappy Salzmänn cleared out with the rest, and amid renewed laughter the squad scrambled up the stairway into the trench.

It was now quite dark, a night of stars. The Russian shells were still bursting round in sudden splashes of red flame, despite a most furious cannonade from the German artillery working frenziedly to beat down the hostile fire. To the east the dark horizon was lit by the frequent leaping reflections from the Russian guns. But on the sky behind the men now lining the trench there was no interval in the illumination from the ceaseless discharges. Both artilleries were working at their full power and the disproportion between their strengths was comfortingly obvious to the German soldiers.

They sprang with alacrity to their positions of

defence. The machine-gun crews joked as they opened their boxes of ammunition and fitted the belts. Grenades were served out lavishly. There was a clicking of rifle bolts. Flares began to soar up along the line of trenches. A searchlight wavered for a moment, flickered, was extinguished, shot out its beam of light again in a swinging arc, disappeared. The deafening crash and roll of the artillery fire seemed to increase permanently as it leaped to paroxysms of vehemence.

Salzmann found himself on the fire step, rifle ready to his hand, gazing out across the neutral ground. Over the Russian trenches the shrapnel twinkled incessantly. Founts of bright flame sprang up from the impact of high-explosive shells upon the enemy works, the crash of their detonation distinctly audible through the din. Half paralysed by the fear of the shrapnel which cracked and moaned above his head also, he stared into the night, agonising for his first perception of the dim human flood which would presently surge against him. He remembered sickeningly the terrible bayonets of a Russian charge. Several times already in his experience he had escaped them only by a miracle, had heard the death shrieks of his less fortunate comrades. He fingered his trigger nervously, ready to fire at the first sign of the enemy, straining his sight into the radiance of the falling flares.

"*Sie kommen!*" shouted some one a little farther along the trench. He heard the curt commands of

the officers behind him, the final order. In one simultaneous crash a long coruscation of short stabbing flames leaped from the parapet, a crash that resolved itself into the tireless hammering of machine guns, the irregular reports of rifles; now swelling as they chanced to coalesce, now scattered individually in rapid independent fire.

Salzmann pulled trigger with the others, though at first he could discern no target. A whelm of shell smoke overlay the neutral ground, thickened the obscurity of the night, swallowed the flares as they fell. Into that smother plunged an unceasing rain of German shells that lit luridly for a brief instant ere they added to the rolling fumes. The Russian batteries hurled shell after shell behind him, apparently lengthening their range.

From that bank of smoke came at last a tumult of voices, shouts and cheers that overpowered the shriek of sudden agony. Curiously high pitched, these voices.

"They must be boys," thought Salzmann as he fired toward the sound. The shouts and cheers continued, swelled louder despite the chaos of brutally violent noise, thudding, crashing, hammering, every kind of explosion, which erupted on that dark countryside and rolled under the stars. These voices of human creatures, dwarfed but undaunted in this immense fury of pitiless destruction, persisted, not to be hushed, curiously impressive.

Suddenly they emerged from the smoke, shadowy

but startlingly close; a crowd of running figures whose faces were plucked into a momentary vividness by near flashes, their bayonets silhouetted above their heads, dark against the sky. They raced toward him with such fierce determination that those who fell were lost out of memory in an instant, their places filled. Their piercing cries, their high-pitched cheers had an uncanny suggestion of the unfamiliar, a hint of the spectral, which sent a spasm of wild alarm through Salzmänn's unsteady nerves.

"Boys!" he cried, to reassure himself.

The guttural exclamations of the German soldiers firing furiously into the mass were comforting in their normality. Despite the blast of rifle fire from the parapet, the incessant explosions of the shells in the neutral ground, the shadowy figures came rapidly nearer through moments that were long as hours. Never had Salzmänn seen such a formidable charge; its swift, unchecked approach in the face of that devastating fire was a miracle that, accompanied by the wild phantasmal treble of its tumult of cheers, appalled him with a vague, superstitious fear. He fired his rifle into it desperately, yet without hope of staying it.

Another anxiety re-enforced his dread. The wire! It had been cut to allow passage for the men fraternizing with the Russians, and had not been repaired; partly because of the paucity of available labour on this thinly held sector, partly because the

effort was thought to be unnecessary. The last of his confidence forsook him with the realisation. In another instant the mysterious attackers were surging up against the parapet, were upon him.

He fired his rifle once more into a face he saw with the flash to be beardless. Then the man on his right shrieked as a dark figure on the parapet plunged its bayonet downward. In the same fraction of a second he saw a sliver of steel dart at his own breast as he stood exposed, recoiling in terror. In one instinctive movement he dropped his rifle, leaped backward into the trench, fled. Behind him the high-pitched voices shrilled out, demoniac, dominating the suddenly vehement guttural curses in an inferno of detonations.

He dashed along the trench, noting unconsciously the wide-spaced figures of the defenders, still crouching as they gazed along the sights or wrestling body to body with dark figures that overtopped them. At the mouth of the communication trench he was automatically seeking he saw his officer. In a spasm of horror, too late for defence, he saw the officer's hand jerk up, the pistol point. The flash and crack were simultaneous. Missed! He dodged, flung himself headlong into the communication trench. As he sprawled he heard the death yell of the officer.

On his feet again he raced along the communication trench blindly, like a hunted animal. He met no one. Every available man was in the fire trench. There were no supports, he knew well; no adjacent

reserves. The sector had been stripped to send reinforcements to Flanders. He might get clear away. The possibility invigorated him. A deafening crash just at his right renewed his alarm, quickened his mad flight. Those cursed Russian batteries were still firing, were putting down a screen of shells behind the fight. Crash followed crash. He ran on.

He emerged into an empty support trench and turned to follow it. A sheet of red flame sprang up from the lip of its trace. He half-heard a shattering roar.

When his eyes opened he saw that the trench was filled with men. He staggered to his feet; noted, as his first sensation, an impressive unbroken quiet that contrasted with something. He remembered; took in the situation. The Russians were in possession of the front trenches. This was the counter attack, ready to spring. Both artilleries had paused. In another moment, perhaps, the battle would commence again. He glanced along the rank of men. There was no escape. He was trapped. He resigned himself hopelessly, trying to think of a plausible excuse to account for himself.

Two officers walked up toward him in deep conversation. Despite the gloom he recognised one of them. It was the *Oberst* commanding the sector. The other was evidently the leader of the troops about to counter attack. They stopped by the mouth of the communication trench.

"I can't understand it at all," said the *Oberst*.

"Who are these people? They are certainly not the infantry usually on this sector."

"New troops evidently, *Herr Oberst*," said the other, suavely-concurring with his superior. There was, nevertheless, a note of anxiety in his voice.

"None of our people seem to have escaped," pursued the *Oberst*, tapping irritably with the toe of his boot upon the earth. He frowned round him. "All killed or prisoners." He caught sight of Salzmann. "Who are you?" he asked with sudden brutality.

Salzmann quivering with terror stood sharply to attention as he named his regiment.

"So?" said the *Oberst* with quickened interest. He turned to the other officer. "Here is a survivor, Brunnendorf!" He reverted to the trembling man. "What happened? Who are these Russians? Why are you here?" he questioned angrily.

Salzmann launched out into a long, incoherent story, in which it was only clear that he had seen the attack, that he thought they were boys, and that a shell had knocked him senseless. The *Oberst* eyed him with frowning suspicion.

"*Genug!*" he interrupted harshly. Salzmann ceased to stammer; stood shaking with apprehension. The *Oberst* pondered a moment, then looked at his watch. Once more he turned to the soldier.

"Your name and number?" he snapped.

Salzmann gave them, feeling that his fate was sealed.

"Note them, Brunnendorf!" said the *Oberst* to

the other officer. "Now, my man, go into the front trench and find out who those people are! Bring me back an identity disk or something of the sort. You have five minutes. At the end of that time our artillery will commence its bombardment. If you succeed you shall have the Iron Cross. If you fail you will be shot for deserting your post! You understand?" Salzman's mouth opened, moved, but emitted no sound. "Go!"

Salzman saluted speechlessly.

As he disappeared the officer in command of the counter attack smiled grimly.

"They have killed every one of my reconnoitering parties, *Herr Oberst*," he said.

The *Oberst* shrugged his shoulders and proceeded to detail his arrangements for supporting the attack.

Salzman crept along the empty communication trench, his mouth dry, shaking in every limb. At each bend in the serpentine course of the trench he hesitated, pressed close, hands outstretched, against the wall. Beyond? Only the fear, the certainty, of that dreadful firing party drove him forward. He had one forlorn chance. He murmured it to himself desperately between his gusts of panic. If only he could find a dead Russian!

Cautiously he stole round a curve of the trench. Then before he could make a movement or utter a sound a couple of dark figures leaped at him, a terrible clutch fastened itself on his throat, bore him backward to the ground. Choking, seeing the

stars sway in the sky as he stared upward, he felt a heavy weight on his chest. One of the figures had seated himself on him. He felt a smaller area of pressure over his heart, and then the point of a knife sharply penetrating his skin. His scream of terror was only a gurgle under that clutch on his throat. But the point came no deeper, remained an acute tiny prick threatening his life. Almost fainting he heard a whispered conversation. He guessed its purport, agonised for the decision. Before he realised that it was made he found a gag stuffed into his mouth, felt himself vigorously turned over onto his face, his hands drawn back and securely tied behind him. He made not the least resistance.

“Up!” whispered an earnest voice in German. “Silence!”

He struggled awkwardly to his feet and looked at his captors. They also were the beardless boys he had seen rushing to the storm of the parapet. Too bewildered to give more than a passing thought to their youth, he felt himself pushed forward by a firm grip on the back of his collar. He went docilely, one only of his captors accompanying him.

They passed quickly down the communication trench and turned into the familiar front line. A number of busy figures thronged it, strengthening the parados, adjusting machine guns, making ready to repel the certain attack. His brain still numbed with terror he scarcely noticed them. Suddenly his captor halted before the mouth of a dugout and

thrust him down the steep steps. He stumbled with uncertain equilibrium into a little square cave lit by a candle on a table. His captor, still maintaining his grasp, followed.

Three young men—officers evidently—were seated at that table. They looked up at his entrance and nodded to the salute of his captor. They were very young—not one had so much as a wisp of moustache—but their expression was both intelligent and determined. All three had laid aside their caps, and the close crop of their hair, revealing the powerful conformation of the skull, lent a certain naked force to their aspect.

The soldier reported in Russian, unintelligible to Salzmänn.

One of the officers—he noted that it was a captain—nodded understanding with a smile, replied rapidly in his incomprehensible Russian, finished in the tone of an order. He felt fingers behind his head; the gag was whipped off. The captain frowned at him.

“What regiment are you?” he asked sternly in his boyish voice. His German was excellently pronounced.

Salzmänn stammered out the information, finishing with an obsequious “*Herr Hauptmann.*”

“So? And your errand?”

Salzmänn hesitated for a moment while he endeavoured to decide whether he should tell the truth or invent a story.

“Answer!” The captain produced a big automatic pistol and dangled it in his hand. His eyes were affrightingly stern. “Quick, or——”

He raised the pistol till Salzmänn found himself staring fascinated into the little round black hole of the muzzle.

“I—I came to reconnoitre, *Herr Hauptmann*,” he said hurriedly. This uncompromising young officer evidently belonged to the genuine caste, obedience to which was an unquestioned instinct. “The *Oberst* sent me——”

“Go on!” The officer tapped impatiently on the table with his left hand, that terrible pistol still poised in his right.

“—— to find out what regiment it was that attacked, *Herr Hauptmann*.” The sweat was pearly on his forehead.

The captain exchanged a smile with his officers. The smile, curiously enigmatic, it seemed to Salzmänn, was still upon his face as he turned again to the prisoner.

“I am afraid you will not have the honour of reporting to him,” he said with a subtle mockery in his clear, level voice, “that it was the Battalion of Death—the women’s battalion—which captured his trenches.”

“Women!” Salzmänn stared in amazement. These boys—women! “*Du lieber Gott!*”

The smile on the captain’s face broadened at the naïveté of his exclamation.

"Yes—women!" There was a certain pride in the utterance.

Salzmann stared into the officer's face, forgetting the pistol, forgetting his position in his curiosity. Yes—it was a woman's face that looked into his, a woman's face of soft curves, of eyes that changed expression at every instant. He took a long breath of relief, smiled fatuously. He always felt himself very much at ease with women; had many conquests, of a sort, to set off against his humiliations in the world of men. He smirked, ventured an ironical compliment, an awkward bow.

"Women!—*Gratuliere, gnädige Frau!*"

"Silence!" The voice was not less stern because it was feminine. Salzmann's new-found assurance vanished in a spasm of alarm. That terrible pistol still covered him. "Answer my questions!"

"*Ja, Herr—Frau—Hauptmann!*" he stumbled, uncertain of the correct designation.

There was no longer any smile on the face of the amazon.

"Your troops are going to counter attack?" she queried.

"*Ja, Herr Hauptmann!*" He decided that the masculine title was more polite.

"When?"

"I don't know!" The lie had slipped out unconsciously; the result of a lifelong habit of carelessness with the truth. His own words were a

shock to him. This was dangerous. But, once uttered, he must stick to his assertion.

"You don't know?"

"No, I swear it, *Herr Hauptmann!*" He agonised at the least movement of the hand that held the pistol.

The captain turned to her companion and conferred for a moment in Russian. Then she addressed herself to his captor—"A woman, also, *lieber Gott!*" thought Salzmann. The soldier—she was little more than a girl—had been standing stiffly in silence during this colloquy. She now saluted in precise military fashion, turned and went out of the dugout. Salzmann heard her heavily booted tread ascending the stairway.

The captain resumed her interrogation.

"What troops are there on this sector?" she demanded.

Salzmann gave the information as accurately as he could, warily avoiding the untruths which came so readily to his tongue. His eyes never quitted the pistol.

"Their morale? Are they tired of the war?"

"*Ach, ja, Herr Hauptmann*—terribly tired."

"Why do they still fight?"

"The officers, *Herr Hauptmann*; when the officer orders——"

His eyes were now fixed upon the face of his questioner. This should be a palatable presentation

of at least a partial truth. He anxiously observed its reception.

The captain smiled slightly. Her face lost something of its severity.

"And the revolution? Would they make a revolution if they could?"

"*Ach, ja, Herr Hauptmann; if they could!*" Salzmann infused an accent that appealed for sympathy into the earnestness of his tone.

The captain deposited her pistol on the table as she turned once more to conversation with her companions. Salzmann's attention followed her. They also were women, these officers; one—he visualised her with long hair—really beautiful and refined; the other, of coarser appearance, he instinctively recognised as a peasant woman, of his own class. What were they talking about? His arms ached. He moved his wrists, felt the tightness of his bonds. If he could only get at that pistol! The minutes were passing. The five minutes allotted must be already gone.

As if in answer to his thought, one long deep rolling roar, followed almost on the instant by a series of heavy, violent crashes just above, shook the dug-out. Earth dropped from the roof. The candle went out. It was lit again before he could decide himself to make a dash for freedom. An expostulation in feminine voices that had commenced in the dark continued in the illumination.

One of the officers, the young and beautiful one,

was endeavouring to reach the door of the dugout, but was held back by the peasant woman. The captain spoke a few words in a tone of calm authority and the young woman seated herself again. Salzmänn gathered that a useless exposure to the bombardment outside had been prohibited. There was clearly nothing to do but to wait.

Once more a panic fear surged up in him. Crash upon crash, appallingly close, shook the earth with rending violence. They would have one in the dugout in a moment! He twisted himself in an agony of apprehension, the more alarmed as there would not be even the shortest warning. The wail and rush of the arriving shells were swallowed in the blast of the explosions, in the dull, heavy roar of the distant guns. At any moment a blinding flash, an immense noise, the dugout collapsing. His imagination was painfully vivid. The strength had gone out of his knees; his legs shook. He pulled frantically, arms behind his back, at the lashing which secured his wrists.

"Bitte, Herr Hauptmann, bitte!" he screamed, panting, wild-eyed in his terror. "Untie me! Untie me! A shell might come! Untie me! I am unarmed! For the love of God, untie me! I am a revolutionary! I think as you do! Untie me! *Bitte! Bitte! Herr Hauptmann!"*

The three women exchanged a glance of pitying contempt. The captain nodded to an appealing look from the young and beautiful one. The peasant

woman obviously demurred, grumbling; Salzmänn hated her. The young one got up from her seat—with exasperating calm it seemed to the wretched man quivering anew at each recurrent crash—and coolly unfastened his wrists. He clutched at her hand, kissed it in grovelling gratitude. She shook him off with disdain. He reeled against the table, supported himself by it.

The captain contemplated him with a scorn that was not unmixed with amusement. Masculinity was making a poor exhibition of itself. She calmly lit a cigarette and puffed at it as she crossed her legs in an attitude of indifference. Salzmänn hated her also—in those brief moments when an interval between the explosions allowed him a respite from his brain-paralysing panic. From the corner of his eye he watched the pistol on the table. He would not dare a direct look at it lest his thought should be read.

The captain spoke; she had to shout to be heard in the din.

“Why did you come?” she asked contemptuously. “Did you volunteer?”

“*Ja, Herr Hauptmann.*” He would have assented to anything in his present torment. “I volunteered.”

The lie was out. He saw an expression of surprise flit across the captain’s face.

“Why?” she asked, obviously incredulous.

“They promised me the Iron Cross,” he said piteously.

The young and beautiful one joined in the captain's laughter. He hated her too. The peasant woman looked inquiringly at her companions. Obviously she did not understand German. There was a short explanation in rapid Russian, and then she also laughed. Salzmann hated all of them in a fresh impulse of resentment. After all—he had been conscious of it while he said it—there was something heroic in his simple statement. Gretel would have thrilled to it. In his exasperation at this perversion of its effect he almost forgot the crashing thunders of the bombardment outside.

“And why did you want the Iron Cross?” asked the captain. Her tone suggested that she was merely whiling away this enforced wait rather than acutely interested.

A terrific detonation outside delayed his reply.

“My sweetheart wanted me to have it,” he said, forcing himself to continue after one wild glance round the dugout. He hoped that this would touch a sympathetic chord.

The two officers who understood German smiled again.

“Your sweetheart wanted you to have it?” said the captain, mockery in the curve of her lips. “She insists that you shall be a hero, I suppose?”

Salzmann felt that justification was necessary.

“She says it is a symbol”—he stopped, trying to remember—“a symbol of the German people.”

“True!” exclaimed the young and beautiful one

earnestly, leaning forward to him. It was the first time he had heard her speak German; the tone of her voice was very rich and musical, even amid this chaos of clashing, stunning noise. Her eyes were as earnest as her tone. He found himself looking into them with an awed respect. "It is the symbol of the German people—the Iron Cross!"

"*Ja—jawohl!*" assented Salzmänn, nodding his head in a sincerity he meant to be impressive. Another little portion of his brain still watched from the corner of his eye the pistol on the table.

"How true that is, Sonia!" continued the young and beautiful one, turning to her captain, but speaking still in German. "The symbol of the German people! The whole world is stretched on an iron cross of suffering—a suffering deliberately contemplated by this German people that believes in the moral majesty of war!"

She spoke rapidly, with an almost mystical exaltation. The Slav temperament, swift to interpret the underlying significance of life, was aflame in the dark, glowing eyes so incongruous with that close-cropped head.

"And wonderfully, all unconscious of its shame, the German people fixes upon itself the brand of its sin against that civilisation which it has crucified! The Iron Cross! The Iron Cross of vast, unutterable agony on which humanity is dying! Yes, it is a symbol—a symbol of iron ruthlessness, of black treachery, of the mockery of God! The symbol

of the German people, fixed upon them by their own hands for all time!" Her bosom heaved under the tight-fitting uniform as she finished in a rush of indignant emotion.

The German soldier stared at her, bewildered, only half-comprehending this denunciation, which in her earnest tones had such an unmistakable accent of accusing truth. Instinctively he felt that some sort of defence devolved upon him. Before he could frame one, another salvo of shattering crashes in the adjacent trench routed his thoughts, sent his glance anxiously round the dugout.

"But—*Herr—Frau—Offizier*," he said lamely, as his alarm subsided, "you yourselves have come to war—women!"

"We have come," said the young woman proudly, "to show the Russian men that if they renounce the battle against the evil thing—against this Germany that poisons before it strikes, then we women must purge the world of it. We will not bear children into it else!"

Salzmann scarcely heard her. He was listening to the bombardment overhead. It had increased to an incredible fury; crash merged into crash without a moment's pause. A new fear started up in him. This must be the final hurricane storm of shells before the counter attack! If that counter attack came now—he had failed in his mission!

This new fear was a spur to his brain. He thought rapidly, an inspiration of cunning quicken-

ing him. The moments were few. His glance slid sidelong to that unguarded pistol. He must make conversation until his opportunity. The captain was still too close to the weapon. He achieved a haggard smile.

"But are you not afraid of being killed?" he asked.

"Killed?" echoed the young woman scornfully. "We are the Battalion of Death! We are vowed to die—women of every class. The captain there is a countess. This officer"—she pointed to the peasant woman, who sat scowlingly ignoring the prisoner—"is a farm hand. I am a student. And life holds nothing for any of us until the world is purged of all your Iron Cross symbolised. Death!" She laughed, her beautiful eyes in an ecstasy. "See this!" she produced a little phial. "That is the poison we all carry—for use if we are taken prisoners. If we fail in our mission death is our only hope!"

Salzmann shuddered at these words, so ominously applicable to his own situation. He listened anxiously to the bombardment. It was slackening. He was sure of it. A few more moments and—— His heart beat so violently that he agonised lest he should betray his desperation.

The captain smiled scornfully.

"You are wasting words on this brute, Anna Dmitrievna," she said in German. She leaned back from the table, blew a puff of cigarette smoke to-

ward the roof, followed it disdainfully with her eyes.

On the instant Salzmänn had leaped forward, snatched the pistol and fired straight into her body. Before the two others could do more than start from their seats the pistol had cracked twice more. He saw them lurch and fall heavily.

Quick! Quick! The bombardment had almost ceased. He prayed now for another crash as he flung himself on his victims, rifled their pockets, stuffed his own full of their papers. Would he yet be in time? He dashed up the stairway.

The trench was filled with choking fumes. It was empty of any living creature as far as he could see. Yet another shell pitched and flashed in a deafening report. He raced along, tripping over prone bodies that did not move when he trod upon them. Behind him he was conscious that people were emerging from dugouts, were running to man the defences. He found the communication trench and plunged into it.

Almost obliterated as it was by the bombardment, his progress along it over its heaps of loose earth seemed maddeningly slow. In front of him he heard a scream, a hoarse German cheer.

"Kamerad! Kamerad!" he shrieked. *"Kamerad!"*

A day or two later Johann Salzmänn was seated in front of a sheet of note paper, a stubby pencil

in his fingers. He smiled to himself as he spread his elbows for the letter.

"*Schätzchen*," he began, "you will be pleased to know that I have been awarded the Iron Cross. As you say, it is a symbol of——"

He stopped, scratching his head, trying to remember. Of what, in the devil's name, was it a symbol?

X

“AND THE EARTH OPENED HER MOUTH—”

THE artillery lieutenant returned his empty coffee mug to the table of the battalion headquarters dugout, where he was a guest, and glanced round the interior with an appreciative eye. By contrast with the front trench, where, as forward observing officer, he was destined to spend a drear night, this deep square cave, roofed and walled with balks of timber, lit by electricity, adorned with many illustrations from the comic press and one or two framed pictures from a Flemish mansion, carpeted and furnished with the same barbaric incongruity, fitted with all the devices imagined by the successive inhabitants of more than two and a half years, was the perfection of security and comfort.

“*Sehr bequem, Kühlmann, nicht wahr?*” he said, with an intonation and smiling gesture of the head, which hinted banteringly that the permanent inhabitants of the dugout protected themselves well from the hardships of real soldiering. “Or do you prefer your mine shaft?”

Kühlmann, tall, long-faced, his fair hair scanty to baldness on his high brow, shifted his extended

legs as he woke from a reverie that had held his glance fixed toward the floor.

He was in charge of a countermining party at work in the vicinity.

"*Ganz zierlich!*" he replied in a fluting drawl, quite unlike the accent of a regular officer. He was a mining engineer in Russia in the days before the war and had always affected an urban elegance. "It would be a pity if it were destroyed, Herr Major," he finished, with a glance at the battalion commander.

The major looked up from the packet of official correspondence he was opening.

"No shell can penetrate here," he said shortly.

"I was not thinking of a shell," said Kühlmann with a wink to the artillery officer; there was something in his slow drawl that made the major look up again quickly from his correspondence.

"What? Mines? Bah! Mines can't touch us here—we're on top of the ridge, and if the Englanders are digging at all they are digging away at the bottom. You mining fellows may be very smart, Kühlmann; but you can't blow up a ridge like this from its foundations—the idea is absurd!"

The major's square military face, with clipped moustache and irascible little eyes, was thrust forward in so emphatic a negation as to suggest that disciplinary action was the imminent penalty of disagreement.

"*Lächerlich, Herr Major—lächerlich!*" said the

adjutant, prompt with sycophantic support of his superior. “*Etwas Neues!*” he added scornfully.

The mining officer ignored him.

“The fact is, Herr Major,” he said, “one cannot prophesy what a mine will or will not do. Given explosives enough, it seems quite feasible to me.”

“Do you seriously suggest that the Engländer are going to blow up the ridge, Kühlmann?” said the major with a snort. “What are your countermines for if you cannot stop them?”

“The difficulty is, they are digging away at the bottom, as you say, Herr Major,” returned Kühlmann; “and between us and them are several strata that are practically impervious to sound. It is certain that the Engländer are digging somewhere; but we fail to detect just where.”

Pugnacity faded out of the major’s face.

“Those *verfluchte* Prussians always give us the part of the line where they expect trouble,” said the major, who belonged to a Bavarian division. “There is certainly something coming—but when? I have never known such a terrible artillery preparation as this has been day after day since the twenty-fourth of May. After the first few days of it I expected the attack; but no, here we are at the sixth of June—no attack yet and the artillery fire slacker than it has been for some time. Why are our batteries so quiet to-night, Weber?” he asked of the observing officer.

“Our orders are to reply only when challenged,

Herr Major. We cannot know when the attack is coming and we have to keep a big reserve of ammunition. We have had two false alarms already."

The major nodded.

"Those two long bursts of *Trommelfeuer!* Yes. *Mein Gott!* They were awful—*schrecklich!* I thought the attack was coming at each of them." He bent down to his correspondence again.

This talk of artillery had redirected the attention of all to the continuous jarring rumble of guns near and far. The three junior officers sat in silence, contemplating their cigarette smoke, listening, while the major continued to go through his batch of official letters.

"These Engländer never stop," said Weber, the artillery officer, suddenly. "One would have thought, after those frightful battles in Artois and round Lens, that they would have had enough for a time. *Herr Gott!* I thought they were through more than once in that fighting round Oppy; it was the bad weather saved us then. I wish it would rain now—this cursed fine spell! It gives their airmen such opportunities too!"

The major looked up from his papers.

"We are on top of the hill and they are at the bottom," he said. "There will not be many left after they have charged up against our machine guns; and I have never seen a more scientific maze of trenches than ours, here—even if they reach them. *Bekümmern Sie sich nicht, lieber Weber*—the Eng-

lander are going to have a smashing defeat.” He went on opening envelopes.

“They captured the Vimy Ridge, though; and that was uphill,” said Weber.

None answered him. The three young men were silent in the rumbling thunder of the artillery, audible even in this deep cave, and the major was absorbed in his task. Suddenly he lifted his head.

“Attention, *meine Herren!* From the corps commander.”

He read from a long typewritten letter a warning of an impending English attack from north of Armentières to south of Ypres that might be expected any day. It enjoined a careful test of all measures for defence and counter attack, and proceeded to outline their main features. The three officers listened with breathless interest. The major raised his voice to emphasise the gravity of his communication:

“The absolute retention of the natural strong points of Wytschaete and Meesen¹ becomes of the greatest importance for the domination of the whole Wytschaete Salient. These strong points, therefore, must not fall, even temporarily, into the enemy’s hands. Both these strong points must be defended to the utmost and held to the last man, even if the enemy has cut communications on both sides and threatens the strong points from the rear.’

¹ Meesen is the German name for Messines. The excerpt is from a document captured by the British on June 7, 1917.

"What do you think of that, *meine Herren?* Looks nervous! There is much more of it." He turned to the end of the document: "'Signed, Von Laffert.'"

The artillery officer glanced at his watch and rose to go.

"Of course we shall hold on to this ridge to the last gasp," he said. "As long as we are on top, we have got the Engländer in a death trap round Ypres."

"*Gewiss!*" said the major. "Well, we are ready for them. Have this circulated to the companies, Kreisler," he said to the adjutant.

Kühlmann also rose for his departure. Both officers put on their steel helmets and saluted with brisk precision.

"*Guten Abend, Herr Major!*" they said in chorus.

The major looked up at them absently, his mind already busy with the problems raised by the corps commander's order.

"*Guten Abend!*" he said. "Come in when you return."

Weber led the way up the steep stairs of the dug-out. They emerged into a deep trench under the pale blue sky of a fine summer evening. The sudden reports of guns firing isolated shots smote them sharply after their seclusion; but the day-long artillery duel had died down. They turned along the trench together.

Fifty yards farther on the trench ran into a larger one; at right angles with it. A red cross and an inscription painted on a signboard indicated a first-aid dugout at the corner. The *Militär-Arzt* squatted at the entrance to his hole, puffing contentedly at his long porcelain-bowled pipe. He nodded recognition as the two officers passed.

“Loafer!” said Weber jocularly.

“Busy enough presently,” replied the doctor in the tone of a shopkeeper open before the market hour.

“Certainly,” agreed the artillery officer. “Is it for to-night?”

The doctor shrugged his shoulders.

The two officers turned along the main trench on their left. Invisible in the blue sky, from which the luminosity was fading at every instant, desultory English shells came hurtling toward them, the whine broadening rapidly to the final rush and crash somewhere out of sight on either flank. Heavy shells from indistinguishable German guns, far to the rear, rumbled overhead on their way to reply. From origins in front, unseen in this narrow hollow way, came the smart crack of a sniper’s rifle; the vicious short reiteration of a machine gun laid on some unknown target.

They were practically on the summit of the ridge, but the ground still rose slightly and no far view was possible. A man came staggering toward them, bent under a heavy sack of earth. A moment later

Kühlmann stopped by a hole in the trench wall where another man stood lowering a rope over a pulley wheel down a dark narrow shaft. Weber's glance rested on a pile of oxygen cylinders adjacent.

"We don't need them yet—not deep enough," said Kühlmann, remarking the glance. "Like to come down and listen for the Englisher?"

"Willingly," replied the artillery officer. "I am not due to relieve Hirschauer for an hour yet."

"Follow me, then," said Kühlmann; "but don't tread on my fingers."

He swung himself into the narrow hole, feet foremost, and descended.

Weber looked down, saw a perpendicular ladder, close against the side of the shaft, reaching down into black depths, where Kühlmann had already disappeared, somewhat clumsily squirmed himself on to the top rungs of the ladder, and commenced the sheer descent. As his head dropped below the level of the opening he heard the last rush and shattering crash of an English shell. He half stopped for an instant, in suspense, to see the entrance cave in; then continued his progress, his feet fumbling for the next lower rung of the ladder. Below him he heard Kühlmann's voice welling up strangely resonant from far beneath; saw the upward flash of his torch to encourage him. The descent seemed bottomless. Cramped, his arms aching, he glanced up to see the entrance no more than a faint white effulgence high

above him; glanced down to utter blackness. The air became dank and stale.

“*Achtung!*” said a voice suddenly, close to his ear. It was Kühlmann. “You are at the bottom.”

A torch flashed out, illuminating the narrow shaft and the black orifice of a small tunnel leading out of it. From the orifice a man emerged, pushing a truck filled with sacks of earth, and clutched at the hook of the rope dangling from above. He stood sharply erect in the white glare of his officer’s torch, grimed with soil, unhuman, like a gnome from uncanny depths.

“This way!” said Kühlmann, diving into the narrow entrance of the tunnel. Weber followed, crouching to escape the low roof, stumbling over the sleepers of the miniature railway. The torch flashed out at intervals, and left him in a darkness that seemed solid the moment it was extinguished.

The tunnel descended in a long easy slope, led on and on in the intensified blackness after the fitful flashes into depths that had still lower depths ahead. A vague terror oppressed the artillery officer as he groped his way onward, the terror of primitive ancestors lost in the mazes of prehistoric caverns.

His civilised mind tried to refer it to an anxiety about the far-distant entrance and a chance shell, to rout it by a calculation of probabilities—but failed. The vague terror persisted, despite the current of damp air he felt faintly blowing behind his ears.

Craving companionship, he strove desperately to keep up with Kühlmann. A dull reverberating roar in the blackness ahead engaged his attention; puzzled him. It swelled louder as he went onward. Suddenly Kühlmann flashed his torch on a whirling electric fan pendent from the roof; explained the sound without a word. Behind he heard the echoing trundling clamour of the truck overtaking them on its return journey.

At last he saw a bright light far ahead in the narrow funnel of darkness, heard the dull thuds of picks at work, caught the voices of men, in the intervals when the man behind him stayed the too rapid progress of the truck. A few more minutes of stumbling haste, when he felt that he must collapse if he could not straighten his aching back, and he found himself in the midst of a group of men illumined by an electric light on a loose cable. Some were sitting on the floor, adjusting an instrument resembling a field telephone; others were hacking and drilling at a wall of clay or shovelling the débris into sacks. It was the end of the tunnel.

One of the sitting figures rose as Kühlmann came among them. He nodded a greeting.

"The relief coming?" he asked in a tired voice.

"Yes," replied Kühlmann; "I came on ahead. *Wie geht's?* Nothing?"

"Nothing," said the weary officer. "We are just going to try again."

Weber sank down upon the floor to rest his aching

back against the wall. Kühlmann turned to him.

“We are going to listen for the Engländer digging their mine. . . . So that the major may have some warning before they blow him up,” he concluded with a smile.

“I hope they don’t blow it up while I am down here!” said Weber fervently.

“It will be the end of you if they do,” replied Kühlmann coolly in his fluting voice. He turned to the men with the instrument. “*Fertig?*” he asked.

“*Ja wohl*, Herr Leutnant,” replied an Unter-officier, with a receiver like that of a telephone operator clipped over his head.

The officer uttered a sharp order, and instantly the men with picks and drills and shovels ceased their work. An absolute silence, unbroken by even the faintest murmur of all those that are continual though unnoticed in the life aboveground, fell upon the little group illumined by the electric lamp in that tunnel end, far down in the depths of the earth.

Weber felt that he could hear his heart thumping as he waited tensely for the verdict of the crouching noncommissioned officer with the sensitive instrument on his head. He gazed at him, fascinated, as at an antique wizard immobile in the trance ere fate is uttered. Minutes passed without a sound, with breath scarce drawn. All eyes were upon the listener, trying to read his furrowed brows. He did not move.

"*Nichts?*" queried Kühlmann at last.

"Nothing, Herr Leutnant," replied the noncommissioned officer.

"Give me the instrument." He fitted the microphones over his ears, listened minute after minute in that same dead silence where his companions were as motionless as statues. Finally he shook his head. "Nothing!" he said gloomily.

"It is those cursed strata," said the other officer.

Kühlmann assented; and the two relapsed into geological technicalities, where Weber was lost.

"You ought to hear something, I suppose?" he asked.

"Yes," replied Kühlmann. "Usually you can plainly hear the other people digging and can estimate fairly well where they are. When the noise stops you know they are laying their mine. But here we have never heard anything."

"But you are certain they are digging?"

"Quite. The entrances to their shafts have been spotted long ago. Beyond that we are utterly ignorant. The Engländer are probably quite close." He turned again to his men; ordered them to recommence their work.

With the thudding of their picks, the artillery officer realised again his position, far down in this crevice, in the depths of the ridge. Once more his dread of the cavern reasserted itself; swept over him in a panic terror that he had to fight lest it should be remarked. Death in this hole seemed to

him the ultimate horror; seemed a near menace that would spring with a dull roar, an imperfectly imagined explosion, an appalling blackness. He was aquiver to be out of it, shrank from the darkness beyond the rays of this little electric lamp. With delight he heard the other officer say:

“*Auf Wiedersehen*, Kühlmann—and good luck!”
—preparatory to departure.

He linked himself to him.

“Good night, Kühlmann!”

The tall figure, bending awkwardly in the confined space, turned and nodded a farewell.

“Good night! I rely on you people to beat off any attack while I am down here,” he added jocularly.

Weber shuddered at the thought of a closed entrance. What if a shell had burst on it even now!

“We’ll do our best,” he said with a forced laugh, and followed the other officer into the tunnel.

As once more, crouching, arms outstretched to finger contact with the walls, he groped his way up that black tunnel, past the whirring electric fan, Kühlmann’s last words haunted him. What if the final bombardment, preparatory to the attack, were even now in progress, obliterating the trenches, filling in the dugouts? He imagined, from ample experience, the tumbled heap of earth that hid the place where the entrance to the mine shaft had been; the crash upon crash of bursting shells in fierce founts of leaping smoke, making certain the work;

the blackened lumps of clay strewn loosely over their tomb.

He hurried, straining after his companion, craving reassurance. The other officer, too fatigued for unnecessary speech, strode on without a word. Weber was impressed by his obvious familiarity with this black underworld. At last, by a flash of his comrade's torch, he perceived that he was at the foot of the perpendicular shaft.

He looked upward—and, with a spasm of renewed terror, saw no light above him. His companion calmly commenced the steep climb. He followed, lagging behind the practised figure above him, for all his efforts. He saw a faint white glimmer high above; saw it darken as his comrade scrambled through. A minute later he himself had emerged into the trench, by the pile of oxygen cylinders.

"*Gute Nacht!*" said the other shortly, and turned along the trench to the left.

Weber turned to the right, toward the front line. After the complete blackness below, the dusky light of the fine summer evening seemed strangely bright. Overhead the stars commenced to glimmer in a blue sky from which the luminosity was even yet not quite withdrawn.

A shell passed, with a whine, to a distant crash. He remembered his fears of the intense bombardment. The artillery fire had not increased. Only

the usual apparently haphazard shelling was in progress.

The trench along which he hurried was thronged with busy men in helmets, profiting by this lull. Some were feverishly repairing the passageway damaged by a chance shot. Others were re-enforcing sandbagged strong points at trench corners, where little black hoop-holes, here and there among the sacks, hinted at the machine guns ready to spurt death into an invader. Most of them were carrying-parties, bearing rations, ammunition and trench stores to men who had hungrily craved them during the long bombardment that had shut them off from a worldful of such articles behind.

He passed over the summit of the ridge, commenced to descend the brow, following the deep trench, which zigzagged downward, with parapets banked high at the corners. Other trenches went off to right and left, which were filled with delving, toiling men, making ready to resist the expected attack. He did not descend far. A few yards below the summit his trench ran into a main fire trench, much damaged by bombardment; its traverses mere heaps of earth, with sandbags askew. He turned along it, threading his way among the feverishly digging men.

After a few steps he turned suddenly into a little square armour-plated recess in the wall of the parapet, offering just space enough for the officer, corporal and two telephone orderlies it contained. The

officer stood with his back to him, peering out through a chink in the wall. He turned round at the entrance of his relief.

"Good evening, Hirschauer," said Weber.

"Good evening," replied the other wearily. Even in this dim light it could be seen that he was haggard with want of sleep. "Your people arrived in front of you. I have relieved mine."

"Nothing fresh?"

"No. A quiet spell this last hour or two."

For a few minutes they discussed brief technicalities; and then Hirschauer bade him good night.

Left alone with his men, Weber tested the telephone communication to his battery with the air of one to whom this was ordinary business routine. He spoke to the Hauptmann with the field guns, some two thousand yards back across the ridge.

"No; nothing fresh. All quiet. . . . No. No signs of attack at present."

He put down the receiver and went across to where the *Scherenfernrohr*, the telescopic range finder, leaned on its tripod against the wall. He looked out through the chink in the sandbags.

Almost straight in front the mass of Mont Kemmel loomed up black against the last radiance of the late sunset. Between its base and him a white mist was rising in level sheets. On his right he thought he could just discern the pale glimmer of the skeleton-white Tower of Ypres, a familiar-enough object in the plain that this view dominated in the day-

time. Close at hand the tangled masses of barbed wire stretched down the ridge toward the English trenches at the bottom. From somewhere among the stakes came the sharp thin flash and quick report of a German rifle in a sniper's post. Beyond the wire, which he now saw to be badly cut by shell fire, an English machine gun rapped out its prohibition of an attempt to repair the obstacle.

He gazed intently toward the enemy's position. There was no sign of it. The white shroud of mist stretched, away below him, level into the dusk, like a sheet of water. It was impenetrable, its unruffled imperceptible rise producing an illusion of brooding calm. Under it guns here and there boomed or cracked, according to their distance; but, after the prolonged roar of the artillery duel, the wailing and crashing of falling shells that for so many days had dominated the ear, the prominence of their casual detonations merely emphasised this unwonted peace. He stared into the mist, toward those distant hill masses, Mont Rouge and Mont Noir, echeloned on the right, behind Mont Kemmel, now blurring into the darkening sky, searching, ever baffled, for a glimpse of the enemy that lay below.

The orderlies behind him were silent, and as he gazed fixedly before him he drifted out of touch with reality; seemed to be alone in this vigil over a solitude bereft of feature, but pregnant with mysterious menace. It came to him suddenly that he had many times gazed out precisely thus over the

blank level sheets of mist that hid an enemy. When? He could not identify it. His emotional background would not blend with any remembered incident, and it was the emotional background that came back to him so uncannily from the past—precisely thus.

It seemed an experience many times reproduced in past existences, with exactly that same pervading sense of personal insecurity, of powerlessness to do anything else. Gazing thus from a hilltop in Flanders over the mist that hid the English foemen awaiting the moment to slay, he, the lad from Munich, fulfilled destiny in the spiral of the æons. He had a flitting vision of himself in the grasp of an obscure Fate that placed him again and again in these circumstances in the penultimate hour before a crisis in his life.

He shook himself free from the hallucination and set himself to grasp the realities of his position. Below him, under that mist, which now lost its spectral familiarity, lay a maze of trenches. He visualised them deliberately. And in those trenches were English soldiers in flat steel helmets—spaced normally or massed for the attack? He could not say. But, should they issue through the mist, he must be instantly ready to give the signal, to shout through the telephone the word that should produce crowds of sharp little explosions in the air above his allotted sector.

He braced himself for such a contingency in his new contact with things as they really were. Even

if the attack was not imminent a raid—one of those that had been made nightly for weeks on the threatened sector—was probable.

And behind the trenches lay guns—guns in hundreds, in thousands—guns beside which the wearied crews slept for a brief space while the weapons cooled, storing new energy for that final fierce orgy of destruction that would be the prelude to the climax he knew to be inevitable. And, hurrying on the roads to the guns, under that pall of mist, he could visualise the long streams of wagons, of motor transport, bringing up new hillocks of shells to melt later when the barrages raged upon the ridge.

For the moment or two in which he thus vividly realised the intense purposeful activity of a vast army hidden under that mist, the English soldiers ceased to be mere shadows to him and he had a glimpse of them, real men with wives and mothers and children, held, as he was, in the grip of relentless Fate, mysteriously forced—he refused to continue the theme.

Behind him, in the trench, he heard an officer giving instructions to a working party about to repair the wire. This was reality; he listened to the instructions without taking his eyes from the chink. It was now almost dark. The stars were bright, even in the west. The mist was no longer a feature. He heard the last carefully reiterated orders of the officer, saw indistinct forms go from the foot of the parapet into that perilous wilderness where

the loose wire hung. It seemed to him that on the instant a vicious fire must burst forth to meet them. It did not. The sector remained quiet, in a brooding hush. Only to the northward the cannonade recommenced once more, grew momentarily more volent. He glanced toward the yellow flashes.

In this darkness his mind went back to the comfortable well-lighted dugout of the battalion headquarters. He heard again the conversation of an hour or two back, saw the major's little face in indignant repudiation of the suggested catastrophe. By a natural transition his thoughts flitted to Kühlmann; to the long dark shaft into the ridge, that tunnel end where they had listened in vain for an intimation of their possible fate. Possible?

He recurred again to the major's ridicule; to the adjutant's scornful suggestion that it would be "something new." There was something familiar in that. His mind jumped back to his schoolboy days—he saw himself sitting with rows of other uniformed little boys in church—*Etwas Neues? Sin autem novam rem fecerit Dominus*—What was that? A text; Numbers xvi, 30; it came back to him word for word in the sonorous tones of the priest: "But if the Lord make a new thing and the earth open her mouth and swallow them up . . . then ye shall understand that these men have provoked the Lord."

Bah! He felt his men behind him look up at his short laugh. He was strangely fanciful to-night. Concentrate! concentrate!—yes, that was also a

memory from his school days—his old master——*Herr Gott!* The dark western sky toward which he looked leaped into one long blaze. He was instantly nothing but a soldier.

In quickly following waves of sound the roar and slam and crash of a thousand guns, firing at a pre-arranged instant, smote him. The roar yet continued from the first startling salvo when he heard the wailing rush of the on-coming shells; the rending, stunning crashes of their arrival. The roar maintained itself, fiercely intensified from moment to moment in a deafening coincidence of reports, throbbing into the distance like a gigantic drum. The rushing of the shells filled the air in the brief intervals between the appalling detonations close at hand.

The bombardment had recommenced. He heard hoarse shouts in the trench behind him, the stampede of panic-stricken men dashing to the dugouts. He set his teeth and gazed steadfastly through his chink. Out there amid the wire lit now by fitful red flashes that leaped simultaneously with the crash, he saw the dim figures of the working party, obscured in a whelm of smoke, racing back to cover. The entanglements would remain unrepaired.

Long drawn minutes passed in this chaos of stunning noise that diminished only for a fresh paroxysm, and ceased never. The earth shook at each vicious explosion. A reek as of burnt fireworks filled the little square shelter, got into his eyes, was inhaled

into his lungs. Unconsciously he smeared his eyes with the back of his hand, intent on that bit of ground darkly in front of him, ready to shout to the telephonist at the first sign of a moving figure.

At any moment the zone of the falling shells might shift farther back—he heard many going well over already—and the British infantry come rushing up behind its barrage, bomb and knife in hand, for the brief death struggle of a reconnoitring raid. He cursed at his own infantry, cowering in their dug-outs, too panic-stricken in this shell fire to fling up the flares that should illuminate their front.

Crash followed crash in such quick succession that it was scarcely possible to note the wail and whine, the broad fierce sibilance of the countless projectiles tearing through the air. The noise of the British batteries was one long-continued heavy roar, surging to ponderous climaxes. Behind him an almost equally fierce roll of sound came from the German guns, working furiously to beat down this terrible fire.

When, for a brief moment, he altered the focus of his gaze from his immediate front to a longer range, his eyes were dazzled with a wonderful spectacle. To the uttermost limits of vision the close horizon was aflame. Broad white sheets of brilliant light flared ceaselessly to the zenith, now far, now strangely near, to the right, to the left—too rapidly multiplied in their irregular coincidence to count. Among them shot yellower tongues of flame

in thousands, leaping and flickering along the gun positions invisible in the dead light of day. Flashes of an almost orange hue were one end of a gamut of fire of which the other was a livid purple. Far back a dump was ablaze, with a heart of furnace red and a smother of rolling smoke.

Nearer at hand the yellow shrapnel stars twinkled, ever renewed as they flashed and vanished, over trenches where German gunners thought British infantry might be massed for the attack. Close in, the ground was at last vividly illumined in the ghastly light, now increasing, now dying down, of the flares flung up one after another by German soldiers ordered from their dugouts to the perilous lookout posts. He gazed, with intense and peering vision, at the fantastic shadows thrown by the tangled wire, on stakes askew, in the dark crater pits where the shells had burst.

He existed, a conscious point of intelligence, held by intense volition above the leaping terrors of the blind instinctive germ-self, agonising from instant to instant in a renewed miracle of continuity, through an uncomputed immeasurable period. The inferno that thundered and crashed about him never varied, entered no new phase that would help to mark off time. The startling shock of a near burst at this instant was followed by another at the next.

The long-rolling viciously vehement roar of the British batteries was as indefinitely sustained as that which came like an echo from the German guns be-

hind. The wide panorama of ceaseless flashes leaping irregularly to the stars was as monotonous in its renewal as that of jostling waves long contemplated; was a hypnotic dazzlement to the vision. Still, he gazed, clearly conscious of nothing else, at the fitfully illumined tangle of stakes and hanging wire.

His vigilance suddenly quickened in a spasm of alarm as a German flare, describing a wider arc than usual, sank like a falling dwindling star far out amid the wire, throwing new shadows among the twisted obstacles. At last! The fulfilment of his eternity of strained expectation was, when it came, a shock at which his heartbeats raced.

For one more second he gazed, concentrated in a paroxysm of attention that convulsed and fixed the muscles of his face. Beyond, in the greenish-white glare of the expiring light spluttering upon the ground, he saw figures, erect and bent forward purposefully; saw the vivid pallor of the faces; saw them move as the light shot up in one last flash before it died. He turned round into the darkness of the shelter. It was like a black dungeon—as silent. Alone? The fear was simultaneous with his word.

“Battery!”

In the darkness the voice of the Unterofficier spoke immediately into the telephone.

“Battery, Herr Leutnant!” it added calmly.

“First barrage—ten rounds gunfire! Fire!”

He heard the message shouted down the line; thanked God, in a sudden recollection of the risks, that the communications were still intact; wondered whether the line orderlies were still present, in the instant in which he turned again to his observation slit.

"Battery firing, Herr Leutnant!" said the voice of the Unterofficier behind him; he scarcely heard it, craving for another flare.

On his left another observation officer had seen the enemy—or had taken the alarm from this local barrage—for another series of vivid little flashes commenced to jump out of the black air. He gazed, oblivious of a terrible crash just behind him. The stretch of tangled wire was now fantastically illuminated as flare after flare soared up from the German lines, fell like a hissing star to extinction in the wilderness. One fell in close proximity to where he had first observed the enemy; lay burning bright.

They were still there! They? He gazed again; saw the same erect and purposefully bent figures, the same white faces among the thicket of the stakes. The shrapnel still lit and cracked above them. They were the bodies of the repairing party, caught by the sudden reopening of the bombardment, dead, hung up on the wire! He cursed savagely.

"Cease fire!" he shouted over his shoulder.

He heard the Unterofficier repeat the order again and again into the telephone.

"Communications broken, Herr Leutnant!" he reported.

The artillery officer cursed again.

"Send up a light signal!" he ordered. "And send one of the men along the wire."

In the reaction from the fierce excitement of the fancied attack his mind went back to the battery, where the men were now stepping back from the silenced guns. He was glad—cowardly—that the broken communications precluded an awkward explanation to the Hauptmann. He could imagine that officer beside himself with mingled curiosity and anxiety. Thence his thoughts slipped to the battalion headquarters dugout, where he had drunk a mug of coffee on the way up. Was the electric light still brightly illuminating that cozy little shelter, with its picture-hung walls? He wondered whether the major and the adjutant were still there, safe from this inferno aboveground—perhaps discussing Kühlmann's pessimistic forebodings.

It was, of course, ridiculous! Nothing could blow up a ridge from its foundations! Then he thought of Kühlmann himself, far down in that narrow tunnel, listening—listening; and then his men, digging away again, in their rayless night all oblivious of the shells crashing and howling and shattering in the night of stars overhead. He shuddered. It was better to face it up here.

The Englander, too—his mind reverted to them for an instant—they were even deeper, if Kühlmann's

mann spoke truth; digging—digging—or had they finished digging? Was the mine all laid, an officer sitting somewhere over yonder, his hand on a firing key, his eyes on the slowly moving pointers of a watch, waiting for the instant when one brusque movement should—— He tried to imagine a surpassing roar; heard, with the clearness of hallucination, the adjutant's scornful: “*Etwas Neues!*” He willed himself to agree with him as once more he focused his attention on the dreary wilderness of the entanglement, with its background of leaping flashes from guns that never ceased.

Suddenly the bombardment passed into a new phase. From somewhere in the dark depths not far distant he saw bright short flashes jump up, illuminating the inequalities of the ground surface, multiplied over a wide front. Almost immediately he heard the deafening detonations of great trench-mortar bombs exploding along the line on his left and right. Mingled with them, in greater numbers, were the sharper bursts of shells, arriving in ever-renewed flights.

These short-range projectiles, vomited as from inexhaustible fountains in the enemy trenches, now monopolised the bombardment of the German front lines. The guns that still flashed and scintillated in the western darkness had lengthened their aim. He heard their shells crashing back and ever back over the ridge in the intervals of the heavy explosions close at hand. They seemed, however, to be dimin-

ishing steadily in their frequency; the leaping gun flashes toward which he gazed seemed to be renewed in an ever-waning multitude.

The bombardment was dying down. He assured himself of this with a relaxation of the intense strain that had held him so long. The night was surely nearly over. He glanced at the phosphorescent dial of his watch—it marked five minutes past four.¹ Yet another reprieve? The dawn must be on the point of breaking. One more hour, at the most, and the attack would be either delivered—or looming still, a vague, awful menace that overshadowed every thought and act of those granted another day of life.

Any moment of this next hour might be that chosen by the mysterious controlling brain far distant behind those diminishing gun flashes. Any moment! He gazed into the night as against shut doors that would suddenly fly open. The minute hand of the wrist watch, still held under his eyes, crawled slowly between the five and ten. A stunning shock came, with a bright red flash.

He picked himself up from the floor, cursing the telephone box, against which his head had been knocked. He knocked it again, against the roof, as he rose. Dense fumes choked him. He remained on his knees, felt round him. The shelter had collapsed under the explosion of a trench-mortar bomb.

¹ German summer time. Five minutes past three A. M. is English summer time.

Through a hole on the ground level he saw fitful quick reflections. Not buried—*Gott sei dank!* He crawled toward the orifice; crawled over the dead body of the Unterofficier. He dragged a box of signal flares with him as he issued into the wrecked trench. Fierce bursts leaped up from it on either hand. He could not stay there. He must go farther back, where he could still observe in some safety.

He glanced up to the ridge, saw its silhouette black against a blanching sky. The dawn!

The next instant he felt the hillside rise and heave like the sea from its foundations; continue to lift and fall under his feet as he reeled and stumbled on his hands and knees, equilibrium impossible. One wild spasm of bewildered alarm convulsed him in the fraction of a second before he saw a vast fountain of red flame shoot up from the summit of the ridge above him—no, not one, but many such fountains, repeated into the indefinite distance, banishing the stars in one colossal rending stupefying roar that swallowed the loudest burst and would not cease.

Sprawling on the heaped clay, he stared up, dazed, fascinated; saw enormous black domes against the sky where the fountains of flame had been; heard the succession of gigantic rumbling blasts as the noise of the more distant explosions arrived. Still the ground rocked and heaved and sank. He felt sickeningly insecure, as though fall-

ing through a world in disintegration. The black domes sank; and in a deluge of hurtling debris, while the concussion of the deafening explosions yet rang in his ears, he heard once more the long thundering roll and slam and roar of the British batteries, firing together at a maximum of repetition.

Even as the first wild flight of shells arrived and crashed, he rose tottering to his feet on the still shuddering earth and gazed toward the enemy.

Against the darkness, but startlingly close, a series of magnificent coruscations of multicoloured sparks was whirling unceasingly and parabolic rains of fireworks from sources near the ground. He stared for an instant in bewildered admiration at the strange and beautiful spectacle.

Then, as the greenish-white flares, the signal lights, shot up from the battered trenches, he saw the uncouth ponderous bulk of tanks nosing their way, with high blind snouts in the air, over the wrecked entanglements, sparks from their grinding contact with the wire flying over and round them. The attack! He bent down to his box of signal flares and sent up rocket after rocket, red and white, against the paling stars.

Then he turned and dashed along the wrecked trench, clambering over heaps of debris, stumbling into deep craters, straining every nerve to get over the summit of the ridge. About him was an inferno of stunning rending explosions. He ran on as in a dream—desperate, baffled, yet continuing. Some-

thing professional in him noted an unfamiliar shell rush; wondered dully what it was. Red fire was burning somewhere, glowing through the choking smoke that reeked across the hillside.

He found himself in a part of the deep communication trench still retaining some of its features. He recognised his whereabouts for a moment, ran on, hearing behind him the thudding of bombs, the hammering of isolated machine guns, the sharp vicious cracks of the weapons carried by the tanks, mingled with the rush and crash of countless shells bursting ever farther across the ridge.

He tripped suddenly over an obstacle, fell with hands outstretched on iron. In the bright red glow that came from somewhere above the lip of the trench he identified the obstacle as he rose. The oxygen cylinders! He gave a glance to his left; saw a man's legs dangling from the middle of a solid mass of clay. It was the pulley attendant, caught by the fall of earth as he peered down the shaft that would not again be opened. The artillery officer only faintly realised the horror that chilled him as he ran on.

He was pulled up short by a sheer wall of earth that barred his progress. He could not identify it. He gazed up, in stupefaction, at a great conical hill rising where no hill had been before, dark against the paling sky. As he staggered back he saw the Red Cross signboard of the first-aid dug-out, all askew, protruding from the debris at the foot

of the hill. Then, on the right—there had been a trench—the battalion headquarters dugout. He stared at the great bulk of the unfamiliar hill, unable to reconcile it with what he had known. It towered solid above him, on the site where he had left only excavations in the level earth; where he had sat, deep down, with friends in a comfortably furnished cave only a little while before. It looked eternal in its mass in this magically changed landscape.

The artillery officer laughed aloud, the screaming laugh of a maniac who triumphs in his dream that he is the first of men to scale the mountains of the moon. Then he commenced to scramble up the loose earth of the steep side. Below him, round him, was the strange ruddy glow he had already noticed, which he now accepted as an integral part of his unearthly environment. He nodded his head at an internal voice that assured him distinctly that the moon was the abode of devils. The surge of roaring, clashing, fulminating sound that beat round him confirmed him in this acquiescence. He laughed again as he clambered upward, shouting Latin prayers, stray verses from the Bible, which a pious Munich mother had taught him in his boyhood, triumphing in his victory over the diabolic.

At last he reached the top. He rose to his feet and was about to advance when he drew back suddenly. Sheer below was a vast pit from which dense smoke curled and drifted. Far down in the smother

of fumes lurked a fierce red smouldering glow. He gazed down, smitten with awe.

He seemed to be two individuals, staring into the gulf. One—an insane one—ejaculated: “*Herr Gott!* The headquarters dugout!” The other—exulting, triumphant, scornful of this incomprehensible madman—shouted, like an antique prophet, justified: “*Disrupta est terra sub pedibus eorum!*” He waved his arms, lost his footing and slipped into the pit.

He slid some distance before an obstruction arrested him, sprawling. He gazed up at the crater’s lip, darkly circular against the sky; and as he looked a projectile arrived with an ugly unfamiliar rush. The incomprehensible madman in him identified it with those already heard; wondered as to the burst.

A sheet of flame flashed from the wall of the crater, trickled down toward him in a broad stream of liquid fire.

XI

PEACE

ACHTUNG!" said a sergeant gruffly. "Less noise there!"

The irregular trench, traversed at short intervals, was choked with close-packed men, above whose deep-helmeted heads a bayonet glinted faintly here and there in the twilight. The first stars were just beginning to appear in a night that would be moonless. Noncommissioned officers pushed their way through the throng, verifying the equipment of their men, emphasising final warnings and instructions. Their tone was businesslike; their scrutiny the keen matter-of-fact scrutiny of a trainer before the race.

The double rank of men, who filled the trench from traverse to traverse on a company front, were diversely armed. Here they leaned on rifles, with bayonets already fixed. There they were cramming into haversacks the last bombs issued to them by corporals who insisted that each man have his full tale. Farther on, broken into little groups, they stood over the light machine guns, now dismantled, which could be easily transported and set up in an instant. Their respective noncommissioned officers

completed the last details of their inspection; swore gutturally but with restrained voices at some man more clumsy than his fellows.

The men stood in stolid silence, their faces haggard and dirty under the deep helmets that all but hid them, the faded grey of their uniforms yellow with mud where a sergeant's torch flashed on them for a moment.

They shivered in the chill of the evening. Some coughed nervously. All were obviously tense, high-strung.

In front of them, here and there, men crouched close under the solid wall of sandbags; gazed down into the reflectors of periscopes. At intervals shadowy figures, clustered about machine guns fitted in strongly armoured emplacements that were invisible from the other side, came into a brief prominence of movement as they tested the arc of traverse of the gun or drew long belts of ammunition from heavy boxes.

Every man in the trench wore the same serious, determined expression. The methodical precision of their movements spoke of long habit in the performance of these tasks, whose gravity was capital. Death, in a few minutes, would be only warded off by the death they dealt; might strike them blindly even then, despite their most scientific precaution.

Yet there was no revolt on the faces of these men. They were set in a gloomy fatalism that overrode the tremors of the quivering body; the fatal-

ism of men inured to the unchallengeable caprice of Death, which ruled their world and lurked, at all times ready to swoop, beyond that sandbagged wall. Sooner or later, in one of countless ways, it would strike. However many perils they had survived, they were hopeless of any other end. A peace rumour had long ceased to be other than a subject for savage mockery. The war was an eternity that had claimed their temporal lives. Yet was the instinct undiminished to fight to the last for their continuance.

There was, however, a special bitterness in their sombre souls as they prepared for the night's work.

"*Diese verfluchte Amerikaner!*" said one of them suddenly, in a tone of murderous hatred, as he tested the edge of his trench knife against the palm of his hand. "Without them——"

A growl of unanimity went up from the close ranks between the traverses.

"Silence there!" said a sergeant in a sharp, low voice. "You Müller! You'll have a shell in us!"

The man addressed grumbled to himself as he put the knife into its sheath; yet he was fully aware of the justice of the inhibition.

The night was deadly quiet. From those American trenches, which, after a brief hurricane bombardment, they were going to raid, came no sound. The slightest noise from them would have been significant to their ears, strained to a more intense pitch of acuteness than they realised. Far back be-

hind them a gun spoke with a gruff double report; a shell came whining dolorously overhead. The sharp crack of a rifle somewhere along the trench was followed by the hammer tap of a machine gun. These sounds left no register on the men's consciousness; they were part of their habitual environment, as normal as the song of birds to the ploughman. Their attention was focused on those silent trenches, masked by the near sandbagged wall, which they knew awaited them at the other side of the desolate, shell-pitted stretch beyond the tangled wire; was held in suspense for the commencement of that furious bombardment whose cessation would be the signal for the plunge.

A flare went up from somewhere along the line—the first of the evening. The enemy's? The signal for the artillery? They waited, holding their breath. The silence continued.

The officer in charge of the raiding party stood, restless and anxious, in the angle of a traverse. From time to time he glanced at his watch; and as he raised the phosphorescent dial close to his face, Müller could see his boyish countenance faintly illumined in the glow. The private wondered impersonally how long this one would survive; in his long experience—he himself had marched almost with the first, had been three times wounded, was a veteran to be pointed at—he had seen so many come, strut their little hour of harshly accentuated importance and disappear.

He had no regrets for them. They all came out of the same mould, replaced each other precisely similar, superior beings whose griefs and joys touched him not, akin, though humbler Olympiads, to the mighty War Lords who moved him and his fellows across the map of Europe, flung them cold-bloodedly to die—to emphasise a diplomatic conversation.

Suddenly there was a murmur of voices farther along the trench, out of sight. A runner emerged from it as he squeezed himself round the traverse and rushed up to the officer.

“Herr Leutnant! Herr Leutnant! A message—from battalion headquarters!”

Though spent with what had evidently been an effort of speed through the obstructed trenches, he saluted as he handed over the envelope.

The lieutenant tore it open; flashed his lamp cautiously upon the sheet. Then his head jerked up in a wild cry; a laugh that was not the laugh of mirth, but apparently of delirium. The men set their teeth in savage wrath at this reckless drawing of the enemy fire.

“Peace!” he cried. “Peace! All offensive operations are cancelled! It’s all over!” He laughed boisterously, vacuously, like a man whose mind has been overthrown. “The war is over! Peace is signed! Do you hear?”

He yelled it at them as though exasperated at their apathy. The ranks of men did not move;

stared at him with the respect the German Army enforces toward an officer, even if he is plainly a lunatic. The officer pulled himself together, re-assumed the normal tone of curt authority.

"Sergeant, the sentries will be posted as usual. No man is to be allowed out of the trench. No shot is to be fired except under the direct orders of an officer. White flags are to be hoisted above the parapet at fifty-yard intervals. White flares will be sent up frequently until the enemy has displayed similar flags. The strictest discipline will be maintained in your section."

The sergeant saluted. "*Zu Befehl*, Herr Leutnant."

The officer hurried round the traverse, disappeared. The sergeant stared after him. Then, with a deep breath, he turned to his men.

"So!" he said. "*Da ist's!*"

They looked at him from their unbroken ranks in silence. This was incredible—fantastic. The end of the war! Like this—without warning—at the moment when the attack was ready to spring? The end? Peace? Reprieve? The genuine ring of the curt orders compelled a credence refused to the wild assertion.

"*Mein Gott!*" Müller heard the ejaculation before he realised it was his own.

This vast event appalled him. The thing was too big to grasp. The others exchanged furtive looks under their helmets, each trying to model

himself on his comrade. They shuffled awkwardly, glanced sheepishly toward the sergeant, at a loss for word or act. Their presence here was suddenly bereft of purpose. An epoch of timeless age had come to an end. The new had not yet begun.

A ragged cheer at a little distance along the trench, whither the officer had disappeared, sounded an awakening note of reality. The sergeant rose to this historic moment.

"You think you can do as you like now, I suppose!" he said with the jeering brutality of the petty tyrant. He glared at the patient squad as at so many victims; was about to continue, when he stopped—cocked his ear.

Far back a gun had boomed. They heard the wailing passage of the shell with a new acuteness—a sudden terror; a sickening collapse. Not true after all? A dream? Madness of the lieutenant? They listened, fixed in their attitudes, in an agony of apprehension—second after second. No other detonation followed.

There was no sound from the enemy trenches. The silence was unbroken. They did not even hear the shell explode. They strained their ears. Not a gun spoke in all the wide night. They had heard the last shell! The memory of its sear across the dark sky was suddenly vivid in them with its full significance—the last!

The man Müller filled his lungs as with a new atmosphere. Something seemed to drop away from

him. The savage who had fingered the knife, who had lusted for blood, was suddenly foreign to him. He felt bewildered. A vast pendulum, on which he had been swinging for an endless time, had suddenly stopped. His first sensation was of an immense, a crushing fatigue. Sleep—oblivion; it was an imperative need of his being. To-morrow he would face this overwhelming fact. Sleep—unbroken by alarms; so much he grasped from this immeasurable boon that had at last descended upon a world grown sceptic of its appearance.

It was not to be. He heard the sergeant detailing his men; found himself assigned to sentry duty. The others stumbled off to execute their orders; returned with the articles they had been told to fetch. The trench was a turmoil of feverish men, desperately at work as though they feared the murderous shot might come ere they had hoisted the signal of protection. Some ripped white sandbags into broad sheets. Others nailed them to poles. Yet another had opened the box of flares; stood ready with loaded pistol to fire the first.

Farther along the trench the white lights were already soaring up amid wild shouts and tumultuous cheers. They also cheered—cheered like madmen, intoxicated with their own clamour, in an overmastering frenzy that gushed from the bottom of their souls, their loudest vociferation yet inadequate to express this vast relief they were now beginning to comprehend—as their first flag was planted upon

the parapet, showing sharply silhouetted above their heads in the brilliance of the first flare.

Müller caught himself half expecting a rush of excited Americans into their trench; cordial handshakes; mutual enthusiasm. But flare after flare soared into a night that echoed no cries but their own. The American trenches lay silent, out of sight, firing no shot, uttering no sound. A regularly spaced row of flapping flags now surmounted the parapet; were illuminated by incessantly soaring, curving flares. The sky was white into the far distance on either hand with a radiance of similar origin. Still the American trenches gave no sign of life. The German soldiers, crowded on the firestep, gazed toward them with eager curiosity. A row of flags, reflecting whiteness as they fluttered in the blanched glare of the falling lights, surmounted them also; were the sole evidence of occupation.

Exasperated by this obstinate silence, a German soldier seized a megaphone and shouted with all his lungs across to them in English: "Hi! You Americans! It's peace! Peace!"

There was a pause. Then a megaphoned reply came booming across: "We know! We won't hurt you."

Baffled by the sarcasm, the German soldiers renounced the attempt at conversation, congregated in little groups for excited talk among themselves. What they were going to do when they returned home—it was one theme, with infinite variations.

Müller stood at his post, breast-high above the parapet, gazing across that strip of ground which so long had been under the ban of terror, scarcely to be spied into; to be entered only furtively by the grace of a precarious darkness, death-cheated at every moment of sojourn. Though the menace was removed, its desolate solitude was still sinister. In all the months and years of war how many multitudes had surged across it, uniformed in the fashion of the moment, shouting in the different tongues of many lands, their faces contorted with the passion and the fear of the death conflict! How many had been annihilated in the spasm of their own murderous thrust! How many had flung up their arms in one wild cry upon a woman despairfully vivid to them! How many had wrestled desperately—body to body—for a dear life that was denied! How many had lingered, inexorably doomed, through the eternities of blazing sun, of frost-chilled nights, hung on the tangled wire whose hold they could not loosen, prone in the shell holes they could not scale!

It lay now in an uncanny silence after its long torment of vicious shell bursts, of every kind of violent detonation; a place of horror abandoned to its dead. The last cry had ceased from the trenches that inclosed it; the last flare had spluttered into darkness. A sky sown full of stars arched over it, unsullied by any terrestrial reflection. From their unthinkable remoteness, this innumerable multitude of worlds and superworlds, holding—like this petty

globe, invisible to them—their mysterious course through infinite space during æon after æon, illumined this hushed arena with the last pin-point rays of their blazing grandeur as indifferently as for so many hundred nights they had shone upon its clamorous agitation. Müller looked up to them in the awe of this silence, so impressive in its new and strange security, and felt suddenly the full measure of his insignificance; of the insignificance of that merciless conflict, which to him had seemed so colossal, so all-pervading, and which had now ceased without—for him at least—decisive victory or defeat. He glanced over the rusty wire that still held sacklike objects upon its barbs, across the shell-riven wilderness where so many young lives had gasped their final breath; where more tragedies had screamed in vain than all the tribunals of Europe had avenged in a hundred years.

It stretched away, to right and left of him, without a cry, in a brooding hush; a corridor left for Death to pace in an ultimate computation of his harvest; left clear through every variant of landscape, hill and valley, woodland and open plain from the Alps to the sea, which tossed its running waves over the dead there also.

He shuddered in a sudden, unwontedly acute perception of the dreadful futility of it all. Solitary there in the night, he was appalled with the magnitude of the destruction that had been wrought. His mind revolted from it. Peace! He breathed a sigh

of thankfulness; a thankfulness which ignored responsibility and retribution. He thought of his own home in the German manufacturing town; of the harmless interests he had forgotten.

An immense longing for comradeship welled up in him; a comradeship that should know no distinction of race or speech; a comradeship that was the full reaction from this bitter enmity in which he had lived so long. He glanced across to the silent American trenches, their regularly spaced flags darkly silhouetted against the luminous blue-black of the horizon, and longed for dawn and the human confirmation of the pact.

He had been relieved, had had some two hours of sleep, when the trench woke again to life in the first grey of the morning. He opened his eyes with the haunting consciousness of some great happening just over the rim of memory, the vague sense of a destiny recently and definitely changed. His partially roused brain could not at first recall the circumstances; was baffled by a feeling that he had wakened to just such an emotion once before in his life. He fixed on that feeling of the past as a clue to the present queried possibilities.

The morning of an attack? A cold thrill ran through him; his stomach sank at this only too apt probability. Then, in a sudden revulsion, the truth flooded in on him: Peace! Wonderful, miraculous peace! A pertinaciously scientific little portion of his mind at the same moment identified the previous

emotion with which he had felt the analogy—it had been his wedding morning. And now the two memories coalesced and re-enforced each other—peace; his wife; home!

“*Mein Gott!*” he murmured, staring straight before him without stirring from his niche in the parapet of the trench. “*Lottchen! Die Kinder!*”

He stared at his rose-hung house he had left—how many ages ago?—on that hot summer morning; saw Lottchen in tears, turning away from him, snatching up the youngest-born in a passionate gesture of despair as he waved farewell. He was overwhelmed with this incredible certainty that he would return to it—to happiness—permanently. He felt like a man waking from a vivid dream of the condemned cell, execution imminent, to reassurance of continued life.

A great gush of affection for his wife was unsealed in him. He yearned out to her, to the children, to home. He visualised his return; thought, with a little glow of vanity, how proud she would be of him with his Iron Cross; with his participation in so many victories.

It was something, after all, to have fought in the war. Now, of course, the thing to do—his mind reverted to the Americans in their trenches—was to shake hands; to start business again. He did not know the terms of peace; but he felt comfortably certain that a German who had fought brilliantly

against so many embattled nations was assured of the respectful admiration of the entire world.

These thoughts and many others coursed through his brain as he lay luxuriating in the consciousness that he had not to get up to fire his rifle through a loophole or restore a damaged traverse under the imminent menace of a shell. They were cut short by the clamour of voices, the rush of many feet just outside. The company was falling in. He rose, stiff with rheumatism, from his earthen couch.

At first, despite the murmured protests of the men, they were not allowed to leave the trench. The officers awaited orders.

Over the parapet they could see groups of slouch-hatted Americans interring the dead on their side of No Man's Land. From the long row of eagerly curious German faces who watched them came a continual shouting of English words, which elicited no response.

Müller found himself searching his memory for scraps of that vocabulary he had learned during a short stay in England years before. He craved to take part, also, in this demonstration of friendliness, impelled perhaps by an obscure desire to make quite sure that this new era of peace applied to him, the individual; that his personal danger was past. He felt jealous of the man on his right who insisted on explaining to him that he had lived many years in America, and that he was going back to his old friends and business.

"*Ach, Müller,*" said the soldier—"America! What is that for a country! It is a freedom you have no idea of. No interfering police. No conscription. No crushing taxes. No officers treating you like a dog. Nothing to prevent your thinking what you like, saying what you like, doing what you like—except, of course, that you cannot commit crimes as you like. Plenty of money! The first year I was there I made——"

"*Ja; ich weiss schon,*" said Müller curtly. "And you are going back, Könnecke?"

"Sure thing!" replied his comrade in American; then, in German: "I take the first steamer back after I am demobilised."

At that moment an underofficer came along and gave permission for the men to leave the trench. They, also, were to bury the dead in the neutral ground. The Germans streamed out through lanes snipped in the rusty wire, leaving their weapons behind them. For the first few moments in the open they realised anew that impressive, continuing silence of the guns, were awed into hushed voices, their movements furtive in the strangeness of this unthreatened exposure among the shell holes at which yesterday they could not have dared a direct glance.

The Americans continued to work on their side of the ground, glancing toward the approaching Germans with a brief laugh and word among themselves as they delved among the heaps of earth.

Könnecke went straight toward them and Müller felt that he could not do better than to attach himself to this experienced ambassador. He wondered what would be that first word from their late adversaries, which, with Teutonic sentimentality, he felt would typify the resumption of international relations. A compliment on their military prowess? He prepared himself for a courteous reception of this most probable salutation, framed ready for utterance an elegant phrase of reciprocal esteem.

Könnecke headed directly toward a tall noncommissioned officer who stood superintending the excavation of a long grave. Müller followed close behind his comrade.

"Howdy, sergeant!" said Könnecke confidently, in his best American accent. "Guess you'll be glad to get quit of this undertaking business?"

The American favoured him with just the smallest fraction of a glance under his eyelid.

"No," he replied coolly; "I'd bury quite a lot more of you."

The German was disconcerted by the level, unemotional tone of the snub. Nevertheless, he grinned in a fashion meant to be ingratiating. Müller's high anticipation sank. After his imagined heroics, this matter-of-fact reception was humiliating. He resented this cool barrier of reserve, was exasperated into a blind desire to penetrate it. At the back of his mind was the explanation that the American

was too dull to appreciate the wonderful qualities of the German soldier.

Könnecke spoke again before Müller could finish his slow preparation of a fitting phrase.

"Reckon you'll be sure glad to get back to the old States," he ventured, renewing his grin. "This is no country for a white man—say, now!" He glanced over the desolation of No Man's Land.

The American also glanced over his environment.

"That's so," he agreed.

"I'm going back, myself," pursued Könnecke—"first steamer that leaves Hamburg—back to my store in Cincinnati. I'm going right back to God's own country—a sure-enough American citizen, first thing you know."

The American turned slowly on his heel and faced the grinning German. He surveyed him deliberately from head to foot. Könnecke waited complacently through the pause, as though expecting a pat on the back.

"You're some optimist!" said the American grimly.

With an abrupt movement, he seized Könnecke by the shoulder and spun him round so that he looked down the dreary vista between the trenches. The battle lines in this area had met in a village; but of that village there was nothing more than a few heaps of pulverised brick, scarcely to be remarked on the naked desolation of the ridge.

"See there!" continued the American, with a

sudden viciousness in his tone, pointing to that obliterated village. "That's you! I guess the States can get on very well without you."

He released his grasp so brusquely that Könnecke, dazed by this sudden hostility, stumbled, and all but fell. The American strode off. Müller looked after him for a moment; then, on a sudden impulse to put himself right with the world—personified at this instant by the American noncommissioned officer—he followed him and overtook him. His virtuous indignation was a stimulus to his remembrance of the English tongue.

"Stop, sergeant!" he cried. The American swung round and disdainfully awaited what he had to say. Müller had his first sentence glib. "You are not just to us," he said. "Germany fought to defend herself against a ring of jealous enemies. We did not start it. Has not our Kaiser said it always? But our victories—surely they entitle us to—to——" He faltered, trying to think of the English for "our place in the sun."

The grey eyes of the American abashed him with their steady scrutiny.

"You've hit it, Mister Boche," he said deliberately. "It's just them victories. This world ain't safe with a crowd in it that makes so darned sure of victories as you do. We've quit fighting; but I guess if you're calculating on shaking hands, and kissing all round, you're in error. No, sir; the best thing you can do is to beat it to a quiet corner and

sit there, and maybe in about a hundred years folk'll have forgotten about your dirty spies and all your mean underhand ways.

"Maybe folk'll forget about the women and children and old men you shot! Maybe folk'll forget about the wounded men you drowned; the villages and towns that ain't no more now than a bit of hell on earth! Maybe folk'll forget about Belgium and the *Lusitania*, and all the rest! Maybe some day folk'll be able to think of a boche without turning sick. But that ain't now; and America has got no use for a crowd like you! We just want to forget you. And I guess your other Europeans feel the same way about it."

He spat, as though in disgust at having been betrayed into such loquacity, turned once more on his heel, and strode off.

Müller stood watching him like a man half stunned. On this first wonderful morning every incident was pregnant with significance; and this sentence of banishment, though it came but from the mouth of a noncommissioned officer of their late enemies, was delivered with such reasoned deliberation, such calm superiority, as to impress him vividly. He felt suddenly homeless, friendless in a hostile world. He tried to banish the uncomfortable feeling. They—all the other millions on this planet—could not possibly decree an effective ostracism of the entire German people. The idea was absurd!

He looked toward the crowd of his comrades in-

sinuating themselves pertinaciously among the tall, soft-hatted Americans, and marked with resentment the contemptuous downward glance upon the round cap of the bullet-headed, under-sized figure no longer lurking behind his machine gun in an intrenchment. He thought of the splendid fellows who had marched to war with him in the early days, and was impelled to cry out in protest that these Germans were not typical; that the manhood of Germany was dead upon its battlefields. The behaviour of these degenerates filled him with bitter anger. Accepting no rebuff, making the most of the monosyllabic replies they received, they ventured to laugh, to become loquacious, determined to extort friendliness, even though servility were the price of it.

“No use for a crowd like you!”—the phrase haunted him with its terrible accent of sincerity. After all the sacrifices—all the blood and tears—this! Hatred he could have accepted with pride—it would have been a tribute; but this disdain that denied even contact! A cold fear invaded him—a presentiment he refused to accept as probable.

George Müller leaned back in the corner of a first-class railroad carriage. He was in civilian clothes—the same suit in which he had reported himself to the depot on that first morning of mobilisation, years back. To-day he wore it again for the first time. The last demonstration of the wonderful military machine of which for so long he had formed part

had been handed him back, neatly ticketed—that once familiar suit of clothes which now looked so strange. It hung loosely upon him, was no longer fashionable; but he wore it with a sense of luxury. This civilian attire was the outward and visible sign of his emancipation from the servitude that had crushed his individuality so long. He felt like a prisoner released from jail, returned to the world of the living, where his personal inclinations once more had scope. A new life was beginning for him; a life that had been in suspense from that wonderful evening in the trenches when, all unexpectedly, the end had come.

Leaning back, with closed eyes, he recapitulated the event—slurring over the episode of the American sergeant's rebuff, which persisted, not to be abolished, in his memory; tasting once more the joy of marching away forever from that ghastly battlefield; angry once again at the suddenly hostile attitude of the French population in their concentration area; it had been impossible to purchase any of the ordinary dainties of life, and a strict order had enforced the utmost correctness of demeanour toward these surly hosts no longer constrained to courtesy; thrilling once more with the jubilant enthusiasm of the trainload of soldiers returning to the Fatherland; bitter at the long administrative delays that had adjourned their final demobilisation.

But now it was all over. He was himself again; no longer a mere number in field grey, but a husband and father hurrying back to his wife and children.

Once more he was to take up the task of earning a livelihood for them. This thought appeared suddenly at the tail of his idle reverie, as it had recurred again and again in every quiet moment since that first morning of peace.

Work and earn! It was a necessity that would bear no postponement. His little capital had almost been spent in keeping his family alive during the famine prices of the years of war. He would have to start afresh.

Once more, as he had done a dozen times already on the journey, he drew from his pocket a letter from the director of the factory where he had been works manager.

"Dear Müller," it ran, "I much regret that I cannot give you an idea of when we shall reopen. We find it absolutely impossible to procure raw material; and even if we could get it our foreign agents inform us that it is hopeless to expect to trade until the prejudice against us is abated. It is a terrible situation. The working classes here are almost desperate. You may rest assured that at the first opportunity we shall again avail ourselves of your services."

Müller reread the letter, though long ere this he could have repeated it word for word. But in the uncertainty of his prospects his mind derived a gloomy satisfaction from this definite negative. What could he do? Emigrate to America? He remembered the American sergeant's words, the cold

aloofness of the American troops, and rejected the idea. The situation was serious. He counted over his slender resources, with a feeling of regret that he had yielded to the extravagant impulse to take a first-class ticket. He had not been able to resist the fascination—after all these years of cattle trucks and third-class carriages—of travelling first class, as of old. It had seemed to him the re-establishment of his identity.

He put away the letter and picked up a newspaper. The first heading to catch his eye was *The Raw-Materials Crisis*, in fat Gothic type. The article dealt at length and plaintively with the terrible disadvantage of German industry in its contest with competitors who, during the war, had seized the principal sources of raw materials throughout the world.

An adjacent column described another crisis, *The Crisis in Shipping*, and bewailed the fact that it was impossible to find cargo space for the millions of tons of ready-manufactured goods which Germany had waiting for export. It showed statistically the immense diminution in the volume of the world's shipping since August, 1914.

"They can thank their damned U-boats for that!" commented Müller, with a curiously impersonal bitterness; he dissociated himself completely from those governing classes over whom he had no control; was rancorously hostile.

The train stopped at an important station. He

left his hat on his seat to mark his proprietorship and went out into the corridor. A minute later he turned to see an imposing Oberst in full uniform, accompanied by a silk-hatted, frock-coated civilian—obviously a functionary of some sort—entering his compartment. Through the window he saw the colonel unbuckle his sword and throw it on the rack, and then coolly remove the hat from the seat, preparatory to sitting in the corner. In a moment Müller had re-entered the compartment.

“Pardon, Herr Oberst,” he said politely; “but that seat is occupied.”

The colonel glared at him.

“Sit somewhere else!” he replied harshly, and prepared to take possession.

A blind fury surged up in the ex-soldier, the accumulated fury of countless brutalities hitherto unresented. He sprang at the officer, gripped his wrist in a hand of steel, and flung him violently out of the seat.

“I do not choose to,” he said; his eyes met the colonel’s in a glare of cold hatred that was almost insane in its sudden vehemence.

With a wild oath the officer leaped for his sword. He found himself once more powerless in an inexorable grip, forced down to a seat. Almost speechless with rage he noted the close-cropped head of his adversary and recognised him for a demobilised soldier.

“Choose!” he cried. “You think you can do as

you like now, I suppose. I'll teach you! Dog!"

Müller smiled grimly at this plagiarism of his sergeant's historic remark, this naïve avowal of the standpoint of the ruling caste. With a newfound dignity he resumed his own seat. He felt curiously elated, as though he had burst some secret chain about his life; the elation of the suddenly inspired pagan who has overthrown his gods.

The colonel continued to glare at him malevolently, muttering to himself the while. Müller ignored him. The train had started. The next stop was his destination, which would end the episode.

The colonel commenced a conversation with his civilian companion and almost immediately the name of his native town awakened the ex-soldier's attention. Hidden behind his newspaper, he listened with a growing interest that speedily became acute. Apparently there was grave industrial trouble—wilful damage to shops and factories; mobs clamouring for work and food; rioting.

He deduced that the civilian was a government commissioner, the Oberst a newly appointed military commandant of the area; both on a mission to suppress the trouble. With increasing alarm he heard them mention various localities that had been sacked. Thank God, his own house was in a suburb of the town! In all probability Lottchen and the children would not be molested. He let his mind dwell on the dear ones he had not seen for so many

months. Another half hour and he should be clasping them to his breast!

He looked through the window and watched with impatience the countryside, which seemed to roll back so slowly, pivoting on distant trees and churches. Here and there were factories in a cluster. He noted that no smoke came from any of their chimneys. A few miserable-looking women were working in the fields; but generally the view was deserted.

This emptiness of the landscape impressed him unpleasantly; the entire countryside seemed to be under a ban. His mind reverted to a clumsy school-boy visualisation of an interdict; came back from it to the present. If the rest of the world had excommunicated the Germans—as it seemed—they would soon be fighting murderously among themselves for the means of existence, like marooned criminals on a desert island. He revolted from the prospect. He was utterly weary of strife. Peace! Peace! He craved for it with all his soul. The war was a nightmare he wanted only to forget.

The train pulled into his destination; stopped. He noticed an unusually large group of policemen on the platform as he descended from his compartment. A moment later he heard the voice of the Oberst behind him, shouting to attract attention. Involuntarily he glanced round; saw himself pointed at by the officer.

"Arrest that man!" cried the colonel. "Insult to the uniform!"

A policeman clutched at him. Müller flung him off in a wild, reckless revolt. He would not be stayed thus on the threshold of his home. He found himself fighting furiously with a group. Overpowered, he sank under a stunning blow from a sheathed sword.

Three policemen dragged him to his feet; hauled him along the platform in the wake of the colonel and his civilian companion. He saw the local chief of police salute the Oberst, go with him through the exit, followed by a posse of his men. In the firm grasp of his captors, Müller also was hurried off the platform and through the lofty hall beyond.

As they emerged from the station into the Bahnhof-Platz the roar of an angry mob smote them like a squall. Beyond a clear space close at hand, where stood a couple of motor cars, was a dense mass of people, who howled and shouted as they waved a forest of fists above their heads. Police, on foot and mounted, kept them back from the station exit by desperate efforts, which had constantly to be renewed.

"*Brot! Brot!*" came one insistent cry from the mob, dominating the chaos of vituperations, of senseless catcalls, of vile words that were the simplest expression of bitter hatred.

They surged forward again and again in tumultu-

ous rushes, stemmed at last by the vigorously struggling police, only to break loose elsewhere.

The Oberst put on his monocle and stared upon the mob with cool contempt. A shower of stones hurtled past him, shattered the station windows at his back. He turned to the chief of police.

"The town is under martial law," he said. "Charge those dogs for me! Mounted men!"

The chief of police blew a shrill blast upon his whistle. A troop of mounted policemen trotted up and formed their ranks in the open space. Other mounted men joined them from the fringe of the crowd. The chief of police gave his orders. There was a flash of swords drawn from the scabbard, a curt command above the uproar. The troop put spurs to their horses. For a second the only sound was the clattering of hoofs upon the pavement, and, then, in one simultaneous outcry, an awful tumult of angry oaths, of panic-stricken shrieks, of screams of pain, echoed from the houses of the square.

Müller gazed, fascinated with horror, at the terrorised crowd of men and women who fled blindly to escape the plunging horses, the swords that rose and fell.

A lane was left open behind the charging troop; a lane strewn with prone bodies of men and women, who endeavoured to raise themselves upon an arm and sank ere they could crawl away.

The colonel smiled grimly.

"So!" he said. "That is the way to pacify them, Herr Bruckmann."

The civilian functionary had turned white. He endeavoured to smile back, but achieved only a grimace. The colonel did not wait for his reply. He went toward his motor car; stopped, with his foot upon the running board.

"Bring that man along to the Rathaus!" he said to the policemen, pointing to Müller. Then, to the civilian, he added: "We will establish a court-martial there immediately."

He disappeared into the car, followed by his companion. A moment later it was speeding along the track of the charging police and passed out of sight into the street beyond.

Several other policemen re-enforced the group that held the ex-soldier, and in a compact body they set off across the square. The tide of the mob had now flowed back into it. The terror of the flashing swords no longer immediately before their eyes, they returned, infuriated by the violence that a moment ago had struck panic to their souls, a savage lust for vengeance blinding them to all other considerations. Howling for blood, hurling stones, striking with sticks, gripping with clawlike hands, they surged round the little escort, which fought its way forward step by step.

In the narrow street at the end of the square the police could make no further progress. Two of them held Müller firmly, who was half dazed by

his treatment, but, like a caged wild animal, ready to spring for liberty at the first opportunity. The group reeled against one another in the rushes of the mob, struck out right and left with their sheathed swords, dealing blows that felled at each stroke. Still they could not advance.

"A prisoner! Rescue! Rescue!" howled the mob.

There was an answering shout from the upper windows of an adjacent house. Müller looked up to it. Men were flinging out furniture into the street below. He could just see the fascia of the building above the heads of the crowd. It was a baker's shop, which had been plundered. The dwelling house was now being sacked.

One of the pillagers had found a rifle. He appeared now at the window, his face grinning in triumph as he shouted a warning. The crowd fell back from the close-beset escort in sudden alarm. The sergeant in charge whipped out an automatic pistol, shouted an order to his men to draw theirs, just as the shot cracked from the window. He fell in a heap.

For a fraction of a second Müller felt his captors' grasp relax as they felt for their weapons. With a violent effort, he sent both sprawling, snatched the pistol of the dead man, and sprang into the crowd.

A fusillade of shots came from the group of policemen, evoking another outburst of shrieks and

cries from the mob, surging back, away from them. The police were now isolated in a stretch of empty street. They charged forward with drawn swords, pistols ready.

With the unthinking instinct of the battle-trained soldier, Müller flung himself into the shelter of a chance doorway and fired rapidly, with practised aim, at the charging group. From the window above the rifle cracked repeatedly. From the mob came the quick reports of other firearms. For one minute more there was an empty space about the savagely retaliating policemen, and then the tumult closed, raging, over the bodies of the stricken men.

From that point Müller lived the unreal life of a fantastic nightmare, where one wild incident blurred into the next. He found himself borne, shoulder-high, along the street by the mob, acclaimed as leader by the latest of their impetuous whims. A hundred wild figures clamoured round him for the orders he gave swiftly, as by instinct. He forgot his home, his children. He was exhilarated with the sense of authority, uttered his commands with the sureness of a born leader who has suddenly found his opportunity.

The passion of the crowd, in fierce revolt against all that had hitherto coerced their lives, was a white-hot flame in his so recently outraged soul. A quenchless hatred for that upper race which had squandered millions of lives as a vain fee for their ambitions and succeeded only in rendering the Ger-

man an outcast, dominated him like mania. All that misery and suffering they had inflicted should now recoil upon those who gave the order—the great caste of government officials and army officers.

An end of it—an end of it; the words beat in his brain like an echo of the phrase he had shouted he knew no longer when. Their power must end here and now. The people—he and his like—had submitted long enough.

The instincts of an ancestor who had fought behind the barricades of 1848 asserted themselves in him as his own as he led his howling, shrieking mob along the shuttered street toward the Rathaus.

In the open space before the building a company of infantry was forming to its front. Machine gunners were rapidly assembling their weapons. Müller took in the situation at a glance. Another minute and the crowd would be exterminated, the revolt crushed at the outset. He ran straight toward the infantry, crying:

“Kameraden! Kameraden! Don't shoot! Don't shoot! I am a soldier like yourselves! A comrade!”

There was hesitation, doubt, among the men forming into line.

“Present!” shouted the officer with a curse.

The rifles rose irregularly to the horizontal. The machine gunners were not quite ready. The officer opened his mouth for the final order. Müller shot him dead.

A moment later the infantry and the machine gunners were overborne by the crowd, which vociferously fraternised with them, cheered them, kissed them, shook hands with them, bewildered them in a clamour of male and female voices.

There was a crashing detonation from the other side of the square. Another company had formed a line; had fired a volley indiscriminately into soldiers and civilians. A howl of rage overpowered the death shrieks of the victims.

The soldiers who had fraternised flung themselves prone and opened a rapid fire upon their erstwhile comrades in arms; civilians and ex-soldiers formed the firing line with them, snatching up the weapons of the dead. Machine guns opened from both sides. The battle commenced.

Gradually the rioters and their scanty auxiliaries were forced back out of the open space. Müller found himself appealed to for orders by leaders of other sections of the mob as well as by his own immediate following. He gave them with quick decision: "Machine guns to the roofs of the houses; snipers to the windows." The fusillade swelled in intensity with each moment as more and more of the mob procured weapons.

Still the government forces held the open space in front of the Rathaus. Over the barricade, which now closed the entrance to the street, Müller glanced cautiously at the line of prone soldiers who fired rapidly, ten bullets against one, at their concealed

foes. He noted pieces of paper whirling across the ground in a high wind from right to left of the line, and had a sudden inspiration.

"Fire the houses on the side of the square!" he cried.

A noisy crowd of men and women dashed off by back streets to execute the order. A few minutes later dense volumes of smoke were rolling across the square, blinding the aim of the defending soldiers. He saw them rise and retreat, misty figures in the smother of fumes; rose to shout his own men forward. Something struck him violently in the chest.

He woke from vague dreams of suffering to find himself stretched across a dead body. Bewildered, he gazed round him. It was twilight. Ruddy reflections flickered on the gaunt skeletons of gutted houses, from the foundations of which smoke still welled in volumes. In his immediate neighbourhood all was deathly quiet; but from somewhere in the distance came rapid rifle shots. He recognised his environment.

"These cursed Belgians!" he said to himself. "That's another town fired to teach them a lesson! I hope they shot the mayor."

The illusion was complete. Waking from the coma of his death wound, he was back again in the wild days of 1914—the familiar gutted town, the row of huddled bodies of women and civilians at the foot of the shot-whitened wall near the broken barricade, were unmistakable.

He realised suddenly that he was wounded; endeavoured to rise in an effort to find his company or an ambulance. His failure brought the truth home to him in a thrill of horror. He clapped his hand to his chest.

"*Mein Gott!*" he murmured despairingly as he sank back. "And the Hauptmann said that peace was certain in a few days!"

As his eyes closed he wondered whether the twilight was of evening or of dawn.

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