



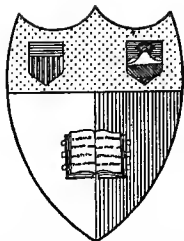
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# THE SECRET OF THE MARNE

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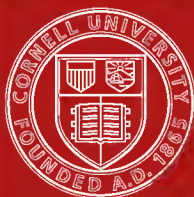
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***By Marcel Berger***



**Ordeal by Fire**

**The Secret of the Marne**

# The Secret of the Marne

How Sergeant Fritsch Saved France

By

**Marcel Berger**

Author of "Ordeal by Fire"

and

**Maude Berger**

**G. P. Putnam's Sons**  
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## FOREWORD

WHY did General von Kluck, on September 2, 1914, order his vanguard to deflect to the south-east, instead of continuing their rush towards Paris?

Up to this point, the German plan had been unfolding with masterly precision. The right wing, commanded by von Kluck,—some twelve army-corps strong,—had not ceased, since Charleroi, to outflank its adversary.

In spite of their heroism, the Franco-English forces had been obliged to fall back. And though they had been able to inflict severe losses on the enemy, the road to Paris was nevertheless almost open to the invader. On the evening of September 2d, Hanoverian scouts encamped at Gonesse, ten miles from Paris. The fortifications could not have resisted the German siege-guns.

But at this point, with victory in his grasp, von Kluck unexpectedly turned away to the

south-east, thereby laying himself open to a flank attack. Gallieni and French seized the opportunity; the battle of the Marne was fought, and France was saved. "Sergeant Fritsch" had done his work.

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PART I  
Henry Fritsch



## CHAPTER I

### A CHIEF WHO KNEW HIS MEN

LIMPING, drenched, famished, the men dropped on the scanty bed of straw. Some, conquered by fatigue, went to sleep at once, and some, too bruised and sore, sought in vain for a comfortable posture and went over in their minds the horrors of that first campaign.

The regiment, like all regiments, had left the depot in the highest spirits. Then had come the long journey in carts with jocular inscriptions scrawled over their sides,—thirty hours of songs and laughter. Then the arrival near Mézières and the immediate fresh start in the direction of the Belgian frontier. Two days later they were in contact with the enemy. It was at Dinant, on the 15th of August, that the 387th gathered its first laurels.

The survivors recalled that forced retreat followed by an overwhelming counter-attack, when

a division of the German Guard and the First Corps of German cavalry were decimated, crushed, hunted, after a hand-to-hand struggle in the streets, and the flags of Belgium and of France again floated in glory above the citadel. But their tired minds dwelt rather on the terrible time that followed, which seemed as though it would never end. Forced march after forced march, punctuated by short fights. Every night trenches to be dug. Every morning a glimpse of the enemy, a few shots exchanged, and then the order to fall back. What, again? So soon? Yes, they were outflanked on the right or the left. The enemy artillery was pouring a madly wasteful rain of projectiles on the highroads, the byroads, the footpaths. The swarming *tauben* pursued them and harassed them. The evacuated territory grew constantly, and behind them like torches flamed the villages of France.

The men lived only in the hope of an offensive reprisal, and the last night but one they thought it was coming. It was on the outskirts of Guise. Instead of waiting to be attacked, they advanced. At dawn they stumbled on the Boches; in a conquering wave they swept them back over recaptured miles. The sun rose upon bayonets



gleaming red, but that was all there was of it. The sequel was abandonment of the retaken positions, countermarch back to the south, a tramp of nearly ten miles with only one halt, and on empty bellies. Above all, what were they to make of the rumours brought by a perturbed motorcyclist—a serious reverse of the English troops near Montdidier, and Amiens fallen into the enemies' hands?

Stable as was the morale of those admirable troops, a little discouragement made its way into the bravest breast that night. To exhaustion succeeded depression. Hunger added her evil counsel. Hoarse voices were angrily raised:

“This ain't no way to treat white men.”

“Here's my resignation,” cried Machevut, punching his knapsack with his fist.

In a corner a group formed around Fouinard who was monologuing. He was the evil genius of the section, a recruit who had been brought into the ranks only four days before by the last reinforcement. Always complaining and grouching, a purveyor of bad news, he was beginning to have a sinister influence on his jaded comrades. As a rule, his bubbles were pricked by Sergeant Fritsch, a Parisian, educated and good-natured,

whom the men adored; or by Cochefort, the witty, who often put him down with a joke and turned the laugh against him. Unfortunately the sergeant and Cochefort had disappeared a quarter of an hour before in search of highly improbable rations. Fouinard profited by the occasion, to recite his grievances in his characteristic drawl:

"No way to treat white men, marchin' us all day as empty as the devil. Guess the old man doesn't know where he's at. What's the sense of back trackin' when we was on top? To be sure our artillery had given out. And our aviators were takin' mighty good care of themselves. I never saw the tail o' one. And the English crumpled on our left. Total, one black eye for us.

"Let 'em give us some grub. Otherwise, nothing doing for this little soldier-boy. Let the captain whistle if he feels like it. I know one feller that'll sit tight and say 'by-by' to this crowd."

Thus the grumbler pursued his poisonous soliloquy. Margerie, the kindly giant, tried twice to interrupt him, but speech came slowly to Margerie.

Then little Corporal Blottin spoke up timidly:

"The Boches would like to hear you talk that way."

"Oh, shut up," said Fouinard. "Don't talk like you was an officer."

"He's a hog," sighed Machevut. "But it's a fact they don't give a damn about us."

"Right you are," growled Couvert, the big plumber from the Marais.

A concert of curses arose. It was a moment when a sinister whisper poisons the healthiest minds.

Then suddenly there was consternation. The light of a lantern flashed in the opening of the door. The nearest turned and started up. The colonel! Corporal Blottin sprang to "attention."

"No, no, keep your places, boys."

It was really Colonel de Laroque; they recognized his tall silhouette in his great overcoat. His face was almost hidden by the hood, but his grey beard was visible, and there was no mistaking his voice, both grave and kindly.

"Well, what is the matter?" he asked.

No one answered.

"Were you the orator, Fouinard?"

Fouinard was dumb.

"Your eloquence is highly spoken of," con-

tinued the colonel. "I should be enchanted to hear a specimen."

The colonel had chosen his moment.

"Tell them," he suggested, "how you faked an epileptic fit on the 7th of August to get out of starting with the boys of your class."

Fouinard had turned pale under the glances directed at him, confirming a story that had already leaked out.

The colonel raised his voice. "Get it well into your heads, boys, that I know you all and have an affection for those who deserve it. Do any of you feel kindly to me?"

An affectionate murmur arose from the group. They had adored the colonel from the day of their first meeting, when, on the eve of their departure for the front, he presented the flag to the regiment and the regiment to the flag, crying, with a fine gesture: "I do not know to which of the two I am doing the greater honour."

In the field they had seen him steadily sharing the life of his men. He was the first in the assault, his swagger-stick in his hand and his pipe in his mouth, like the old "African" that he was. And in the sinister hour of retreat, when he rode beside the column on his beautiful black mare, there

was not a man who did not resettle his knapsack with a movement of relief, did not grasp his rifle the tighter, did not feel that under the eye of such a chief he could conquer everything.

The colonel seemed to be looking about for some one. "I see Corporal Blottin," he said, "but where is the sergeant? Sergeant Fritsch?" He was frowning. "Where is he? His place is here."

Some one said: "Probably on the hunt."

"How is that? Does he neglect you?"

They protested. On the contrary. He was probably hunting up something for his mates. He was a dandy non-com, nothing yellow about him, always fussing over his men. At this moment he was certainly following some trail for the common good.

"Unless, indeed," added Machevut, "seeing that he is with Cochefort, those two are up to some of their little jokes."

Faces cleared. How many times, in gloomy hours, those two had invented something funny that cheered everybody up!

"Very good, very good," said the colonel. "I did not come to scold you or to punish you. Even you, Fouinard, get off this time; but don't

let me catch you again." He advanced a few steps into the stable where the lantern projected its feeble light. "I came to talk with you, my boys."

He glanced at the cracks in the roof.

"You are not very well lodged, men."

Couvert ventured a joke. "We're in cold storage."

"You'll keep forever, my lads."

He looked about among the men and called Margerie's name. The giant straightened up.

"As you were, my boy. I am looking for you."

"Me, sir?" stammered Margerie.

"Yes, I am looking for you as the bravest of the brave. I know just how many Boches you accounted for the other morning, at the risk of the bayonet. Tell me your number."

Margerie was quite incapable of giving his number.

"I make it No. 14. Do you agree with me?"

That was the number. The wonderful colonel evidently knew everybody's number and everything else about them, faults and virtues alike. For ten minutes he stood there talking with them as a friend. He knew their hardships and shared them. A bed had been offered him but he had

refused it. As for food, it would have made him sick while his men were famishing. He dwelt on the importance of their task. They, the first reserves, were simply the covering troops under whose protection France, peaceful France, surprised by treachery, would pull herself together. He explained to them that there was no occasion for despair in the situation. What they were doing was admirable, still more admirable what they were going to do. They would be spoken of among the glories of France. The regiment would soon be brought up to its normal effective by reinforcements. Soon there would be plenty of everything—men, arms, munitions. There would be a day of sad awakening for the Boches. To be sure, they were retreating, but did this retreat look like a defeat? Not at all. It was studded with victories. And then how could anyone tell that they were not doing this to carry out a superior plan? Perhaps to deceive the enemy in regard to their resources or their morale, to draw him on to a chosen place, into a trap. Why not?

It was brief and moving, the colonel's speech. At the end of it all the men were sitting up. Machevut interpreted the general feeling. "When do we start again, sir?"

"Perhaps tomorrow, perhaps in an hour."

"Never mind when and never mind where, sir; if it's with you, it'll do."

There would have been a sensation in the section if they had seen the colonel a few minutes later, sitting on the edge of a well, having removed his overcoat and also his beard, and in the act of vigorously soaping his face.

"Confound this paint," he was saying. "It's certainly water-proof."

He turned to his orderly, who was shaken with laughter.

"I thought of course you were going to let them onto it at the end, sergeant," said Cochefort.

"Well," said Fritsch, laughing, "when I saw how they bucked up, I thought I would let it go at that."



## CHAPTER II

### A DELICATE MISSION

WHEN he was roused before dawn by a message that the colonel wanted to see him at once, Henry Fritsch was not without certain misgivings. Stiff with cold and still stupid with sleep, he managed to get up without waking his comrades. Could a rumour of the visit paid to the quarters of the 22d section the night before have by any chance reached the colonel's ear? Had a discreet investigation revealed the identity of the audacious impersonator?

A captain awaited our hero at the threshold.

"Sergeant Fritsch?"

"Yes, sir."

"Come in. The colonel is waiting for you."

Fritsch entered a low-ceiled room. The bed was not disturbed; the colonel must have been up all night. He was seated at a little table, his cap lying beside him. By the light of a poor

lamp, he was finishing a report. Fritsch, motionless and respectful, waited at attention. The colonel turned and made a sign to the captain to leave them. Then he turned on the young non-com a glance that penetrated his soul. Fritsch knew well that manly face, well enough to reproduce it as he had done the night before. But rarely had he seen its expression so anxious and at the same time so enthusiastic.

"Fritsch," said the colonel at length, "we are considering you for a very important mission. Your captain has spoken of you to me in the warmest terms."

"I am much obliged to him."

"You are a teacher of German, they tell me."

"No longer, sir."

"You know that language well?"

"Excellently, I may say."

"It seems also that you are not without military knowledge."

"Military matters interest me very much."

"Are you not a nephew of General Herluison?"

"You are correctly informed, sir."

Briefly and clearly the colonel laid the following facts before him. That very night, not two hours earlier, by great good luck, a patrol that

had lost its way fell into a little enemy post inside our lines.

He pointed it out on the map. "You see this road marked 'poor'; it is four miles from here, nearly at the watershed line, about three hundred yards to the right, by a bad footpath. It's an abandoned building, so well chosen that it overlooks three highroads and the valleys of the Oise and the Blaise. It has been organized and occupied for a long time. Two German spies, hidden there, reported by telephone to the enemy. Our patrol, in their zeal, sent them to join their ancestors, but the sergeant in command has just reported that from time to time the buzzer sounds, and when he takes up the receiver he hears 'Hoch! Hoch!' from the other end of the wire."

"I begin to understand," said Fritsch.

The rôle bristled with difficulties. It would be no joke to try to mislead, over the telephone, the enemy general staff in regard to the number and disposition of the troops that were to resist the cutting of the Blaise. The job ought by rights to have fallen to the lot of one of the officers on duty, and a commissioned officer at that. The colonel did not try to conceal it, but unfortunately the cadres had suffered throughout,

two days before in the glorious actions of Guise, and he could not lay his hand on anyone who spoke German well enough.

"Do I take anyone with me?" asked Fritsch.

"If you happen to have a comrade who knows the language."

"Private Cochefort, who worked for two years in the Duchy of Baden."

"Good; take Cochefort. Two will be necessary and sufficient.

The colonel went over the detail of technical instructions, and was surprised to find the young man well informed on a number of points.

Fritsch smiled. "My uncle has bored me to death with these things."

"A great man, your uncle. He has gained fresh distinction since the outbreak of the war; a great tactician, ex-director of the Military Academy, the only man who anticipated the strategy and tactics of the Germans."

Fritsch ventured to ask one more question. "Shall I not be connected with our lines by telephone?"

"You shall be. You will take with you the apparatus that I have urgently requisitioned from the division."

The colonel placed in the sergeant's hands a map, a field-glass, and the code to date of the enemy's signals of various kinds. In the act of dismissing him, he showed emotion.

"Sergeant Fritsch," he said, "I congratulate you on the sacrifice you are making with so fine a spirit."

"Sacrifice, sir?"

"Your instructions, as you see, are precise. They direct you to deceive the enemy to the last."

"Of course, sir."

"Up to the moment when your position is indubitably controlled by his advance forces."

"That is my understanding, sir."

"You have then a very small chance of getting out."

"Isn't that true of all of us, sir?"

"At your age one wants to live."

"One wants one's life to be decent."

"Are your parents living?"

"No, sir."

"You are not married?"

"No, sir."

"Nor engaged?"

The young man hesitated a second. "No, sir. No one is waiting for me."

The colonel was silent a moment; then he said: "I am going to show you something that will interest you, Fritsch."

He scribbled a few lines on a pad, tore off the page and handed it to the young man.

"The text of your citation."

Fritsch read it aloud. ". . . has acquitted himself with remarkable courage and ability of the dangerous and delicate task confided to him; has succeeded by his devotion in assuring the safety of the army corps, in the most critical circumstances."

He choked a little, and the two men shook hands in silence.

Fritsch delayed his start only until he should be in possession of the telephone apparatus. His first thought had been to wake Cochefort at once, but he found him sleeping so soundly that he had not the heart to rouse him until the last moment before what might be the last journey for them both. He lay down again himself on his heap of straw, but he did not try to sleep. He reviewed his life, the life of which he had hoped so much.

His family, of Lorraine stock, from the neigh-

bourhood of Fenestrangle, had migrated to France in '71, but could not make up their minds to leave the frontier. He was born at Commercy, at the foot of the Côtes de Meuse, whence the spires of Metz are visible. After a brilliant course of study at Bar-le-Duc, he received three nominations to the Concours Général, which was to be suppressed the following year. Every summer after that period, however severe the German surveillance, young Henry managed to spend several weeks in the annexed territory. From taste and for practical purposes he initiated himself, while still a lad, into the subtleties of the German language and Kultur. It is best to know what you are going to fight. When his school-days were finished, and his parents were asking themselves what they should do with the boy, the question was peremptorily answered by an old uncle, professor of the Faculty of Letters at Nancy. The boy had the makings of a scholar in him, and the Grande Ecole still preserved its prestige with the bourgeois public. At the age of sixteen and a half, young Fritsch made his début at the college of Louis-le-Grand.

Two years later he came to grief in his examinations; it was the oral history that ruined him.

Not that he was unfamiliar with the subject assigned him, "Germany from 1870 to our own day." On the contrary, he knew it too well. He developed his favourite theory: "Germany, an essentially aggressive power, has become, since her successes, a permanent danger to the safety of Europe and of France in particular." And he insisted on the existence and aim of Pan-Germanic aspirations.

His examiner, well-known for his easy-going collectivism and internationalism, listened to him with impatience and got even with him by a preposterous mark.

In his discouragement, Fritsch enlisted. A year of service with the rank of student officer of reserve, interested him, thrilled him.

After this was finished, he took two examinations, one in languages, the other in philosophy, and won a travelling fellowship which carried him to Germany for eighteen months to prepare his dissertation. All his tastes were already leaning towards literature. Certain letters written from Berlin to an important evening paper almost placed him in the front rank. During this sojourn, his conviction was only strengthened that the war-virus had infected the Teutonic soul, and that



a general conflagration was at hand. Amazed and horrified by what he saw of the functioning of the German war-machine, he imparted his misgivings in one of his articles. From that day his copy ceased to be printed. Moreover his dissertation on Germany was unjustly rejected. Thereupon he bade farewell without regret to the academic life and turned to the life of letters. Here he found an opening and threw himself into it with all his strength.

The radiant years of youth that followed, Henry could hardly then recall without melancholy; years bright with so many memories, gay or tender; and sad years too. He had plenty of talent; it flowed out of him, various and profound. And what toil he put into it! Still there was no adequate result. His manuscript articles were not read; his novels were returned; his plays mislaid. There were months of that sort of thing.

His parents died and his uncle broke off relations with him. The only house where he was always sure of a kindly welcome was that of General Herluison. He dined there twice a week, and once, between two interminable discussions of current politics and high strategy, the general

said: "It's a shame you didn't go to Saint Cyr."

The theatre was especially attractive to Fritsch, who had not only the playwright's gift but the actor's. There was a less depressing period in his life when he supported himself through several weeks of destitution by making his talents as a mimic appreciated in a Montmartre cabaret; but a well-known professional objected, and organized a conspiracy of silence in Henry's audience. And the manager died; so another door was closed.

When Fritsch was thirty years old he had arrived nowhere. In the world of today, crowded with pretentious incompetence, many a genuine talent goes under. It will be understood that under his jolly-good-fellow manner, Sergeant Fritsch hid a heart painfully disillusioned by the raps of churlish fate.

A reply came from the division: the apparatus asked for could not be sent at once.

"Confound the red tape," grumbled Colonel de Laroque. To Fritsch he said: "You must start. I will send it to you at the earliest possible moment."

The wan day was breaking when our hero went to call Cochefort.

"Get up, old man."

Cochefort muttered, stirred, and rubbed his eyes.

"What's up? Marching orders?"

"Hush, just you and me."

"Just us?"

"Special mission!" In two words he told him the news. Cochefort slapped his thigh. "Jaw with the Boches over the telephone? I shouldn't wonder if I gave 'em some true talk."

"This isn't just the moment."

"I should worry."

He got up, quite cheered. "Some lark," he said. "In the first place, we'll have fun with the Boches, and then we may find something to eat on the road."

"Are you still hungry?" teased Fritsch.

"Slightly. Forty-eight hours is a little beyond my habit."

Their preparations were quickly made, and Fritsch went to shake hands with Machevut, who had waked up.

"Is our little sergeant going to leave us?" asked Machevut.

"See you later at Berlin."

Fritsch delegated his powers to Blottin. "Good-bye, old man; they tell me that if the colonel hadn't happened along last night . . ."

"What are you gassing about, old slob?" said Cochefort, intervening cheerfully.

"I'm coming. Let's say good-bye to the captain."

Just as they reached the farmyard, the captain loomed up.

"Captain!"

"Fritsch!"

"I was looking for you."

"I meant to say good-bye to you."

Between the officer, a lawyer, and the sergeant, a scholar, a strong, manly friendship had built itself up during these four weeks.

"The colonel told me that you had a hand . . ."

"He did me the honour to consult me in regard to choosing . . . the rare bird. I told him there was only one in sight, that you are a class by yourself."

"Captain, may I ask a favour?"

"Anything I can do, my dear fellow."

Fritsch drew from his tunic two post-cards. "One never knows what may happen," he said,

"or rather one knows too well. If, by chance, I shouldn't turn up again, it would be kind of you to hand these two missives to the motorcyclist when he goes by.

One of the cards was addressed to:

M. LE GENERAL HERLUISON,  
40, rue de la Tour,  
Auteuil.

The other bore the superscription:

Mlle. ANNE MARIE DE SERAZEREUX,  
58, rue de l'Université,  
Paris.

Serazereux! Fritsch repeated silently the syllables that once had meant for him the earthly paradise.

## CHAPTER III

### TO THEIR FATE

THE two comrades started on their mission with a firm tread. All along the broken roads they met long columns of infantry that had been marching through the night. Ironical greetings met them from the ranks.

"You fellers are headed the wrong way."

"Brussels is our billet," Cochefort would say.

Farther on, they met a platoon of hussars, and the lieutenant, suspicious, stopped them and questioned them closely before he would let them go on; an excusable, and even a necessary precaution, in a country infested with spies.

The rising sun soon dissolved the clouds scattered in the sky and drank up the humidity of the earth. Evidently it was going to be a glorious day. Cochefort, in the best of spirits, whistled a march. Or else he reverted to one of his favourite themes and chaffed the sergeant about the

abnormal size of his "grip." Fritsch in fact carried on his back, by a whim in accord with his character, a load quite different from the primitive baggage of the infantryman: in the first place, two books, Tacitus and Jules Renard, which he declared he never parted with; next, two of his own manuscripts, a novel, and a play in three acts on which he meant to work in his odd moments (probably the rest of his moments were going to be very odd indeed!); and finally, by a queer whim, a make-up outfit, three tubes of "tint," some false hair (including the colonel's beard), a glue-pot, two brushes, and some rouge-sticks.

The road they were following crossed a highroad and at the four-corners they saw a distressing spectacle, a stream of fugitive non-combatants. Old men, women, and children, many of them on foot, were pushing or dragging wheelbarrows and carts in which were heaped everything they possessed. Other vehicles were drawn by oxen, donkeys, even dogs. They were a haggard crowd, fleeing headlong, abandoning their homes to the horrors of invasion. The enemy was signalled; not far away; if not his whole force, at least a reconnoissance of Uhlans. Since daybreak they could hear from the north the roar of guns.

Our friends stopped. They had seen the same sight often enough since the disaster in Belgium, but it never ceased to wring their hearts. A baker's cart came along, drawn by a thin old donkey. On the side of the cart was inscribed in large letters the legend

“STAR BAKERY OF SERAZEREUX”

To the surprise of Cochefort, Fritsch stepped forward and asked the buxom woman who was driving it whether she was from Serazereux.

“As you see, my son.”

“Do you know the marquis?”

“Marquis Edouard? At the château?”

“Yes.”

“Do I know him? Why I bake for him and my father baked for his father, and my grandfather . . .”

Fritsch interrupted the stream. “A simple inquiry, madam. Has the Marquis Edouard been seen at Serazereux since the war broke out?”

“Sure.”

“Alone?”

“Sure; it was no time to bring Mademoiselle Anne Marie.”



“Was he there when you left?”

“Thank goodness, no. He may have gone back to Brittany.” She counted on her fingers. “He stayed only four days; that makes ten since he left.”

“Before Charleroi, then. Thank you.”

Our friends resumed their journey. A little farther on they picked up the stony road marked “poor” that the colonel had indicated. During the rest of their walk, in spite of Cochefort’s jokes, Fritsch could not lay aside his air of abstraction. Serazereux abandoned! There was nothing surprising in that. How could he have supposed that the marquis would be so rash as to expose Anne Marie to such a menace? Well, he knew the facts, anyhow. These last days, as he drew nearer that region of the Oise, his mind had been forever hovering about the village and the château. The regiment on the retreat must have passed within twenty-five miles of it. He had dreamed that he might catch a glimpse of the ancient towers, the vast outline, of the fine old feudal structure where she dwelt every summer. Perhaps he had been sustained by the hope of seeing Anne Marie herself, dreaming on a balcony, or galloping along the shady avenues of the park. He

would hardly have dared to make himself known to her in any case. And now fate had spoken, and between them a great gulf was fixed.

He had met the young girl the preceding winter at a ball at the Military Club, whither General Herluison had taken him. He had been presented to her by chance, and a sympathy had immediately made itself felt between the lovely blonde heiress, dancing at her first ball, and the dashing cavalier that Fritsch could be when he tried. He had the audacity to dance with her six times. At parting she presented him to her father, the old marquis, civil but distant. And his head whirled when the young girl gave him her hand and said she hoped they might meet again. After ten months he could still recall the modest, tender look she gave him. Then came an invitation the following month, to the grand ball given in the old family house on the Boulevard des Invalides, in honour of Anne Marie's eighteenth birthday. At this ball he had elbowed all the celebrities of the fashionable world.

The Marquis de Serazereux, heir to one of the great names of France, for twelve years a widower, lived for his only daughter. Under his direction

Anne Marie had received an education both liberal and thorough. Together they had explored the world on their yacht, the *Parthenon*, and these travels had given the girl a certain depth of culture and an independent judgment, within limits still compatible with girlish charm. She was a charming mixture of timidity and courage. It was she who, after their third meeting, suggested to the young man a post-card correspondence. What gratitude he felt for the youthful enthusiasm that had led her to him! One day she wrote him a letter in which she told him how she had weighed him in the balance and found him generous and loyal beyond all others; how her choice was made; and then, naïvely, modestly, she asked him to tell her in return what he felt for her. His whole soul went out to her in his reply.

She announced that she was going to speak to her father. In her confidence as a petted child, she fixed the day of their marriage. A week later, a letter told him of her bitter disappointment. Indulgent in everything else, the old marquis drew the line at a misalliance. The last of the Serazereux to tarnish the splendid line from which she sprang? Never. Not while he lived, at any rate. He left no room for doubt

in the mind of Anne Marie. She herself was wholly without the sentiment of caste, but even she was impressed by the old man's recital of the glories of their race. Ambroise Jean Sebastien was made baron for having saved at Boubines, at the price of his blood, the life of King Philippe Auguste. Martial Godefroy was made marquis for having rallied at Crécy the weakening French left wing. Hence the device of the Serazereux arms: "France twice saved by us." What could a young girl, trained to respect, answer to such facts as those? She yielded to her father, warning him that his line would end with her. As for Henry, she told him they must cease to correspond, but that she would never marry anyone else.

The young man shook himself free from his bitter-sweet thoughts. The few words he had scribbled on the post-card had stirred memories and wakened regret, though they were carrying a last farewell.

The road went continually uphill, skirting a tract of bushes. Already a wide view opened out to the east and south. At the right, a few miles away, they saw the silvery Oise with its

towpath bordered by poplars. Fritsch spied about for a few moments and found the footpath indicated by the colonel. This path went almost straight up.

"Some climb," grumbled Cochefort.

They reached the top of the spur. A hundred yards away stood an abandoned building, a great edifice in ruins, buried in the earth, almost hidden under a growth of grass and climbing plants. Part of the roof was gone. Hardly anything was left, in fact, but the four walls and the flooring of the first story, caved in here and there. As they approached, a white bird dived into one of the yawning windows.

"They must have nests in there," said Cochefort.

They had hardly advanced thirty paces when two poilus emerged from behind a group of trees, and, with crossed bayonets, cried "Halt!"

Cochefort jumped. "Oh, my poor nerves!" he said.

"Advance and give the countersign!"

"Denain," said Fritsch. Instantly the menacing steel was withdrawn.

A corporal appeared. "Hullo, the relief!" he said. "Well, I can stand a little relief." He was a good fellow, the corporal, and he never

stopped talking till he had told the whole story of their adventure.

They were the patrol that had lost their way the night before. While they were looking for the regiment, the men wanted to raise a shout but the sergeant wouldn't let them, representing to them that it was at night that the Boches got in their choicest work. They laughed at him, saying there wasn't a Boche within ten miles. They were clambering up the stony path on the hillside. Suddenly the sergeant stopped them. Voices! They held their breath and listened. The voices kept on. They seemed to come from below ground. The men looked at each other. That jargon must be Boche-talk, neither more nor less. What a nerve! They must think they were perfectly safe, at night like that, at the bottom of a well! The patrol searched for a quarter of an hour before they found the mouth of the lair.

While he was talking he had led our friends to the foot of the strange habitation.

"This is the way," said Fritsch, pointing to traces on the grass.

"Good eye, sergeant," said the corporal, and he went on to a hedge that formed a border.

Stooping, he separated the branches. An opening was visible, with an iron ladder. He put his foot on the first round.

“Would you like to go over the premises?” he asked.

## CHAPTER IV

### ON THE SPOT

AT the bottom, Sergeant Lhuillier, commanding, awaited them, having heard the sound of their approach.

"Come in, mates," he said.

"Why, this is one giddy boudoir," said Cochefort, looking about him.

Our friends found themselves in fact in a subterranean apartment, lighted by a shaded electric lamp.

"It's certainly a *bijou* residence," said Fritsch, advancing.

Evidently it was not a chance shelter, improvised since the war, but a post established long in advance and organized at leisure. The room was floored and ceiled, and furnished like an office. An important centre, evidently. A sudden sense came to Fritsch of the incomparable interest of his mission.



“They look out for number one,” said Cochefort.

“Was it here that you surprised them?” asked Fritsch.

“Right here,” said the corporal. “Before they could say damn they were pinned to the wall.”

Fritsch bent curiously over the table on which was spread a superb map, on a half-inch scale, of the department of the Oise and the bounding departments,—the map of the German General Staff. Pins and arrows marked directions. Beside it was an open register; other documents were scattered about. A glance was enough.

“Interesting as the devil,” said Fritsch to himself. And to the sergeant in command: “Have you spotted the observer’s post?”

“What observer’s post?” asked Lhuillier, surprised.

“Evidently, during the day, one of the two men must have gone out of this cave, to examine the neighbourhood.”

“Do you think so?”

“Let’s have a look.”

“Look here,” said Cochefort. “I’m all in. Suppose we have some grub.”

“What grub?”

“Whatever’s going.” He had made some investigations of his own.

“Yes, we live high here,” said the corporal. He opened a large cupboard standing in a recess, and displayed a formidable array of tinned provisions of every sort.

“I don’t mind incurring a certain degree of stomach-ache,” said Cochefort.

Our friends made a standing lunch of biscuit, cold-storage rump-steak, and *petits pois*. Cochefort could have spent some time over it, but Fritsch was in a hurry to finish his inspection. All four remounted the ladder. After having examined the place for some minutes Fritsch declared: “The signaller cannot have carried on his job anywhere but on the top of the building.”

“Why so?”

“From here,” Fritsch explained, “he couldn’t get a view. The building does not project above the military ridge,—an advantage in a sense, for its very existence could hardly be suspected by troops entrenching on the slopes. But from the top of it, unless I am much mistaken, you ought to get an extensive view of both valleys.”

“But how in the world could you get up there? You’d break your neck.”

Cochefort pointed out a staircase, half tumbled down in its well, certainly unattractive as a way up. Fritsch, escorted by the three men, walked around the edifice, his eyes on the ground, looking for a clue.

"Here we have it," he said at last. Certain marks had caught his eye. He sprang down into the hollow of the foundations and worked his way among the nettles and the stones. His instinct had not deceived him. Arrived in a dark corner he exclaimed: "An iron ladder! That's what I expected."

It was of the same type as the one leading to the underground room. In silence they mounted. There was no landing at the top of the first flight. But at the top of the second, there was exactly what our hero had foreseen, an excellently equipped observation station. Nothing was lacking, powerful glasses, optical telegraph outfit, cases of rockets of different sizes, not to mention a map identical with the one found below, and as extended a panorama as an observer could desire.

Henry postponed till later the task of examining in detail the configuration of the country; for the time being he contented himself with a summary reconnoissance.

He pointed out to Cochefort the mouth of a speaking-tube. "That's where you come in, old man. That carries down stairs."

As they made their way down the ladder, the corporal remarked: "The old shack's full of nests."

"I've taken that in," said Cochefort. "If we're here for the duration of the war, there will be a good many pigeon pies."

They had hardly reached the underground room when a feeble ringing was heard. "They're at it again," said Sergeant Lhuillier.

"The telephone?"

"Sure; they've rung up four times already." He admitted he had had the curiosity to take up the receiver.

"What language do they speak?"

"Why, Boche. I know because I didn't understand a word of it."

"Lead me to it," said Cochefort. "I want to say a thing or two to a Boche."

But Fritsch stopped him. "No joking," he said. "There are some things we've got to find out first."

"What about us?" asked Lhuillier. "How much longer do you want us here?"

"Just a few minutes."

"You see, if the regiment is on the hike all this time . . ."

"No danger. The regiment will stay where it is for a good long time. There's only one thing more I want to ask of you. What did you do with the bodies and belongings of the spies?"

Lhuillier admitted with some embarrassment that they had not yet taken the time to bury them. They were lying close by.

"Good," said Fritsch. "I was afraid you might have cremated them."

"Want to see them?"

He led them into a cave close at hand, and Cochefort held his nose.

The two Germans had died of similar wounds, bayonet thrusts in the belly, as they turned round.

"A captain and a non-com," murmured Fritsch. The officer was a handsome fellow of medium height, still young, with a little blond moustache, a square chin and hard features. Even in death he retained the insolent smile of the Teuton Junker.

"How do you like his looks?" asked Cochefort.

Fritsch was evidently anxious to impress that masque upon his memory to the last detail. He took several photographs of it with a camera

found in the next room, and then sketched it on his pad.

"What's that for?" asked Lhuillier, wondering.

"For nothing, perhaps," answered Fritsch; "but he's the gentleman I'm to impersonate. Before I step into his shoes I want to make his acquaintance."

He examined the dead man's identification disc, which he wore on his wrist in the German fashion. It bore the inscription: "Von Lüchow, Karl, Captain, Coburg 2413-81."

"Does that help?"

"Certainly; now I know his name, his recruiting date, and his age. I would have given a lot of money for that."

Cochefort on his part examined the disc of the non-com: "Sonnenberg, Hans, Feldwehbel, Dantzig 4044-75."

After Fritsch had taken possession also of the officer's memorandum book and various notes, he dismissed Lhuillier and his men. As soon as they were gone, his first task was to classify the documents in his possession. All the merely personal papers he placed religiously in a large envelope, addressed to the officer's widow. Then he undertook the study of the register kept by

the spy, and this he found a fruitful source of information.

Captain von Lüchow had formed part of that formidable advance guard which the German General Staff had poured into France in the course of July, 1914. It was on Thursday, the 23d, that he crossed the frontier, certainly not for the first time. His military history, figuring at the opening of his book, described him as having already been twice attached to the spy service, or, to use the regular euphemism, to the corps of "extra-territorial information." His career had been rapid and brilliant, that was clear. He had graduated from the Military Academy in Berlin in 1910, standing ninth in his class. He carried on him papers made out in the name of Anton Goldschmidt, merchant of Zürich, an elementary measure of prudence, intended to allay suspicions across the frontier. It was in the night of August 1-2 that von Lüchow had reached Post 74, which had been assigned to him in advance. All the departments of the north and of the east were included in a network of similar observation-posts. According to his diary, he had made daily reports from this station. To whom? He had, apparently, two correspondents at least,

one designated by the initial S, the other by an odd combination of letters, K. F. Q.

Henry was able to reconstruct the work done by the two men during that period of four weeks. Experts at their work, not a single movement of troops effected in their region had escaped them. They had been able to report, in concise notes, not only the numbers of regiments of all arms which had passed through or stopped, but their approximate effective and even their apparent morale. All this information was specified as having been transmitted to Post S. On the other hand, those referred to Post K. F. Q. were reduced to the bare mention of hours, accompanied, in the margin, by the word "received," or the word "sent." And each time recurred a strange symbol which resembled a large circumflex accent, "Λ." This was the first riddle.

A second note-book that he discovered aroused still more strongly the young man's curiosity. From the first page to the last, it contained nothing but a meaningless succession of German letters, varied by inconsequent punctuation marks. The whole formed hieroglyphic tables, for the most part scored through with dashes of an impatient pen. Were they notes translated into cipher?



More likely, Henry was inclined to think, they represented a search for a key. He would have been glad to devote himself to the solution of the mystery, but he had not the slightest clue to work on, and time pressed. Twelve hours had already passed since relations had been broken off with the unknown correspondents, and their suspicions must certainly have been aroused. It was Fritsch's duty to start in without delay to play his dangerous rôle. He reviewed mentally the colonel's instructions. "Now for it," he said.

He detached the receiver. After a few seconds he heard a distinct "Hoch!"

What in the world should he say? He chanced the query: "Is this Post S?"

"This is Post S," came the answer.

"I've been having trouble," said Fritsch. "I regret not having been able to answer sooner."

"The colonel is going to talk to you."

Fritsch had not spoken three words, when Cochefort, eyes and mouth open with astonishment, came and looked at him.

"That's the queerest Boche I ever heard anybody spit," he said. In fact, though he was used to hearing German spoken during his long

sojourn in Baden, he could hardly recognize the words in Henry's harsh northern accent. Henry motioned him to be silent as a new voice made itself heard at the other end of the wire.

"Hoch! who is speaking?" it asked.

"Von Lüchow, colonel."

"You're still alive, then?"

"Yes, sir, but I've had a near thing."

"Ah! Now I recognize your voice."

"I am honoured, sir."

"Well, what has happened?"

Sticking to his harsh inflections, Henry coolly spun the yarn he had been preparing.

"All communication has been impossible for twelve hours on account of the establishment close by of a little French post. The telephone-bell, smothered as it was, gave us the greatest anxiety. A word spoken would have brought them in on us."

"And what has become of this post?"

"It consisted of only six men; they were tired and went to sleep. We went up quietly and accounted for them with our revolvers.

"Excellent. What is Sonnenberg doing now?"

"He has gone up to his station."

"What does he signal you?"

“He has only this minute resumed his observations.”

“I rely on you. Try to find out whether the enemy has decided to stand and await us at the Blaise.”

“My impression is, yes.”

“You thought the contrary last evening. You reported to me that a wave of retreat was flowing backward in your neighbourhood.”

“The talk of the French patrol has caused me to change my opinion. I am now inclined to think rather that an important concentration movement is taking place.”

Cochefort made a face at him. “May be and may be not,” he said. “You’re going strong, old man.”

Fritsch shrugged his shoulders and invited him with one hand to hold his tongue.

“Have some definite information for me in two hours,” said his interlocutor.

“I will try, sir.” Our hero was inclined to think the conversation was at an end, but the colonel added:

“Don’t ring off, I’m going to give you headquarters.”

Headquarters! Fritsch’s excitement grew.

Some seconds passed, during which he collected his thoughts. Was it a trap they were laying for him? But no, he suddenly reflected; Headquarters? Why that was the K. F. Q. of the register. What headquarters would it be now,— of the army, of the group of armies, or general headquarters?

An imperious voice at the telephone made him jump. "Hoch! von Lüchow!"

"I don't hear well; there's a vibration. Who is speaking?"

"The general."

Fritsch began to renew his explanations.

"I know; I know; they've posted me. Tell me, has there been another *taube*?"

The young man was flabbergasted. "Another *taube*, general?"

"Yes; I am surprised at not receiving anything more."

"It's not my fault."

"As soon as it arrives, I expect a message without delay."

"Of course," said Fritsch, entirely in the dark.

"Did you send the last one?"

"The one of what hour, sir?"

"Why, the midnight one, *donnerwetter!*"

"Oh, yes, I sent that one," said Fritsch.

"Well, let me hear as soon as possible."

A faint click announced the close of the conversation. The young man remained plunged in thought. What in the world were those *tauben*, to be sent and received? How could German aviators come and go in broad daylight?

Cochefort, for his part, returned to his own source of wonder. "Where did you pick up that lingo you were giving 'em?"

"Idiot! That's the Coburg accent. Once they've had it, they can't get rid of it. Von Lüchow was born and bred in it." He took his head in his hands and sighed. "But what the devil did he mean with his damn *tauben*?"

## CHAPTER V

### FRESH SURPRISES

“IN two hours I shall ring you up again,” the colonel had said. It was necessary to push investigations before that time expired. Fritsch and Cochefort made their way up again to the observation station, whence their vision commanded a surprising extent of country. A summer wind was blowing from the north. At their feet the landscape showed through a trembling veil of warm bright air. It was the valley of the Oise, broad and fertile, its fields of beets alternating with those of wheat and barley, and, joining it at a right angle, the narrower valley of the Blaise, hemmed in between wooded banks. A good smell floated up, of ripe grain and near-by woodland. Henry would have been glad to stay there dreaming until the sun sank into the west.

• Instinctively he associated every pleasant natural impression with the image of his well-beloved; he thought with desire and regret of those sunsets

they had watched, pressed one against the other. But he pulled himself together. What was the use? The rupture was final, and now his life was at stake. The distant voice of the guns recalled him from his poetic meditations to the terribly serious business of the hour. It was, then, with the cool eye of the observer that he examined the details of the tactical position.

At the first glance this seemed remarkably favourable for defence. The valley of the Blaise formed a serious obstacle. Detachments placed in sufficient density on the south bank could hold their own against considerably superior forces. With the danger, it is true, of being flanked on the left, for a few kilometres up stream the river bent sharply to the south.

Fritsch's gaze fixed itself on the fields, slightly sloping.

"Where are the boys?" asked Cochefort.

Henry passed him the glass. "Look on the side of the hill down there, at about four hundred yards from the edge of the woods."

"I get them now." Tiny as ants, the toilers were sunk to the waist in the trenches they were digging. "They're going to stay there," declared Fritsch.

"Get out," said Cochefort. "They won't stay long. We've seen that little game before."

"This time it's different." Fritsch explained to him the paramount necessity of holding there, for one day at least, the fierce attack of the enemy, one regiment being designated to protect, all by itself, the retreat of the whole army corps.

"All by itself?"

"An honour, my dear fellow." And Henry, lifting his hand, showed him the enormous sector assigned to the 387th, from the confluence of the two rivers all the way to a distant hamlet; not less than four miles.

"They're crazy," said Cochefort, staggered by the proposition. "It needs a division. There won't be one to every four yards."

"That's true; and accordingly it looks to me as though they weren't trying to make a continuous line of trenches,—only single elements scattered along, but so arranged that their lines of fire cross."

"They will have some artillery, anyway."

"Pooh! One miserable battery." Farther down, on a cross-road that climbed the flank of the hill, they could see four teams.



Cochefort sighed. "Good lord, it's going to be a massacre."

Henry tapped him on the shoulder. "The Boches will find a fly in the jam," he said. "That's where you and I come in."

As they came down, Fritsch let himself go about the delay in sending him the promised field-telephone. He would have been glad to report to Colonel de Laroque the first results obtained and the difficulties remaining.

Cochefort was again conscious of an appetite. He made a wry face at the monotony of their fare. Tins! And then more tins. Coming back to an earlier idea, he asked permission to go on a hunt among the ruins of the building. "I'll bet there are pigeons' nests," he said.

Henry could not refuse him. "Don't break your neck, that's all I ask."

Left alone, he reverted to the mysterious notebook; what was the meaning of those bizarre tables? Again he asked himself whether they were not groups of symbols brought together in an effort to interpret something.

The two hours passed and the telephone bell rang again.

"What have you for me, von Lüchow?"

"Some interesting information."

"Let us see whether it confirms or contradicts the reports of our airmen."

"The French are concentrating strongly in this neighbourhood."

"Is it possible?"

"Why, what do the pilots say?"

"On this point they are explicit; the principal mass of the Xth corps is described to us as tending to bend rapidly to the south."

"That is a mistake, colonel. A feint of the enemy. I can positively assure you that the enemy is grouping important contingents on the Blaise."

"That would change everything. How many regiments, do you think?"

"Seven or eight."

"The devil! What numbers?"

Fritsch was lucky enough to have in his memory the numbers of the regiments of the army corps with which his own had fraternized more or less during the weeks of trial.

The colonel seemed disturbed. "But Lieutenant Schlimpf . . ."

"The French have improved their methods," said Henry. "This present concentration has been effected very secretly."

"They are still short of artillery?"

"Don't flatter yourself with that illusion; those devils of 75's are on hand."

"How many batteries—three or four?"

"I've counted twenty."

"Thanks. I will pass this all on."

Fritsch had just hung up the receiver when Cochefort put in an appearance.

"What luck, old man?"

"This old shack isn't what it seems."

"What is it then?"

"It's a poultry-farm."

"A poultry-farm?" Fritsch followed him. He led the way to a particularly dilapidated corner of the building. Here there was another iron ladder, and, leading from the top of it, a plank gangway with a slender hand-rail. Following this, Cochefort pushed open a door closed merely by a latch, and they entered a large apartment with a series of great cages on either side. It looked like a hen-yard, or rather like an aviary.

Fritsch had had occasion to visit the pigeon-farm of the king of Spain at St. Sebastian. There was no room for doubt; this was a model dove-cote, so skilfully oriented that the openings for entrance and exit of the birds were entirely un-

noticeable from outside. Who would have suspected such an establishment in this abandoned building? Two or three hundred birds, at the very least, were disporting themselves there. A sudden light dawned on our young man;—these were the *tauben* that the colonel had been talking about. He didn't mean the aircraft to which the name has been given, but real flesh-and-blood birds, which are still, in spite of modern scientific inventions, the surest means of long-distance communication. Two notices, in German, attracted Fritsch's eye; that at the right said, "Received," that at the left, "Sent,"—the same words, he remarked, that accompanied the mention of K. F. Q. in the register. Moved by a pressing curiosity, he made his way into the right-hand division.

The cages were kept in immaculate order; and there was no danger of the birds dying of hunger, for a great quantity of grain was accumulated in the cribs. The pigeons were flying about, very tame. Stepping over the wire netting, the two men made their way into a cage which had a hundred narrow slits opening into the outside air. A dozen birds were in it. One of them was asleep, standing on one leg. Its plumage was

less brilliant, less lustrous than that of the others, as though it had made a long flight. Fritsch took it up and felt of it. Under its wing, fastened into a band, was a tiny roll which he detached and opened; German characters were visible on the frail film. Evidently a cipher correspondence. The German General Staff was on its guard against intermediaries. Apparently even officers of such high military education as von Lüchow's were confined to the task of mere transmission. The rôle of the latter had been confined, apparently, to repeating by telephone, one by one, the letters and numbers that made up these mysterious messages. Fritsch understood the overwhelming interest of an attempt to work out a key to the cipher, and in the shortest possible time. An intuition encouraged him; had not his predecessor been at this job before him? He remembered those tables that had puzzled him so much. Returning to the underground office, he set himself to examine, page by page, the note-book of the dead captain.

Certain personal notes which he had hitherto neglected furnished him with a clue. Bit by bit he reconstructed the psychology of von Lüchow. He must have been mortally bored at his post for

four weeks. And he must have been irritated by seeing so many instructions of capital importance pass through his hands, all dead letters to him. Driven by his professional instinct, the officer had attempted to disentangle the skein,— a job almost comparable to that of Champollion in deciphering the cuneiform inscriptions. Feeling his way, how many trials he had made, in those close-ranged tables! At first he got but meagre results. Little by little they improved. Here and there he noted his satisfaction or his disgust. Under the date of August 26th he had written: "I believe I've got it." In fact, that day's table had enabled him to read the first part of the message.

On the following day his researches had been violently interrupted, for ever.

Fritsch, with this hastily acquired information, had only one course before him; to profit by the clues already worked out, and to push them farther.

Night had drawn in, and Cochefort was sleepy. "I guess I'll hit the hay," he said.

Henry spent the night at the office desk, where two quarts of coffee contributed to keep him awake. At dawn, his face was haggard and his eyes red,

but nothing mattered in the splendid light of his achievement. He held in his hand the solution he had counted on. The table that was the result of his toil must be the same as that in the hands of the enemy General Staff. Applied in accordance with the principle of "inverted cipher," it revealed at once the secret of the film.

The message was dated at Paris, the 29th of August, at two o'clock in the morning. It read: "Council of ministers held. Resolution considered. Government quit capital. Must we hasten execution of plan AZ? We await orders before carrying out paragraph 17." No signature.

Our hero was perplexed; should he transmit this, or should he not? Of course the German General Staff would gain an advantage from the information, but what an advantage for the French to know their reply!

At about four o'clock, he was rung up by Post K. F. Q.; to the first question he answered without hesitation. "The pigeon has this moment arrived."

"How late it is, if it started at eight o'clock, as usual!"

Fritsch improvised an explanation. "The bird seemed very tired; the band had chafed him."

“All right. I am ready; go ahead.”

Obediently, letter by letter, Henry dictated the document. A quarter of an hour later, a response was spelled out to him in the same way, “to be forwarded with the utmost haste.” Hanging up the receiver, Fritsch hastened to refer to his table. It did not take long to render the text intelligible.

“The Government must not leave Paris at any cost. Do not hesitate to apply paragraph 17 of plan AZ, with the most extreme rigour.”

On this occasion Fritsch had less doubt; his affair was to hold up this message, at any rate until he had referred it to his superiors. But what means had he of referring it? He was cut off from communication with his immediate chief, Colonel de Laroque. For a moment he thought of sending Cochefort with it. He realized that hazard had placed him on a trail of capital importance. Apparently he was the exchange through which passed all the communications between the German secret service headquarters at Paris and the military headquarters. Several points remained obscure to him; he would have been glad to divide with others the heavy responsibility. How much more so when, a few minutes



later, he had the following conversation, this time with Post S.

“Do you still think they will resist?”

“I am surer than ever, colonel.”

“Have you located the position of their trenches?”

“To within ten yards.”

“Of their reserves?”

“Also.”

“Good. We are going to strike.”

“Really? The attack . . .”

“Cost what it may, we are going over them by brute force. At noon the dance will open with a first salvo of 280's.”

## CHAPTER VI

### PLAN AZ

THE enemy was in sight. From his station Cochefort had signalled to Fritsch through the tube the presence of detachments of Uhlans on a ridge situated to the north-east, ten miles distant. A mere advance guard, behind which a roaring sea was advancing.

With anguish Henry saw the hours slip away. The morning advanced. Had they been forgotten, abandoned to their fate? Was the terrible secret in their possession to remain without result?

Ah, no; with inexpressible relief Fritsch learned from Cochefort at about ten o'clock that a patrol of three men had detached itself from the French line and was advancing towards them. As they came nearer, they were made out to be an officer and two privates. One of the soldiers made a motion as of unrolling a reel; apparently he was carrying the longed-for telephone. But why an

officer? And a moment later, Cochefort, surprised, made out upon his sleeve the four bars of a major. He must have learned from Lhuillier the lie of the land for, on reaching the crest of the hill, he came straight forward towards the bushes that masked the opening of the underground room.

Fritsch went to meet him at the entrance. At first sight the officer was severe, a little forbidding. He inspected the place without a word. His orderly, a smart, blond youth, with a good-natured air, never left him. The telephonist set down his apparatus.

At last the major deigned to address a word to our hero: "I have come to relieve you, my man."

Fritsch had turned a little pale.

"By order of General Sabot, who finds it a little singular that such a mission should be confided to a simple non-commissioned officer."

Fritsch contented himself with answering: "I have done my best, sir."

"Tell me about that; quickly."

"Not too quickly, major." Controlling himself, Henry explained his renewal of relations with the two enemy posts, the enigma of the *tauben*,

how it had been solved by accident, and the problem of the cipher-tables.

The face of the officer showed his surprise. He made a gesture of approval.

“Very well done,” he said. “Remarkably well done, in fact.”

Fritsch reached the essential part of his story. In spite of himself, he lowered his voice and threw an expressive glance in the direction of the orderly, who could hear every word of the conversation. The major reassured him at once: “Oscar? You can speak before him. He has been my companion for three years, and has brought me out of a hundred bad scrapes, as I have brought him out of a thousand. He is quick and discreet; I have no secrets from him.”

Fritsch could only bow, and he continued the story of the good luck which enabled him to penetrate the meaning of the two mysterious messages.

“Have you kept copies?”

Fritsch handed him the two communications. As he ran over the first, Major Trubert exclaimed: “Plan AZ! So that emanates from . . .” He devoured the second and said with a shaking voice: “You haven’t forwarded this?”

“No, I have held it.”

“Thank God,” cried the officer, and seized his hand. Fritsch would certainly have felt flattered if it had been given to him to know the character of his interlocutor. Major Trubert, an officer of rare intelligence, had just served for three months in the War-Department as director of the principal section of spy-detection, one of the most difficult positions, and one for which he had eminent qualifications. When he took it up, he had found it full of apathy and routine, at an hour so grave for the destinies of the nation. He became aware immediately of a formidable intrigue carried on by the enemy in the heart of Paris itself. In a few weeks he began to disentangle the formidable skein. A little light began to appear. Better still, he had his hand on a clue. At this precise moment the war broke out, before he had anything more than presumptions to go upon. He found himself placed, overnight, under the tutelage of an obstinate old colonel, honest but narrow. Then followed a period of petty mischief-making. For instance, his superior officer on the very first day refused to allow him to continue to collaborate with the plain-clothes men of the Police Department, a set of clear-headed, plucky fellows, who had been his

most valuable auxiliaries. He was unable so much as to get detailed for his assistance Inspector Baston, his right-hand man. It was another instance of the stupid jealousy between the military and civil authorities. He had to endure the sceptical smile with which Colonel Rocambelle received all revelations of the activities of the enemy.

"That's all dime-novel stuff, major," he would say.

After a fortnight of misunderstanding and clashes, Trubert, discouraged at finding that he no longer had a free hand, lost patience and resigned his job. He demanded the command of a battalion at the front and had joined the 386th the day before Fritsch's adventure, an embittered man, but with abilities of the highest order.

Fritsch had noticed the excitement that appeared in his face at the mention of Plan AZ. Between these exceptional men, the disparity of rank was bridged at once. "What do they mean by this Plan AZ?" asked the younger man.

The other felt he had no right to keep the truth from him. "A plan for the systematic devastation of Paris!"

"Paris! But they've got to take it first!" cried Fritsch. Never, even in his own mind, had he allowed that hypothesis.

But the major made a despairing gesture. "Take Paris? I don't say it's certain, but it's probable they will take it within a week. From the moment the enveloping movement planned by the German General Staff succeeded at Charleroi, and the enemy right continued to advance at its present rate, Paris must be considered as very gravely menaced. An enemy detachment must be in the act of putting its hand on Dunkirk, Calais, and the coast. If he makes a quick descent as far as Dieppe and Havre, the English army's supplies are cut off and it is put out of business. The invading army will be before Paris in a few days with its formidable siege-guns which pounded Namur and Liège to bits in forty-eight hours. How can our poor fortifications stop them?"

"Aren't they good for anything?" gasped Fritsch.

"They're not absolutely worthless, if they're held by brave men who know how to die like heroes. But how could we have foreseen it? What can we do with guns that carry ten miles, against giants that carry fifteen or twenty?"

"To come back to this Plan AZ . . ." stammered Fritsch.

"Ah, this terrible Plan AZ. I have suspected its existence; I may say, its general lines were known to me, but my superiors refused systematically to take any stock in it." His tone was bitter. "And here," he said, "I have the proof of it in my hand."

"Is it a scheme cooked up by the Boche secret-service?"

"Better than that. It's the personal work, the great idea, of our most dangerous adversary, the man who is at the same time their greatest military genius and perhaps—time will show—the ablest of their diplomatists, the profoundest political thinker they've had since Bismarck, and of the same implacable temper."

"What is his name?"

"It is beginning to be famous. Their hordes that are dirtying the soil of France come proclaiming him as our conquering master . . ." The major paused a moment. "Tell me," he said, "that general who was talking with you a little while ago from headquarters, hadn't he a drawling accent, with a slight sing-song?"

"Exactly."



"I would bet a good deal it was he."

"But who is he?"

"Von Kluck."

"Von Kluck!" Fritsch was stunned. The fame of the conqueror of Charleroi had in fact spread rapidly, even among his adversaries; and the thought that he in his obscurity was engaged in a struggle with such a man filled him both with anxiety and with a sort of vanity.

The major explained to him in a few sentences that for three years von Kluck had been the prepondering member of the German Supreme Council. To him had been confided the direction of the chief service of extra-territorial information, and to him was due the credit of having, almost unaided, conceived, created, and won acceptance for the formidable plan, on which, according to him, depended the rapid and decisive issue of the great war. Without going into the details of this plan at that moment, the major outlined for Fritsch the two distinct parts into which its execution was to fall. The first part comprised measures to be taken before the occupation; these were what he knew the least about, but they were perhaps the most impressive,—thousands of emissaries each spending unlimited sums in his own field.

Bastion knew most about these people; he dropped half-words about the developments he expected,—depressing rumours, organized attempts at sedition, sabotage on a large scale, signals devised for the benefit of the enemy, finally, to precipitate panic and hysteria, the most criminal attacks—let the President look out for himself, and the Bank of France!

Then, when the city was taken, the grand coup would be played. The day after the occupation, terms would be offered to the remains of the government and to the chiefs of the army in the field. The conditions of peace could be guessed. They would be the same that Count Bernstorff, ambassador at Washington, had the cynicism to make public: A line drawn from Havre to Geneva, making a new frontier for France; the cession of our fleet and of all our war material; an indemnity of a hundred milliards of francs, with payment spread over twenty-five years; complete economic subservience;—in a word, the end of France as a free nation.

What in case of refusal? A quarter of Paris would be blown up. The quarter had been selected—Notre Dame! New proposals would follow. If they were refused, another quarter

would go—this time the Opera. And so on; it was perfectly simple. Think of Paris, the incomparable, a hostage in the hands of a brutal captor!

As Fritsch marvelled aloud at the precision of his information, the major unbosomed himself completely. He confided to our hero the work of those weeks passed by him in an office where he had had no real predecessor and had now no successor. Ah, if only he had had the assistance he had a right to expect! “If only they had left me Baston!” He told of the meagre results he had been able to accomplish, the arrest of a few conspirators, the men at the top always keeping out of the way. They had their confederates everywhere. There was not a deliberation of the government or of the General Staff of which they were not at once informed, and the information was immediately transmitted to enemy headquarters; our officers in the field have had abundant evidence of that.

“By pigeons, I understand now!” he said; “especially since we have cut the ground from under their feet as regards wireless.”

“How is that?” asked Fritsch.

“An idea of my own. We placed registering microphones along the whole line of the trenches.

Every radio they sent fell into our hands. At the end of three days, they ceased to put any confidence in them. I suspect that they still have a post or two in Brittany, although their check at 'L'Isle qui Parle' cost them just as dear. Well, we've talked enough. Show me the way to the dove-cote."

Fritsch could not leave the receiver long enough to go with him; he could only give him directions for finding it. The officer went off, accompanied by his faithful Oscar. By the major's orders, the telephonist had departed as soon as he had installed the instrument.

It was not long before Fritsch saw Trubert coming back triumphant, with a fresh film in his hand. The message was quickly deciphered; it was couched in almost the same terms as the last, but the tone was a little more urgent.

"Time is passing; we had hoped for an almost immediate answer."

"Oh! yes; you can count on it," murmured the officer.

At that moment the telephone-bell rang; Fritsch glanced at the major.

"Answer it, my dear fellow; you are so good a hand at it."

Colonel von Tesberger, chief of staff of von Steinger, was telephoning this time, from Dampierre, a little village situated, as Fritsch saw by a glance at his map, twelve miles to the north. He explained that the advance was accelerated. In half an hour his heavy guns would be in position to open fire. Von Lüchow was to hold himself in readiness to help find the range. A whole series of technical enquiries followed, to which Fritsch as usual was able to answer without hesitation.

When he had hung up the receiver, the major expressed his astonishment. "By Jove, you have certainly got their shop-talk down to a fine point."

Our hero modestly gave the credit to his uncle, General Herluison.

"Your uncle? I was his pupil. Ah, if they had listened to him, perhaps the Boches wouldn't be walking up to Paris at their ease."

Followed always by Oscar, Trubert started to complete the tour of the building, especially to pay a visit to Cochefort in the observation-station. In a short time, Fritsch heard himself hailed through the speaking tube: "Hello, there, old man; they've just left me."

"Well?"

"I don't like his style of beauty."

"Whose? the major's?"

"No, the orderly's."

"What are you talking about? He's a good fellow who's been with him for three years."

"Look out for him."

"Why? Have you seen anything suspicious?"

"He got on my nerves,—tried to make me talk; and whenever the old boy's back was turned, he was scribbling on a scrap of paper."

"You're crazy; it must have been something he was writing for the major."

"Have it your own way; we'll see later."

At first Fritsch shrugged his shoulders at this; then, as he thought about it, he remembered what a good eye Cochefort had. Ought he to drop a hint to the officer?

But when Trubert appeared he looked so gloomy that Fritsch hesitated to trouble him. From the roof he had seen the rising tide of the enemy, with their guns taking position out of range of the French. He was possessed by an idea: It was a fine thing, no doubt, to interrupt the dialogue between Paris and von Kluck, but how much better it would be to succeed in putting his hand on the nest of spies!

There was an unexpected ring at the other end of the office; Colonel de Laroque, no doubt. At a sign from Trubert, Fritsch answered this call too.

"Hello! Is this you, major?"

"No, colonel; this is Sergeant Fritsch."

"Has the major arrived?"

"Yes, sir; he is studying the situation."

"Everything going well, so far?"

"Beautifully, sir." And Fritsch gave him a summary of the work accomplished.

"Then you are signalling them . . .?"

"That you are occupying the edge of the woods, with strong reserves massed west of Vacheresse."

"Our reserves? That's good! And what about their plans?"

"Briefly, they mean to eat us alive."

"Pooh, we shall stick in their crops."

"They are advancing; the head of their column is passing Hill 158. Be ready to receive the first shells at noon."

"Not to receive them, I hope."

"That's what I'm here for." Fritsch asked for a number of useful facts and instructions; then he told the colonel that the major wished to speak with him.

Trubert took his place at the telephone and

consulted his superior. To make the fullest use of this secret of essential importance that had fallen into their hands, he had an idea which was perhaps chimerical, since it depended on the presence in the neighbourhood of an available airplane.

“You want to borrow one?”

“With your authorization.”

The colonel did not inquire into the details of an idea so slenderly founded, and the major left the telephone with a gesture of anxiety. It was a slight chance, in fact, this plan that had taken shape in his mind, and what a gamble it was!

At this moment Cochefort signalled from above: “The batteries are in position! Look out for yourselves!”



## CHAPTER VII

### A TRAITOR

IT was not von Steinger's custom to break his word; exactly at high noon a formidable roar was heard travelling in the upper air. You would have said an express train was running in the sky. Then, fifteen hundred yards away, on the crest of the slope beyond the southern bank of the Blaise, there was an explosion, and a vast column of black smoke arose.

"The fun's begun," cried Cochefort from the observatory.

The effect of those 280 shells was terrible. A tree that happened to be near the point where one fell was torn up and thrown a hundred yards like a straw.

Vloun! Vovloun! hardly was the smoke dispersed when a second roar was heard, followed by the same frightful consequences. An instant later the telephone rang: "Rectify the range, von Lüchow," cried an authoritative voice.

"Lengthen it," answered Fritsch. Trubert, who was standing beside him, made a gesture of approval; at this rate, the French trenches would be completely protected from the fire.

A fresh volley followed, this time causing destruction far behind in the woods. Fritsch, on the alert, sent in his report: "Go ahead; they're in the border of the woods."

The affair had only just begun. The enemy tactics were simple; they consisted in overwhelming the adversary's position with projectiles; at the end of the day, fresh troops would make the assault against elements worn out by the violence of the bombardment. This method, which was to become the routine of trench warfare, was instinctively adopted by these brutal strategists from the first.

Other batteries were let loose, the greater part of them out of sight behind the hills. Cochefort recognized, by the sound, shells of different calibres, the 150's, the 220's, and the terrifying 280's. The 77's alone were silent; one would say they were afraid of eliciting a reply from their special antagonist, our famous 75's.

A nameless cacophony filled space. The summit of the ridge, over a stretch of four miles at

least, was nothing but a hell of smoke and flame. Cochefort had never in his life seen ammunition burned at such a rate. From minute to minute he made his comments to Fritsch. By tacit consent, both men now spoke in German only.

With bent brows Henry concentrated his attention. The position of the seventy-two German batteries, massed in four principal centres, had been indicated to him by Colonel von Tesberger. The object he was striving for was to keep the fire of the Boches' pieces out of the zone where it would be dangerous to his friends, that is to say, at more than four hundred yards behind their lines. Provided with an apparently inexhaustible supply of projectiles, the Teuton gunners swept indefatigably the strip marked out for them, a really delightful task. Finally the soil, for the breadth of almost a mile, was completely turned upside down as though by an earthquake. Nothing human could possibly have survived. Pretty soon the infantry of General von Steinger would have a walkover.

What von Steinger himself had been making sure of was the annihilation of the formidable French batteries located by von Lüchow. They were cleverly masked, certainly. Several airmen

sent out to find the emplacement had returned wholly at a loss. A lucky chance that von Lüchow was so favourably placed! He alone had been able to give the marksmen the range. Nothing could be left of the French pieces, after the concentrated fire to which they had been subjected. This was proved by the fact that they made no response when, towards two o'clock, the mass of the German forces was within range.

From time to time Fritsch crossed the room and carried on a brief dialogue with Colonel de Laroque over the field-telephone.

"What is the news, Fritsch?"

"They are advancing; they are coming out of the Montreuil woods."

"Good; we shall soon be able to see them."

"I expect the attack late this afternoon."

"So much the better! We shall have a quiet night."

"Not too many losses in the regiment?"

"None at all, to speak of. We owe a thumping big candle to some saint. The only accident was a *marmite* that went astray and fell into Section 23. Bad work there—six dead, they tell me. One of the little inconveniences of our trade!"

As for Major Trubert, he walked up and down, a prey to nervous excitement. What plan could it be that he was revolving in his mind for an hour? Twice he asked Fritsch to inquire of the colonel whether no airplane was available, but the response was always discouraging. Chance, however, was destined to help him out. All of a sudden it came in the shape of an announcement from Cochefort—a plane was descending within our lines!

This was soon after confirmed by telephone: it was the English aviator Simpson, seriously wounded by shrapnel in the course of a reconnaissance; fortunately he had brought his machine down intact, and, like a good sport, he placed it at the disposal of the ally authorities. The major sprang up hopefully.

“What power is the machine?”

“A Butterfly, 120 horse-power, new model.”

“Just my affair; I know the make.”

“All right, then; will you have it?”

“With your permission.”

“Are you taking anyone with you?”

“My orderly, Oscar.”

“You’re leaving the little sergeant in charge?”

“Couldn’t be a better man.”

“Good luck to you, major.”

“Thanks.”

Trubert turned to Fritsch. “Do you guess what I am up to?”

Fritsch shook his head. “Not in the least.”

“It will perhaps look crazy to you, but I don’t see any other way. At present, the important thing is to surprise and arrest, in the middle of its fatal work, the German Committee in Paris.”

“How can you discover its whereabouts?”

“We are connected with its whereabouts by a line, invisible, it is true, but absolutely straight.”

“What line?”

“The flight of these birds.”

Fritsch looked his silent amazement.

“Listen to me, man; I am going out to get this monoplane. When you see me at a suitable height release a pigeon from the cage marked ‘sent.’ ”

“And then?”

“I will hustle along in his wake.”

“All the way to Paris?”

“All the way to Paris. There I am perfectly aware my difficulties will be stiff; not to lose the trail, to discover what building or group of buildings the bird makes for. But if I pull it off, I put my hand on the whole enemy organization. I

shall give Baston the tip and I'll bag those men, with the help of the Department of Justice, if the War Department won't help me."

The major's excitement was contagious. Certainly his idea was ingenious in its daring and its originality. Still, the obvious objection rose to Fritsch's lips. "Won't the bird outrun you?" There floated in his mind vague impressions of the dizzy speed of auto-propulsion of birds.

"I've thought of that, and guarded against it, I believe."

"How?"

"Come with me."

In his anxiety the young man abandoned his post for a moment and followed the major; by an obscure intuition, he caused Oscar to walk before him. The officer led them to the dove-cote.

One of the pigeons, a strong, handsome bird, was walking up and down in the departure cage clothed in a suit of paper armour, cut out of newspaper. Fritsch caught on: it was a primitive means of checking the creature's flight without interrupting it. There was a double advantage in it, for the bird thus accoutred would be easier to keep in the field of the glass.

The firm hope that inspired Trubert began to

gain on Fritsch. At the moment of departure, the major gave him his final instructions. "I go with a quiet mind," he said, "because I leave you here." He searched his mind. "If I succeed, and if luck permits you to maintain yourself here for twenty-four hours, we shall without doubt be able to get in touch again. You may expect to receive by pigeon a message signed by me."

"An open message? Very dangerous."

The major reflected. "Very well," he said. "I am about to give you, Fritsch, the highest mark of confidence. Our General Staff, of course, has a cipher for its own use, a cipher which is not known to a dozen of us in France, and which has been changed within four days because there seemed to be a leak somewhere. This cipher you will find here."

He handed him a paper; Fritsch turned it over—it was blank.

"Sympathetic ink; heat it." He added this final admonition: "Don't be taken with it on you."

"Neither living nor dead," said Fritsch.

With real emotion, they parted as two brothers might have done. In their tragic situation, it seemed unlikely that they could meet again.



The major and Oscar had half-an-hour's walk before them. The monoplane was lying in the field where it had come down, under the guard of two sentries. Trubert looked over the motor and the steering apparatus; his examination appeared to be satisfactory.

"A pretty machine," said Oscar. He as well as the officer was an expert aviator.

In the "Butterfly" model, as is well known, the observer sits in front of the pilot and below him, a few feet above the propeller whose redoubtable whirr rises to his seat.

The machine was fully supplied with gas. The major climbed to his seat and put on the aviator's cap. Silent and expeditious, Oscar cranked the motor and swung himself lightly to his place. The machine began to move on its rubber tires; soon it left the ground with an easy motion.

As may well be believed, the major had no attention to give to the scenery. Even the tactical situation, the continuous menacing advance of the German detachments, was for the moment in the background of his preoccupations. While the "Butterfly," with Oscar at the wheel, rose rapidly in great eccentric circles, he, with his glass at his eyes, was gazing at the hilltop and the building

that he had quitted. From that building would suddenly emerge the messenger who was to show them the way. They had not long to wait. "There he is," he cried. A very queer-looking bird had darted from the ruined house. The creature seemed hampered by the paper corselet in which he found himself encased. As though hesitating, he took two or three turns; then, painfully, he started for the southern horizon.

"Chase him," cried Trubert. No chance now of his going too fast for them. The commandant ordered Oscar to tack about so as not to go ahead of him, to keep at about the same height as the bird, and not to come so near as to frighten him. Obediently the pilot followed his instructions.

When this fantastic chase had lasted a few minutes and the monoplane, having covered a dozen miles, was out of the sight of the observant Cochefort at his post, the major, with his glass pointed, ordered Oscar to head a little to the right. It seemed to him that the manœuvre was slow in being performed and he turned round. Crack! There was a sharp detonation, distinguishable from the noise of the motor. At the same instant he seemed to receive a blow on the shoulder. Then there was an atrocious burning sensation

in his neck . . . Was it an hallucination? No, he could see behind him. His comrade was firing on him!

He no longer recognized the placid, friendly face of Oscar in that grin, that grimacing mouth. . . . Coolly taking aim, the man continued to discharge the six shots of his revolver. Trubert, hit successively in the shoulder, the neck, and the groin, felt himself fainting.

As in a dream, he felt the shock of a piercing revelation. This was Oscar, his good comrade, . . . a miserable traitor, a spy. This was the reason, he suddenly saw, why some of his best-laid plans had come to grief.

And the present one, the most vital of them all!

The wind of the heights swept the face of the dying man. The machine, swerving, made a great detour. Vaguely Trubert became aware of the supreme danger. The bird was out of sight now, there was no hope of overtaking it. Disdaining to pay any further attention to his dying companion, the murderer's attention was fixed on bringing his trophy safe within the German lines. He was in possession of invaluable information to be carried at once to the German General Headquarters. The alarm given and

Fritsch denounced, his mission would fail of its object and relations would quickly be re-established through some other channel with the confederates in Paris.

These same thoughts tormented Trubert in his last agonies. At his feet glinted the propeller, apparently motionless in the formidable rapidity of its motion. It occurred to him what he must do. Gathering all his remaining strength, with a desperate effort, he unfastened the covering that protected his legs; with a hazardous movement he let it fall over the rim of the car upon the gleaming surface of the propeller. The screw was muffled, checked in its terrific spin; there was a sound of cracking steel and a swerve that upset the stability of the machine. Like straws Oscar and the major were torn from their places and hurled headlong. . . .

Behind the hills, Fritsch was basing all his hopes on his chief who had gone forth to save France.

PART II  
von Lüchow



## CHAPTER I

### THE SIGNAL-STATION

COCHEFORT had beneath his eyes an impressive spectacle: in the plain, grey masses were slowly deploying—the German battalions on the march. Coolly he estimated their numbers. At the least, four brigades—an army corps—were preparing to force the barrier offered by a single French regiment. Very fortunately, von Steinger had based his plan of attack on the information furnished him by the pseudo von Lüchow, and he astutely directed the attacking columns against the best defended portions of the line.

The first Boche elements had just reached the Blaise. At this point the river was about a dozen yards wide; how were they going to cross it? Cochefort wondered whether his comrades, placed not very far away, would offer opposition by fire to this delicate operation. Apparently not;

Colonel de Laroque had without doubt decided not to interpose yet.

Cochefort admired afresh the German organization: pontoon outfits came to the front; in a few minutes metal bridges were discharged from special trucks and thrown across the stream. In the space of half an hour a good half of the troops had been transferred to the north bank. The rest, forming a support, deployed a little in the rear. From a sense of duty the men began to dig trenches.

Cochefort kept Fritsch informed of each stage of the game, and a sort of anguish seized our hero as he pictured the judicious arrangements of the enemy. In vain he repeated to himself the colonel's maxim, "We will let them come exactly to the thirty-yard line." Could the slender French line resist this formidable wave of assault?

The troops of shock divided themselves into three distinct detachments. The commander of each group, relying on the information received, was to bring the force to bear on a point of the enemy position assumed to be weak. The advance was made in close formation.

For the last time, the German chief of artillery



asked, by telephone, for specification of the objective.

"Lengthen your range," cried Fritsch again. "Their reserves are penetrating the wood!"

Confidence was high in the breasts of the Bavarian General Staff. From the top of a spur six miles to the rear, General von Steinger followed with his glass the advance of his men.

"Ah!" he cried, suddenly, with a brutal laugh, addressing his aide-de-camp, Colonel von Tesberger. "This attack, I imagine, will not be very expensive for us."

"With sufficient artillery preparation," said von Tesberger, sententiously, "you not only always get there, but you get there without loss."

"I don't suppose the poor devils have a rifle left them."

"Or an arm to lift it with."

"See the neat line we've drawn!" Von Steinger pointed with his finger to the belt of destruction wrought by the great *marmites*. He began to lecture, like the pedant he was.

"How badly chosen their position was! A great deal too far from the river! Seven or eight hundred yards! How in the world, at that distance, could they keep us from crossing, even in

broad daylight, miserable marksmen that they are? Don't you agree with me, Tesberger?"

"They ought to have placed themselves on the half-slope, just about as high up as our brave infantry are now."

"Do you suppose we shall lose a single man?"

In fact, it seemed likely that the unfortunate defenders, overwhelmed by the bombardment, would not recover sufficient energy for effective resistance. Elbow to elbow, with fixed bayonets, the Boche battalions ascended the slope in three enormous phalanges of perfect alignment and apparently moved by a single mechanism.

"Good heavens!" cried von Steinger. "It's a pretty . . ."

The words died in his throat; a faraway noise like the tearing of an enormous sheet, rent and shook the air.

"They're firing, the rascals!"

At the same second a violent fusillade was loosed from the three menaced sectors, apparently by troops on their guard, with resources and morale intact, under the control of exceptional commanders.

"Good heavens!" cried von Steinger again.

With his glass he perceived the disorder created

in his compact ranks by the sustained fire, which had already been crackling for fifteen seconds. Every ball must be finding several victims. The lines began to bend.

Apparently the officers of the assailing troops were stunned. They had supposed themselves at least five hundred yards from the enemy, and here was a point-blank fire crashing about their ears. The sensation was cut short for them, since most of them fell at once.

With its leaders gone, the mass hesitated; it seemed to waver.

Mute with rage, von Steinger saw the first rank suddenly turn on its heels. The rest quickly followed suit. A rout!

Fritsch, at his underground post, heard the good news duly from Cochefort and braced himself for a storm of abuse. But it was the bell of the field-telephone that called him first. The artillery captain commanding the French battery asked for the direction, which was quickly given him. And then to the deep thunder of the German shells a reply began to come, in the sharp, quick voice of the 75's.

The range was found. In the disordered columns, hurrying in retreat, stumbling over the

dead whom they left behind, the mowing-stroke of the melinite shells made fearful havoc.

They melted away as they ran, stricken with indescribable panic. Not one in three lived to reach the Blaise.

There they sought in vain the slender bridges; these were broken, twisted, carried away for the most part, by the accurate fire of the French guns. Hundreds of fugitives, in their terror, threw themselves into the clear water, among the reeds and the water-lilies. The little stream was deep and swift, and many drowned under the eyes of their comrades, powerless to help them. The rest, fearfully punished by the machine-guns, were soon killed or wounded, almost to a man.

Then suddenly the 75's lengthened their range, and the shells began to fall thick as hail on the battalions of the reserve, making in a few minutes a notable reduction in their effective.

In vain von Steinger, with rage in his heart, gave orders to the artillery to cover the retreat. In the first place, the insane expenditure of ammunition early in the afternoon had begun to exhaust the supplies. In the second place, what was their objective? It was a thing disconcerting to a well-ordered gunner's mind that from a line

wiped out by that colossal preliminary, such a response as this could burst. But there was something still worse. One of the great guns which had been craftily advanced, under the shelter of a wooded rise of ground, to within a few yards of the firing-line, suddenly found itself brutally blown to pieces by a projectile. It looked as though the French marksmen had an invisible signaller in the sky. In two minutes five of the crew were killed, as well as the engineer detailed by the Krupps to accompany it; fifteen others and twenty horses were injured, and the piece was out of commission.

Finally it became von Steinger's duty to look to the safety of his headquarters, already threatened. Many of the staff urged a precipitate retreat.

Fritsch was still waiting to receive the bitterest reproaches from his German correspondents; even to be relieved from his post. He and Cochefort had drawn their revolvers, and were ready to give a warm reception to the relieving party. But there was no need of it. They had not counted sufficiently on the sentiment of solidarity and of discipline, all-powerful in the Kaiser's army. From the moment when von Lüchow

had been chosen for that post by the Commander-in-Chief, he was the man of that post. It never entered von Steinger's head that the man could have betrayed the confidence reposed in him. No, he attributed the check to chance alone, to some fatal combination of circumstances. Nevertheless his first word over the telephone was a sharp request for an explanation:

"Where was your head, von Lüchow? Their trenches weren't shot to bits, then?"

"I understand it now," answered Fritsch. "The French are established in a line they must have prepared in advance, before the war."

"The devil they are! Our own method!"

"During the bombardment they must have taken shelter in their dugouts, and come out of them again just in time to repel the attack."

"Damnation! Are they numerous, do you think?"

"I should be surprised if there were less than two brigades."

"Then we must take them some other way." Von Steinger's mind was instantly made up; it was out of the question to think of taking the position by frontal attack.

Messages were exchanged with the General Staff.

Night came. It promised quiet; the troops engaged needed rest. Only the German cannon raised a sullen voice from time to time.

A German defensive cordon deepened the trenches on the left bank of the Blaise.

In the meantime, congratulations had come to Colonel de Laroque from headquarters. To stop, with two thousand men, the onset of fifteen thousand Bavarians, supported by formidable heavy artillery, was a prodigious exploit, even for those splendid troops on whom, at that moment, the French Commander-in-Chief based his certainty of a prompt revenge. The retreat of the Xth Corps, the removal of the munitions and provisions of the Nth army, were now assured. The British army, supported on its right flank, was going to be able to reply, in the woods of Compiègne, by one of those ugly thrusts of which it had the secret.

Fritsch would have given a good deal to know whether Major Trubert had succeeded in his perilous attempt. Hour after hour he awaited the liberating message. By his order, Cochefort paid frequent visits to the dove-cote. It was not until three o'clock in the morning that a cipher message arrived. "Paris" was astounded, it

said, by the arrival of an exhausted bird, wrapped in the fragments of an English newspaper. What was the meaning of such a jest? An explanation was awaited.

Our hero was puzzled. He seemed to make out that the bird had not arrived before nightfall; in the gathering darkness had he unluckily managed to get out of the sight of his pursuers? But on the other hand, was it not possible that the major was breaking in upon the conspirators at that very moment?

Fritsch received without delay from Colonel von Tesberger, detailed information of the new plan adopted. Throughout the night a westward movement had been effected. Important elements had just crossed the Blaise twelve miles higher up, outlining a threat of the classical envelopment manoeuvre.

Colonel de Laroque, having the benefit of this information, did not hesitate a moment. His business was to use the remaining hours of darkness to evacuate his position. No sense in waiting to be surrounded, or in prolonging a defence that had served its purpose.

“Try to join us, you two,” he added.

This advice was easier to give than to follow;



the German line now ran between the hillock and the river. Fritsch informed Cochefort that his intention was to stay where he was; up to the last minute he might perhaps have a chance to retard or compromise the German advance. And then, at any moment there might be news of Major Trubert.

"I get you," said Cochefort. "Stay it is; and when the Boches turn up, why, we will give them some fun for their money."

"I have a better idea than that," said Fritsch.

The dawn came.

The German detachment, a full brigade in strength, which had crossed the Blaise, turned openly westward. Its forward elements were signalled at five miles distance. Its object was to fall on the back of the French defence, which would at the same time be paralysed by a violent frontal attack. Von Steinger had only one fear, that the enemy, having got wind of the manœuvre, might have decamped during the night. Von Lüchow reassured him; he asserted that, by certain unmistakable signs, he was sure the trenches were still occupied by the same French contingent. They would be scooped up by this

masterly cast of the net. Thousands of prisoners would be taken. The affair would reflect lustre on the reputation of the corps commander, a little tarnished by the check of the night before.

The German artillery had begun anew its infernal concert. At half past six, the manoeuvring brigade came out at the rear of the French position, virtually cutting it off from its base. Taken between two fires, the French made no attempt at resistance. Apparently they were not going to surrender either.

The Boches came down the hill at the double. They had reached the zone of destruction made by yesterday's fire. Between two slopes there was a sort of basin. There, according to von Lüchow, was the rallying point of the resistance, and it was therefore the spot which the enemy must first control. The first wave of the assault bore down upon it in concentric arcs. Section after section they came down the slope like a swarm of ants.

At this moment a rocket went up from the crest of the hillock which supported the signal-station; it caused a sigh of relief among the detachment of French engineers, who had been waiting, on tenterhooks, on a height five miles to the south.

A few seconds later, an incredible explosion shook the whole countryside. The earth literally quaked for a radius of more than a mile. A sort of crater opened in the side of the green hill. Four hundred yards into the air leaped a sheet of fire. Two hundred pounds of Turpin powder make quite a disturbance when they explode.

A terrible death overtook on that spot a thousand of the Bavarians. Human fragments came to earth more than a mile away.

The rest, halted only for an instant, rushed forward eager to avenge themselves hand-to-hand. There was no enemy to be found. Only a few posters, conceived in ironical terms: "Sorry to miss you," "See you later," "Come early: an informal dance."

This time von Steinger saw clearly that he had been duped; his cup was full. Who was responsible? It must be that signal-officer. A patrol, commanded by an officer of equivalent rank, was sent to arrest Captain von Lüchow.

An hour later the officer commanding the patrol reported that his orders had been executed.

"Von Lüchow is here?"

"He is here, sir."

## CHAPTER II

### A DANGEROUS PASS

YES, Fritsch had ventured to play a game of incredible audacity. An intuition of such a possibility had led him to make a careful scrutiny the day before of the dead German officer. The photograph and the sketch had been made to this end. He had already adopted the accent of von Lüchow; to add his countenance and his uniform ought not to be beyond the scope of his talent. Fortunately the German had been of about his own height and build, so that the uniform was an excellent fit, and application to the make-up kit had resulted in a tightly adjusted small reddish moustache which clinched the resemblance.

As for Cochefort, his first idea had been to transform him into a German sergeant, but unfortunately, the Frenchman was short and thin, while the German had been tall and fat.

Fritsch had another inspiration. We must

bear in mind that he had never quite given up the wild hope of complete success. He cherished the thought that Trubert would perhaps achieve his end. He himself carried, stitched into the lining of his trousers, documents of inestimable value, the cipher of the German General Staff and that of the French. And finally, he chuckled over a simple yet ingenious expedient he had found for preventing the resumption of communication between German headquarters and the spies in Paris, until further orders were issued.

Accordingly, when the German patrol arrived, they found him standing in the open, near the building, with Cochefort, tightly bound, at his feet.

No suspicion of his identity was manifested. The part he had to play was simple; he had only to bow before the order relieving him of his duties and follow his comrade to von Steinger's quarters. Cochefort accompanied him under a close guard.

When he was in the presence of the general, our hero's first experience was a stream of reproach and insult; he was a wretch, whose erroneous information, on two occasions, on two separate days, had cost the lives of goodness knows how many soldiers of his Imperial Majesty.

Fritsch let the storm pass in stoical silence. Finally, when he was given a chance to speak, he presented his defence with cold dignity. He admitted that he had been for an hour the victim of an infamous French spy. But what an excuse there was for his conduct! Poor Hans Sonnenberg had been surprised in the dark and his throat had been cut; the traitor had taken Hans's place, and passed false information down the tube. Finally he, Fritsch, had discovered the ruse. He had rushed up at the moment of the explosion of the mine and was knocked down by it. It was mere luck that he was able to recover in time to revenge himself on his sinister adversary. He had overpowered him, and was on the point of despatching him like a dangerous beast. But on questioning the man, he found him disposed to be confidential. He had drawn from him what seemed to be important revelations concerning the recent development of the French anti-spy work.

This explanation was not so fortunate as to satisfy the general. On the contrary, he burst out into fresh invective, even more bitter. The blot on his prestige put him beside himself. How could he let it get out that he had been the victim

of this miserable farce? He had not even the patience to take the obvious step of examining the French prisoner.

"It is a case of court-martial, von Lüchow," he said.

But a court-martial according to the regulations could not be constituted before the arrival of two other general officers.

Our friend was remanded to a small room opening into the vestibule of the dwelling-house which was the headquarters of the Third Bavarian Corps. There he passed one of the darkest hours of his life.

Now that the affair had taken this brutal turn, his ruse was of no further avail. Knowing the summary ways of justice in the German army he could not doubt that he would be shot. Cochefort would share his fate. One thing was more repugnant to him than all the rest—the thought of dying with this hated uniform on his back. He formed a firm resolution that when they actually placed him against the **wall**, he would drop the mask and declare his **quality** of French non-commissioned officer.

His only consolation was that his rôle had not been played entirely in vain. He hugged the

memory of those two bloody massacres of the Boches. And then, but for him, the major would never have attempted his flight to save France. Fritsch had confidence in the major.

A blow was in store for him. He heard suddenly an unusual stir on the road outside, followed by the rumble of an arriving automobile. From his window Fritsch made out the tall and heavy silhouette of a Prussian general, alighting from a luxurious limousine. He was accompanied by orderly officers.

Mechanically Fritsch drew close to the door, a slight one, through which he could catch scraps of dialogue.

Someone must have handed the general a note just as he entered the vestibule, for he exclaimed, in a guttural voice: "What the devil. Here's a nice letter to get! Karlewitz is dead!"

Exclamations of consternation arose about him, and demands for the details.

"They've just found his body. Killed in an aviation accident, along with that Trubert whom he had been watching for three years. We lose an invaluable man."

He passed on, but Fritsch needed to hear no more to reconstitute the tragedy. So Cochefort's



suspicious had received this horrible confirmation! The loss of the major, of the chief to whom he had vowed deference and admiration, had a depressing effect on the young man. And there were the conspirators in Paris, sure now of impunity! On Fritsch alone rested the secret, and the burden was intolerably heavy. On him, under strict guard, about to be led before the firing-squad!

While the young man was plunged in these pessimistic reflections, the door opened and admitted a young captain, dressed with especial care, monocle, cravat, white gloves.

"My dear comrade," he said, "the duty is laid upon me from this time on to see to your—ahem—safety. I know who you are,—allow me the honour of presenting myself: Baron Johann von Kräuse, attached to the staff of his Excellency General von Kluck.

"The honour is mine."

"You will get out of this all right. I am aware of the—ahem—exaggeration of that lunatic von Steinger's intentions in your direction."

Fritsch looked at him in astonishment. The newcomer confided to him the event which had just taken place.

"Oh, that old von Steinger! We have come to relieve him and bring his successor."

"What?" cried Fritsch.

"Yes, that unequalled tactician is to be made—governor of Nüremberg. Disgrace, nothing less. A proposition of his Excellency, ratified in advance."

"Is his Excellency to be in this neighbourhood?"

"He's in the act of establishing himself here for some days. He seems to have found a good place, in an old château of these parts."

"Near here?"

"About twenty miles."

"What's the name of the château?"

"A queer one—wait a minute . . ."

"Well?"

"Serazereux, I think."

Somehow Fritsch had been sure of it. His heartbeats stifled him.

"Really?" he said. "And this château was inhabited, doubtless?"

"To tell the truth, I have only had a glimpse of the place. A report that came under my eye spoke of an old gentleman who had some idea of opposing our advance,—rather quaint of him, wasn't it?"

Fritsch had not the courage to ask for further details. From that moment an instinct stronger than reason urged him towards that ancient dwelling where destiny united the dearest interests of his heart and of his country.

Half an hour later, when he was summoned to appear before General von Haumrich, he was sustained by pride and renewed energy. This time he had to do with a benevolent judge, who gave him a chance to present his explanation in full.

“His Excellency, who knows you,” said the general, “was right, I think, in not placing entire confidence in the report which blamed you without reservation. You were guilty of negligence, certainly, but the most to blame was your unhappy companion, and he paid for his blunder on the spot. His Excellency has decided to restore you to your post; you have had a salutary warning. But he has left it to me to give a supplementary sanction, and my mind is not yet made up. Bring me the French spy.”

It was not without apprehension that Fritsch awaited the entry of Cochefort. There had been no definite plan agreed upon between them, and during those two mortal hours they had

had no chance of communication. Fortunately, Cochefort was prudent even to excess and began the interview with his judges by observing an obstinate silence. Von Haumrich promptly lost his temper and was on the point of setting him up against the wall.

Fritsch grew nervous as he watched the excitement growing in the German's fierce face, and ventured a suggestion.

"General, will you allow me an instant to try and draw from the damned Frenchman at least as much as he confided to me this morning?"

"I give you five minutes," said von Haumrich.

"You dog," cried the young man, addressing the prisoner, "didn't you talk to me a while ago about your chief, Major—what d'ye call him—Trubert?"

"Trubert!" exclaimed the general softly, glancing at his chief of staff.

"Trubert!" murmured Cochefort, not sure what Fritsch wanted of him.

"Yes or no: did you tell me he had started in an aeroplane?"

"If I said that, I can say it again," said Cochefort.

"But will you tell us what his mission was?"

"I will not; a thousand times not!"

"You brute, you swore you would tell if you were brought before a high German commander; it was in consideration of that promise only that I spared your life."

"Before a high German commander?" repeated Cochefort, puzzled.

"Must I name his Excellency General von Kluck?"

A furtive wink dictated Cochefort's reply.

"Before him yes; I'll spit it out before him."

He looked at Fritsch, who gave him an imperceptible sign.

"That is to say," he added, "if his whiskers is there too."

"You hear," said Fritsch. "He has a fixed idea about this; he wants me to be there."

Von Haumrich did not hesitate.

He knew what importance his Excellency attached to interrogating in person any prisoner who seemed interesting, and Trubert's name in this man's mouth was an enigma of the deepest interest. He scribbled a pass. Von Kräuse was detailed to escort the spy and the German captain to the General Headquarters of the First Army.

## CHAPTER III

### THE GERMAN TIDE

As Captain von Kräuse took the wheel of the sixty horse-power motor, he made a point of seating our hero beside him. Cochefort was behind, between two stalwart guards.

The speed was not rapid. Sounding his horn almost continuously, von Kräuse was obliged to work his way along a crowded road. He was in high spirits, as he recounted the adventures of the early days of the campaign.

"But yours must have been pretty dull, von Lüchow," he said, "stewing away in that beastly hole."

"Fairly dull," Fritsch admitted.

"I had the luck to be with von Emmich's army, concentrated in the most deadly secrecy at Altes Lager, early in July. We had the honour of making the attack, out of the blue."

"More honour than success," remarked Fritsch, with some irony.

"I beg pardon?"

"They say that in front of Liège . . ."

"Oh, we started that rumour about our receiving a check there, with the single purpose of making the enemy command believe we had renounced our plan of an invasion towards the sources of the Oise."

"Forty thousand men massacred to give currency to a rumour," thought Fritsch. "They could have fooled us at less expense than that."

With an innocent air he asked: "And at the Meuse, up the stream? Didn't the passage cost you dear?"

"You can't have an omelette without breaking some eggs."

"Of course, but how about Dinant?"

"At Dinant everything went our way."

"I heard some talk about a French success there, about the 15th."

"Pooh! the shadow of a success would be more correct; and they only got that by the complicity of the civilians. I know what I'm talking about, for I was there."

Fritsch, who was there too, wondered whether

he had levelled his rifle at his companion of today.

“Let me tell you,” said von Kräuse, “the neat way I got even with those civilians. Once those damned French troops were out of the way for good, I sent word through the town that at a certain hour all the inhabitants who wanted to get off with their lives, were to come out of their houses. The idiots obeyed.”

“And then?”

“Then we had some fun. The machine-guns were in position at the end of each street. You ought to have been there, the blood literally ran in the gutters the way water does after a hard rain.”

This time Fritsch could make no answer. A physical sickness swept him.

Von Kräuse went on to glittering generalities.

“Where we showed our genius,” he said, “was in fooling the world about our state of preparation. The enemy general staffs thought we were starting in with our whole effective. They estimated us at twenty-five corps! Just on this one front, at this moment, we have more than fifty; ten at least, here on the right wing,—more than twice as many as the French and English together.”



He smiled complacently. "And what troops, if I say it that shouldn't!"

Around them was flowing the interminable tide of German infantry. In column of twos or fours they came, squad after squad of fine, well set-up fellows, covered with sweat and dust. They all looked as if they were cast in the same mould,—blond, heavy-jawed, harsh-featured. All these young animals of prey were rifling the fields of France, lying open before them. At the end of the files walked the non-commissioned officers with brutal faces, angrily shouting orders or a simple call to order. And at the heads of the companies went the captains or the first lieutenants with monocle and helmet, insolent, indifferent to the rabble.

The most striking thing to Fritsch was that he never saw a single detachment at ease. He knew that the German system does not admit of the hourly rest. "What is the average length of a march?" he asked von Kräuse.

"Thirty miles, my dear fellow." He added some details: One halt only, to eat; half the troops marching while the others rest, thus losing the minimum of time; the army always in condition, and the stream flowing without a pause.

“And what about the men who can’t stand it?”

“We give them treatment.”

“How?”

“With this.” Von Kräuse struck the butt of his revolver. “When boys of twenty-five can’t stand up under the fatigues of the first weeks of a campaign, they are hopeless, and we get rid of them. They would be a dead weight.”

He directed his companion’s attention to the equipment and supplies. All of the first quality! Just compare it with those poor Frenchmen’s! He dwelt on the attention to detail, elsewhere unknown, the steel soles on the shoes, the light helmets, waterproof and often shell-proof, the buttons of the uniform, applied by a device that made it almost impossible to detach them from the garment.

They met a prodigious string of vehicles, the baggage train of an army corps. Fritsch pretended ignorance and a desire to be informed; the foreign missions which had kept him abroad for the last three years served as a sufficient excuse. His companion pointed out to him as they passed the trucks and the autobusses carrying spare material, tools and implements of all sorts

and sizes; miles of barbed wire, telescopes, periscopes, hand-grenades, pumps for liquid fire. Then a park of artillery, with the whole gamut of field-guns, from the 77's to the formidable 305's, made in Austria. Also a collection of the terrible machine-guns, the special arm of modern warfare.

At that moment their road skirted a field where there had been fighting the day before, and Fritsch beheld a sinister spectacle: a French section fallen in a block, the men perfectly aligned, the lieutenant at the head, the two sergeants at the ends of the files, all in their regulation places. And every man of them was in the same attitude, with the left arm raised to the head, all stricken by the same thunderbolt.

Farther on they passed through a village where Fritsch was really surprised. What were these squads of workmen in grey overalls, who seemed to be busy with a sort of spring-moving on a gigantic scale? Von Kräuse obliged him again with information; they really were professional moving-van people, operating in each locality under the direction of a special official, an ex-resident of the place. All furniture and objects of value were expeditiously packed and removed to Germany, there to be sold at bargain prices.

Fritsch sank back on the cushions of the limousine, sick at heart.

He realized the cruel inequality of the struggle with this formidable war-machine, prepared in every detail for twenty years and set in motion at the opportune moment. This was the impression of practically everyone who, at the end of August, 1914, had the opportunity to see at close quarters the outpouring of the horde that swept all barriers before it. In spite of himself, Fritsch recalled Trubert's warning: if that tide should reach the gates of Paris, what human force could stay it?

He still had spirit enough to try his companion on this topic. Paris? Would they get to Paris?

"Why, we shall be inside in six days."

"But what about the forts? The defences?"

"They don't exist, my dear fellow." Von Kräuse smiled a pitying smile. "Besides," he lowered his voice, "there are our friends inside!"

Fritsch glanced at him and murmured: "Plan AZ, you mean?"

Von Kräuse started. "Ah, you are on, are you?"

"Partially."

Fritsch exerted himself to make the other talk.

He gleaned from him some details concerning the habits of the commander-in-chief: for instance, that his Excellency used to shut himself up for days together, before his map and his telephonic switchboard, with no companion but his chief of staff, General von Tanhausen.

“What sort of a man is he?”

“He has no individuality at all; he is a simple reflex of his Excellency, in whose wake he has prospered and advanced for fifteen years. He shares his opinions, his rheumatism, and his handwriting.”

“And the rest of you, how do you put in your time?”

“Not in any round of giddy excitement. We are mere ciphers, good for parade, and that’s about all. In fact, we haven’t even the resource of going on the spree once in a while.”

“Why so?”

“He’s hard on himself and hard on others.” Von Kräuse lowered his voice again. “Since his troubles, you know . . .”

Fritsch nodded comprehension. He had heard gossip, at the time when he was in the habit of visiting Germany, of the drama which had darkened the private life of his Excellency: The

abduction of his wife by an Austrian archduke, the revolver-shot at Carlsbad, a doubt hovering over the legitimacy of his two sons, a tremendous emotional experience from which he had emerged older, embittered, sad, with that strictness of life and that will and capacity for work which had made him the marvel of the Empire.

Whenever Fritsch thought of his impending interview with the great warrior, he shook in his shoes. If the general had known von Lüchow personally, as he was given to understand, how could he be imposed upon for a minute? And then, what would Cochefort say or do? That was a source of cruel anxiety.

The motor was now running more freely, along a transverse road. Little by little, Henry's thoughts took a different cast. A signboard conveyed the information: "Serazereux, 4 km. 3." The country became more broken, diversified, picturesque. That word "Serazereux" had so long been set to music in the young man's mind! How many times he had dreamed of this countryside, and of the old feudal dwelling, where his well-beloved spent, almost every year, the delicious weeks of autumn! What should he find when he got there? Could he rely on the report re-

ceived from the trekking baker's wife? Or rather on that to which von Kräuse had alluded? Had the marquis made his way back to the house of his fathers? Was fortune about to bring him, Fritsch, into the presence of the man who had so scornfully rejected him as a son-in-law? And what if Anne Marie had accompanied the old man? He thought of it with mingled hope and anguish.

The motor crossed the last ridge and began to descend a winding road. On the side of the slope across the valley rose a forbidding donjon, and beside it the mass of an ancient château. This was Serazereux.

Five minutes later the motor stopped at the drawbridge.

## CHAPTER IV

### VON KLUCK

VON KRÄUSE gave the password to the sentry, and they crossed on foot the great court of honour.

Pomeranian cuirassiers and hussars were bivouacking there in the open. The two groups did not fraternize at all, according to von Kräuse. He pointed out extra-rapid guns, mounted for use against possible attacks by French aircraft.

The two young men were conducted into the great hall, called the Guard-room. Their guide went off for orders, and returned after a quarter of an hour. His Excellency was at work, but perhaps he would see them in a few minutes.

From the corner of his eye Fritsch examined, not without uneasiness, Cochefort's face, which had taken on an expression of ironical despair. Several times he tried to get near him, but in vain; the guard was too vigilant.

Once he trembled, hearing Cochefort's voice



raised at the other end of the room. "When do you grub, you fellows?"

As the guard did not understand French, they invited Cochefort to express himself in German.

"Not on your life," said he. "I don't use my tongue for dirty work."

They referred the matter to von Kräuse, who approached the prisoner.

"When do you grub?" repeated Cochefort in an aggressive tone.

"Grub?"

"Yes."

"What?"

"Grub."

The captain's French education had stopped short of slang, and he was obliged to have recourse to Fritsch.

"He wants something to eat," said Fritsch.

Orders were given, and Cochefort was quickly served with some potatoes swimming in a greasy liquid. He refused the dish with a gesture.

"High life or nothing!"

Fritsch translated again: the man demanded the fare of the German officers.

Von Kräuse was furious. "The French hobo!" he shouted.

Fritsch took the captain aside. Of course the fellow's demand was absurd, but no one knew better than he the obstinacy of those crazy Frenchmen. If they didn't satisfy this beggar's whim, they shouldn't get a word out of him presently before the general. His Excellency would certainly be furious if they bothered him for nothing. Perhaps it would be wiser to give the rascal what he wanted.

Von Kräuse resigned himself. Fresh orders produced vol-au-vent, salmon, chicken, and a bottle of good wine. As a wind-up, the prisoner asked for champagne, and it was judged prudent to let him have it.

"It's all very pleasant so far," he sighed when he was at last satisfied.

Fritsch for his part was contented with a more frugal meal.

He questioned the captain, who had been coming and going in the château. Had he confirmed the report that the old gentleman, the proprietor of the château, had stayed at Serazereux?

"Some say he's sequestered, others say shot, for having attempted resistance."

Henry hid his horrible anxiety under a feigned indifference.

“And his daughter? Was she too . . .?”

“The daughter? The girl with him is what they call a soubrette.” He pronounced the word French fashion.

“What do you mean by a soubrette?”

“A pretty girl, with whom all our comrades profess to be in love.”

“And who favours . . . ?”

“Nobody—so far; but we shall see.”

Left to himself, Fritsch fell to pondering this new enigma. A soubrette? Could it be Anne Marie who was figuring in such a rôle, she who had not a trace of natural endowment for it? Was she living under this roof? But how could he have failed to feel her gracious presence? A sudden fear caught at his heart: if by chance she should meet him while he wore this hateful uniform, she might recognize him and take him perhaps for a traitor, a spy. . . .

It was six o'clock in the evening when Fritsch saw von Kräuse reappear: His Excellency ordered von Lüchow's immediate attendance.

The blood hammered in Fritsch's temples. Von Kluck! For a young Frenchman, brought up in a military atmosphere, what ideas were implicit in the name of the greatest fighting-man

of Germany, the man to whose talent even his enemies did justice, as the Germans did to a Pau or a Castelnau! How many times he had heard from the lips of General Herluison, eulogies of the famous tactician! Even before the war, he was a popular personality from one end of the empire to the other, this officer of humble origin, raised to the very summit of the military hierarchy more by his merits, perhaps, than by the favour of his sovereign. And the opening of the war had only put a fresh gloss upon his aureole. Before his fame, the star of von Moltke looked strangely pale, though von Moltke was generalissimo by title. Von Kluck, the victor of Charleroi!

His Excellency had established his office in the room that had been the marquis's study, a large room, furnished in the purest Renaissance. In the middle stood a huge Henry II. writing-table, on which a map was spread. At one side was a telephone switchboard.

At this table two men were seated, facing each other. About one of them there was no doubt; \* \* it was von Kluck himself, very pale, in his close-fitting uniform of grey cloth, a single decoration—the iron cross—upon his breast, and his face

brutal and energetic as Henry had seen it twenty times on window-posters beyond the Rhine. One detail surprised him: the general's eyes were hidden behind thick black goggles. Early in the campaign he had been half blinded by the explosion of a bomb that fell within twenty feet of him.

The other man at the table was a small, dry, smooth-faced person, General Karl von Tanhausen, the only confidant of his Excellency.

Von Kräuse preceded our hero, and approached with measured step:

"Captain von Lüchow is here."

Von Kluck made a brief gesture of dismissal.

Von Lüchow saluted and waited in the impeccable "attention" of German discipline.

"This is you, Captain von Lüchow?"

"It is I, your Excellency."

"I have been satisfied with you up to now. But for two days everything has gone wrong with you. I have a report to your disadvantage from General von Steinger."

His tone reassured Fritsch; it was familiar, almost kindly. He opened his lips to reply, but von Kluck went on.

"Well, well, he failed; the affair has cost him his command. Naturally he is furious." He turned

to his chief-of-staff. "Just what did that report say, Tanhausen?"

"The captain was accused of having, by erroneous and unintelligent information, caused two serious checks for the Bavarian divisions."

Von Kluck smiled slightly. "I seem to see my good Bavarians running their heads into a noose in perfect innocence of heart. That reverse didn't surprise me—I had my suspicions of the Blaise. Well, the way is cleared for my Prussian columns. I pass over the rest of the charge."

"Especially," added von Tanhausen, "since the captain's chief duty was the faithful transmission to us . . ."

"Exactly," said von Kluck. "Our friends the corps commanders really take these things very coolly. I post an officer to perform a highly important duty for me, and they gobble him to serve as signal-officer for their own immediate purposes." He turned to von Lüchow. "How do I know that it wasn't his absurd demands that made you neglect your special duty for two days?"

"I did not neglect it," declared Fritsch boldly.

"It is true that your successor is doing no better."

"Hasn't there been any message since I left?"

Fritsch ventured to ask. He had completely recovered his assurance.

“Not one. Complete silence from Paris.”

“The last one I transmitted was of the evening of the 27th.”

“Yes, more than forty-eight hours ago. That is alarming, isn't it?” he asked of von Tanhausen.

Tanhausen agreed. “Perhaps there has been a surprise there. . . . And as we don't get anything from the post at Tis-Diaou either. . . .”

A shade passed over von Kluck's face. Evidently he was preoccupied to the highest degree by the breaking down of his espionage centres at this critical point in the campaign.

“I have sent out six messages since the day before yesterday; can it be that they have not received anything at their end?”

Fritsch was inwardly delighted at the success of the summary means he had used to put a stop to the intrigue.

Von Tanhausen brought the general's attention back to the young man.

“What shall we do with the captain?” he asked.

His Excellency brushed aside with a contemptuous gesture von Steinger's report. “This

doesn't amount to anything," he said. "We will send the young man for a little tour on the Russian front."

"Do you not wish to interrogate the French spy?"

"The spy? Oh, have we got to waste time listening to his yarn? Well, bring him along."

The order was given. There was a minute of silence. What would Cochefort's attitude be? Fritsch abandoned himself to fate. His gaze strayed about the room—how often Anne Marie must have come here and seated herself in one of those chairs to cheer her father with the grace he knew so well! It seemed to him that the gloomy room was illuminated. He studied a large portrait of a woman in the panel over the chimney-piece. The upper part of the face was lost in shadow, but he could detect the purity of the drawing. The subject was some chatelaine of Serazereux, whose features had been fixed by a great artist of long ago. He could decipher the inscription below, and it shook him. "Anne Marie de Serazereux. 1643-1672."

He was still more moved as, on closer inspection, he noted, feature for feature, a resemblance to the lovely girl of his own day. The same



forehead framed in vaporous blonde curls, the same delicately curved nose, and above all, the eyes! The eyes seemed really alive, and they rested on the young man with a charming expression of tenderness and encouragement. They warmed his soul.

There was a knock at the door. "Come in," cried his Excellency.

Cochefort appeared on the threshold, escorted by two guards. As he entered, he exchanged a rapid glance with Fritsch. In his clenched jaws and trembling nostril, Fritsch thought he read some ironical purpose, and he was nervous.

"So here is our man," said von Kluck. He turned to the prisoner.

"Come, my son, let us have a little confidential talk. I am listening; go ahead."

Cochefort remained silent. Von Kluck repeated his order. Still silence.

"Doesn't he understand German?"

"French is the language of honest men," remarked Cochefort, in a sort of stage aside.

Von Tanhausen, horrified, cried out, but von Kluck, with a kindliness that surprised them all, said in French: "Very well."

Cochefort then by a gesture showed that he

wished his colossal guards to withdraw. At a sign from his Excellency they retired.

"And the old jack-lantern," said Cochefort, pointing at von Tanhausen, who jumped in his seat.

"The general will remain," said von Kluck drily. "He is another me."

"Another robber-chief, that is."

"Come, come, my man," began von Kluck.

"Come, come, yourself," said Cochefort. "Was your mother surprised when they told her the baby was a monkey?"

Fritsch was appalled; it was clear that Cochefort had decided to risk a most outrageous row.

With his cap on the back of his head and his hands behind his back in an attitude of defiance, Cochefort looked straight at the commander-in-chief, who tried in vain to make him lower his eyes.

"General," he said, "I have decided that it is my duty to tell you something—something good—that you haven't a suspicion of."

"I am listening," said von Kluck, in a tone which he took pains to make paternal.

Cochefort took his time. "That thing,—listen, now . . ."

"Is?"

"Is . . ." he accented every syllable, "that you—won't—get—us!"

"What?"

"Never mind if you pour in your grey boys by the million and make your guns bark till they bust! It's just like it was in '70! There's plenty of chaps behind us! Enough to chase you out of France!"

"Wretched man!" Von Kluck had risen, with foam on his lips.

Cochefort did not withdraw a hairbreadth. "If you take my advice, look out for yourself, Mr. von Kluck. You think you're going into Paris, riding on the Eiffel tower! Papa Joffre has got his eye on you, and you'll find yourself in the gutter!"

Von Tanhausen had taken it upon himself to touch the bell; four cuirassiers appeared in the doorway.

Von Kluck, on his part, mastered his temper.

"You've got a nerve, my friend," he said.

"Now, that's good French," said Cochefort. "It'll come in handy when you're our prisoner."

"Are there many like you in your country?" asked his Excellency.

"Three millions at Pantruche alone, at your service, to kick you out."

The scene had lasted long enough. Von Kluck turned quietly to Fritsch. "Take command of a patrol," he said, "and shoot this man. At once, you understand; it's getting dark. You will sleep here tonight; tomorrow you start for the Russian front; I will give you a letter to General von Hindenburg."

Fritsch seemed to hesitate.

"You want a written order?" He turned to von Tanhausen. "Write one and sign it for me. I have wasted enough time already."

It was a matter of a moment. The chief of staff offered the signed order to the young man; the guards led Cochefort away. Fritsch saluted and went.

In the vestibule our hero sought in vain for some means to evade the atrocious duty laid upon him, or even to delay its execution. Von Kluck had said "At once!" The word had been heard; already a zealous sergeant was approaching him with a dozen armed cuirassiers. Mechanically he placed himself at their head.

On the staircase they met a pretty girl in a coquettish apron; was this the charming "soubrette" that von Kräuse had been talking about?

Fritsch, his mind a vacuum, made way for her to pass. By coincidence or intention, they brushed against each other, and, strange to say, a furtive hand sought his and softly passed a paper into it. Our hero sent his escort ahead, and deciphered these lines:

“If you wish the French soldier to escape, choose the moat for the place of execution. Count forty-seven paving-stones to the left after you pass the drawbridge. Take measures to place him below the ring in the wall.”

His mysterious correspondent had disappeared. Night was falling.

Henry crumpled the paper with an air of indifference, and arrived in the court where the patrol had halted. What should he do? Whither should he lead these men? Still in doubt, he guided his little band toward the drawbridge. Beneath stretched a large moat, paved with enormous flagstones. Perhaps there was some sense in the letter,—there might be a last chance of safety for his good comrade. Certainly there was no other hope in sight. Followed by his men, he went down into the moat, turned to the left, and in spite of himself, began to count the stones. Near the thirtieth the building took a

turn; a granite buttress masqued the draw-bridge. Forty-seven, and there, fastened in the solid masonry, was an iron ring.

Darkness was rapidly coming on, wrapping persons and things in a feathery mist.

Cochefort looked at Fritsch. With a wooden gesture, Fritsch removed the firing-squad twenty yards. Then he made an authoritative sign to the prisoner to advance. Drawing out the mysterious letter he placed it before his eyes with a severe air, as if it contained his accusation.

In a low voice and in the purest slang, they exchanged a few words.

"Do you get it?"

"You bet."

"May be something doing."

"This stone has the jim-jams." In fact it moved slightly beneath him.

"A trap perhaps."

Fritsch had an idea. Taking a step towards the soldiers, he shouted imperiously, "Left wheel." They pivoted as one man. He called the sergeant. The man came running, his revolver in his hand; it was his duty, he was aware, to despatch the prisoner if need were.

"Take off your coat," commanded Fritsch.

Somewhat surprised, the sergeant obeyed. Cochefort, having received the same order, took off his tunic. The two men were of the same height. They made two similar silhouettes, in the gathering shadows.

Fritsch had a plan in his head. He cried suddenly, in a loud voice: "Sergeant, go and wait for me at the gilded gate to the park."

The German, amazed, opened his mouth to speak. With a gesture Fritsch ordered silence and kept him at his side. At this instant the ground seemed to open under Cochefort; the flagstone sank slowly. Henry used the golden moment. Springing backward, he thundered an order to the firing squad:

"Right wheel! Make ready! Fire!"

The twelve men had turned round; they fired upon the only figure they saw through the twilight. The unlucky German sergeant fell, pierced by their balls.

Fritsch cast Cochefort's tunic over the body, and withdrew his stolid Pomeranians, who had neither seen nor understood anything of the scene.

As he dismissed them, he asked, "What is the name of your sergeant?"

"Frauenberg," was the reply.

“Very good; I need him; a detail for special service. I will see your captain.”

It was from another detachment that Fritsch chose four men to bury the dead man, under his own eye.



## CHAPTER V

### THE GLANCE OF THE PORTRAIT

FRITSCH had acted in this scene like a man walking in his sleep. He could hardly resume his waking senses.

Cochefort had escaped! What intrigue within the château had declared itself as his accomplice? Who was the girl he had met, who had handed him the note? A messenger from Anne Marie? The hope was sweet, but it was childish; he alternately laughed at it and clung to it.

He went to find von Kräuse, and they ascended the marble staircase together. Lo and behold, at a turning appeared the same graceful apparition! Henry cast a questioning glance at the soubrette.

"*Gemüthlich*," said von Kräuse, and tried to touch the pretty hand as he passed. But the unknown, with a modest gesture, turned and disappeared. It was Fritsch against whom she brushed.

"Devilish shy," murmured von Kräuse, following her with his eye.

Prompted by curiosity, our friend urged him on. "Couldn't you stop her?" he asked.

"Hush, my dear boy; she has only to lodge a complaint. His Excellency won't stand any nonsense." Von Kluck's austerity was celebrated. It had made itself felt from top to bottom of the army.

Fritsch did not insist. As he passed the girl he had felt again a gentle contact; a second letter passed. He made a pretext to stop on the next landing, and read: "Your friend is safe. Try to occupy the green bedroom, and to be alone there at about ten o'clock."

But von Kräuse was plying him with jovial suggestions. "My dear fellow, this is the chance of our lives to spend a pleasant evening, to celebrate your deliverance from your hole. You will find good company, and, which is even better, good champagne!"

Impossible to get out of it! Von Kräuse carried him away. "A man who is off for East Prussia tomorrow morning oughtn't to miss a good thing like that."

They entered a large room where, around a

vast table covered with uncorked bottles, sat a dozen young officers, already drunk.

Von Kräuse presented the newcomer. There were welcoming cries of "Hoch, hoch!"

"Von Lüchow!" cried someone; "come here, old man; let's have a look at you. Don't you remember von Lübeck, at the Academy?"

"God bless you, old man," responded the pseudo von Lüchow, in the pure accent of Coburg.

"No need to ask what province you were born in, my boy," said one.

"In the best of the lot, in my opinion," answered Fritsch.

"Here's to Coburg," cried a gay convive. "To all the Coburgs in the world, and among the rest to the Bulgarian Coburg, which, I am willing to bet, will sooner or later come down on the backs of those brutes of Serbs."

"Hoch, hoch!" shouted the drinkers. Fritsch had a glass in his hand, but he merely wet his lips. His gorge rose at the ignoble toast.

"The sobriety of these Saxons!" cried one with a giggle.

The orgy was only beginning; they were drinking to pass the time till supper, which was to be served at eight o'clock.

Von Kräuse was grumbling. "The trouble is that damned 'lights out' at eleven o'clock sharp. This is a regiment of monks; witness the regrettable absence of ladies."

Everyone agreed that his Excellency's discipline was too severe in this respect.

"And yet there are pretty girls to be met on the stairs?" hazarded Fritsch.

"He's got it too!" they shouted. The whole table declared themselves sweet on the little French girl.

"Only . . ."

"Well?"

"Not very safe."

Von Lübeck explained: the girl was suspected of being a spy; she had several times been sent for to the chief's office and examined in private; everybody was surprised that she was still at large.

"Cochefort is all right, then," thought Fritsch; "but how in the world did she recognize a friend in me?"

He chanced one more question: "She's apparently a lady's maid; doesn't that imply a mistress somewhere about?"

"Of course; the old gentleman's daughter." But they added that no one had seen the daughter,

unless in glimpses; she was shut up in her oratory praying. And moreover Colonel von Triptig had given strict orders that she should be treated with entire respect.

Henry's heart beat to bursting. So Anne Marie was here!

To the great chagrin of von Kräuse, Fritsch rose when the banquet was in mid-course and announced his wish to go to bed. He explained how tired he was; this would make he couldn't say how many nights on end without sleep. And tomorrow he had that outrageous journey before him to the Polish frontier.

Then with a careless air he asked: "Where do I sleep?"

Von Kräuse offered to have a bed made next to his.

"Thank you, my dear boy, I should be in your way. I have got to get up so early. What about this green room someone mentioned?"

"The poorest on this floor."

"Just my affair."

"Oh, these Saxons!"

Two orderlies, carrying massive candlesticks of bronze, guided him to his apartment.

Left to himself, Fritsch examined the room. The walls were covered with sombre old brocade. The furniture was simple, but of the period of the brocade, and a collector would have given a good price for it. The most striking object was a superb marble mantelpiece.

What should he do? Nothing but wait. Wait until his mysterious friends should reveal their presence. He had left the door open into the corridor, and he could hear the bacchanalian shouts of the company he had quitted. As he strained his ears, he thought he could detect a slippered tread. He got up and went to the door, but nothing was visible; nothing but darkness.

Who would his visitor be? Cochefort? Or the pretty soubrette? It was of another visit that he dreamed.

He went and leaned upon the window-sill, tasting with refreshment the cool air that played about his forehead, pleasant after the strain of the sultry day. His glance strayed about the vast courtyard and towards the secular tree-tops of the park, unreal and fairy-like under the opalescent moonlight.

All this was the scene in which Anne Marie

had lived, in which she was breathing at this moment. . . .

There was the honk of a motor from the direction of the drawbridge, short and sharp. Apparently the sentries had been warned, for without interrogation on their part, the bridge was rapidly lowered. A motor-car entered the courtyard, a long grey torpedo, without ornamentation of any sort. It made a half-circuit and stopped before the main entrance. A tall man, of military bearing, alighted, and, without a word to the chauffeur, mounted the steps. The sentries at the door had doubtless received their orders too, for they ranged themselves on either side and silently saluted. Our hero was interested; who could this nocturnal visitor be?

Shortly afterward, his curiosity received another fillip: Von Kluck's apartments, which were almost exactly opposite, on the story below, were suddenly illuminated. Through the drawn curtains, Henry thought he could distinguish the tall figure of the stranger. What visitor could be introduced into the general's rooms at this hour? Fritsch's imagination got to work.

At this moment, a soft sound behind him

caused him to turn. The monumental mantel-piece, whose harmonious and substantial proportions he had been admiring, seemed to turn on itself. From the darkness a form arose. He stepped forward, his hands stretched out towards the mirage.

“It is Anne Marie, Henry,” said a sweet voice.

Although he had almost counted on it, this visit that he had so much desired stopped Henry’s breath; words forsook him. But Anne Marie gave him her hand, her loyal, tender little hand, which had so often lain in his. For the moment neither felt any need to waste words on the cruel separation and silence of the last months. One handclasp, and behold, their mutual love, in spite of everything, was solemnly ratified.

The first thing she did was to go to the door and slide the bolt.

“How do you come to be here?” he asked.

In hasty phrases she told him her story. She had been with her father in the mountains at the beginning of August, when the storm broke. Her father had first made a trip to Serazereux, alone, to look after the family papers. It was a simple measure of precaution, for it seemed hardly possible the enemy could penetrate so far. But the day after



Charleroi grievous news came of the open breach in the frontier and the flow of the tide towards the Ile de France. The old marquis deemed it his duty not to leave the castle of his ancestors uninhabited; perhaps his presence would intimidate to some degree the incoming barbarians. She had insisted on coming with him, hoping she might be able to keep him from imprudent action. When they reached the château, the enemy were not many miles away. The inevitable happened. When a helmeted trooper roughly called upon the castle to surrender, the old man could not restrain himself; he ordered up the drawbridge.

Fortunately, Anne Marie's coolness had prevented disastrous consequences and useless bloodshed. A few shells would quickly have reduced Serazereux to a heap of ruins. Nothing to be done but surrender; wisdom prevailed and the old marquis yielded. The only result of his hostile attitude was his immediate arrest and the threat of a court-martial, when a miracle happened. Among the staff of General von Kluck there was a certain Colonel Baron von Triptig, formerly military attaché at Paris, who had met the marquis at various official functions. Anxious to show the extent of his influence, he intervened,

and obtained a conditional offer of liberty to the old man. But the marquis absolutely refused to hear of conditions. Since that time he had been under guard in a room on the third floor.

“And you?” murmured Henry.

“Me?” she repeated teasingly. “Why, haven’t you heard that I pass my days in my oratory?”

“Still you go where you like?”

She smiled. “Ah, that is a secret.” But under the young man’s silent interrogatory she told her secret. Like many old buildings of its class and period, the château was honeycombed with passages hidden in the thickness of its great walls. The builders of the time gave play to their imagination in arranging a perfect labyrinth of corridors, staircases, cubby-holes, so that every room in the house was accessible by an invisible system of communication, and every room had its sliding panel or revolving chimney-piece or what not.

“I myself,” she admitted, “had only a casual knowledge of them; but as soon as we got here, my father hastened to complete my education, to the sound of the furious gallop of the Uhlans. So, you see, though they take us for helpless prisoners, we have the advantage of our tyrants,

to the point of being able to surprise their words and even their thoughts, and to interfere with their plans."

Fritsch's eye brightened. "So that is how Cochefort was saved!"

"Yes, we saved him. He is close by; you will see him presently."

"But how did you know of our arrival?"

"My window upstairs commands all the entrances, and nobody comes or goes without my knowledge. I saw you get out of the motor, and knew you at once, in spite of the uniform."

"That disgraceful uniform!" A question rose to his lips, which she gave him no time to formulate.

"No, no! Never! You a spy? My heart knows better than that! Besides, I understood the situation from the moment you appeared before von Kluck. I was present."

"How is that?"

"Close by you!"

"In that room?" He looked at her with a surprise that amused her.

"Henry," she said, "you remember that large portrait, in the shadow?"

"Of your ancestress, whose name you bear?"

"Exactly; didn't you think her eyes resembled mine?"

Suddenly he understood the secret of that tender glance that had rested on him.

She smiled again. "Your stiffening of revolt, the contraction of your face, when your comrade was sentenced . . . if I had had the slightest doubt of you, that would have set me right. But I can swear to you, Henry, that I never had a doubt of you."

Deeply moved, the young man seized her soft hand and carried it to his lips. He began to tell her of his own adventures, of the events and the hope that had brought him to the château, but she interrupted him.

"I know it all already; Cochefort has told me. His story is simply the praise of your cleverness and your nerve. Destiny has brought you here to do something very great."

"If you will be my guide."

"Here you are, in the midst of the enemy general headquarters!"

.. "But I have to keep dark. What can I do  
" unless some accident . . ."

"No accident! An act of God! How often, when I have been eavesdropping at the discus-

sions of von Kluck and his chief-of-staff, I have regretted that my German is so scrappy!"

Henry seemed to be reflecting. "Do you know," he said, "that the general has a visitor at this moment?"

"Really?"

The young man described the arrival of the unknown.

"Have you any curiosity," she asked, "to assist at their interview?"

"Curiosity is no name for it!"

"Come." With a rapid gesture she pressed a rosette sculptured in the marble; the chimney-piece turned on itself again, opening the entrance to a gallery. A dark-lantern hung there. The girl took it down and bade Fritsch follow her.

They had not gone many steps when another light was seen through the darkness; a figure became visible which Fritsch recognized at once as that of the charming soubrette.

"Lisbeth, my foster-sister and good friend," said Anne Marie. Then addressing the girl: "How late you are."

The maid smiled roughly. "I had to stop to receive a letter 'They' sent me."

"Another? 'They' won't take no for an answer!"

"It's not my fault!"

"Show it to me!" Anne Marie cast her eye over it, and then handed it to Henry. "Read that," she said.

The letter was in the tone of heavy compliment, written in French but inspired by the clumsy Germanic muse. It opened with reproaches, with elaborate allusions to the cruelty of the fair one, and it ended with a crude proposal of a rendezvous; the young girl was invited to leave her door open at midnight! A reply would be expected at eleven o'clock, at a place named.

"Who sends this?" asked Fritsch. "Without doubt one of the young gentlemen I left in their cups a while ago."

"You're on a wrong scent altogether," said Anne Marie. "This note would bring a high price as an autograph,—a holograph by the hand of the greatest living German."

"No!"

"The hand of his Excellency, General von Kluck!"

The young man could not believe his ears. "They told me he was a Puritan!"

“Not much! He’s a quaint old gallant out of a comedy, making love to Lisbeth.”

“Is Lisbeth flattered?” asked Henry, laughing.

The soubrette shrugged her shoulders disdainfully.

“Cochefort had only to come on the scene,” said Anne Marie. “What is a German commander-in-chief in comparison with a little French private?”

## CHAPTER VI

### THE STRANGER'S ERRAND

WHAT mission could have been entrusted to the unknown, so important as to gain him admission to the Chief's presence at this hour? Fritsch burned to know and Anne Marie hastened to guide him through the uncanny labyrinth. The young man was bewildered by the arrangement of these interior galleries. At one point he heard, through the wall, a confused noise made up of the clinking of glasses and the cries of tipsy voices. The hall of the supper-party obviously. They went down a staircase, and somewhat farther along she told him they were skirting the Guard-room where he had spent his first hour in the château.

They traversed a long corridor. "Now be careful," she said. With precaution she set down her lantern on the floor. Finger on lip, she signed to Henry to approach. At the same



time, her fingers glided over the woodwork; she drew a tiny bolt, and two small openings were disclosed. At the first glance, Henry recognized von Kluck's office. The room was flooded with electric light, and every detail was visible. And by an ingenious arrangement, sound waves originated anywhere in the room were concentrated and amplified at the height of the portrait. Not only the full voice, but the slightest whisper was plainly audible there.

Around the massive table, three men were seated. The first, who was seated facing him, Henry identified as von Kluck. The second, who presented his profile, was the stranger of the mysterious motor-car; a strong, corpulent man, above the average height. He retained his steel helmet, which topped a grizzled brow. The third, with his back turned, was von Tanhausen, who sat with a fountain-pen in his hand, apparently awaiting instructions. Fritsch listened with his very soul.

"And the morale of the English?" asked the stranger.

"At zero! The numerous prisoners taken during the last two days declare that they have

had enough, that war is not their affair! They are appalled by the effect of our artillery, both heavy and light."

"And the French?"

"Oh, the French! They are more obstinate, the rascals. We have lost touch with their centre, after having been delayed in crossing the Blaise. A stupid affair! I have changed the command of the third Bavarian Corps."

His interlocutor approved. "Very wise; but we are a good deal behind the schedule."

"Behind the schedule?" repeated the general, in a tone that betrayed some impatience.

"Yes. Here we are at the 30th. I allow a margin of a week for the silly resistance of the Belgians. But according to your famous program, we were to be at the last fortification on the 20th."

"Well, we're within thirty miles of it," murmured the general, with obvious ill-humour.

At this moment, the stranger made a movement which brought his face fully into view. The young girl and our hero stared at each other with the same amazement.

Well did they know that face! One of the best-known faces in the world! That imperious

mask, that pallor, the swollen flesh that betrayed the ravages of hereditary disease, above all, the characteristic and aggressive cut of the moustache!

The Kaiser!

Fritsch recalled the gossip he had heard once from a prisoner, describing William's habit of travelling about by himself, without escort, while various twins, profusely accompanied, drew upon themselves the attention of enemy airmen.

In the meantime, it appeared that the general was by no means inclined to swallow docilely the hardly disguised charge of slowness in execution.

"I maintain, sire, that our machine works with a suppleness and a ductibility that are marvellous. We are ten days behind time . . . what is that in an undertaking of this scale?" He interrupted himself. "Oh, of course, . . . it is true we shall not be able to celebrate Sedan Day at the Hotel Astoria!" This was a side thrust at a rather puerile dream of the sovereign, to which the military commander attached no importance whatever.

He resumed. "Besides, this delay, such as it is, is not my responsibility. Three army corps melted away under me at Liège, and they have

never been replaced. Three others have just been withdrawn from me and sent to the Eastern front. That is, I have a hundred and fifty thousand fewer men than I counted on."

The Kaiser adopted a careless air. "You have two corps in reserve at Lille," he remarked. "Von Schrapf's. Why don't you use them?"

"I beg your pardon, they have their orders."

"Oh, yes; they are to take Calais."

"Exactly; they are to take that whole coast, and thus insure our right wing from attack from the west."

William twisted his moustache. "Do you attach great importance to that manoeuvre?"

"The point was discussed at great length in the Council of War."

"It isn't an article of faith, all the same."

"As long as the reasons for it exist."

"That's where you come in, again."

"Twelve days more, at the outside! Just-time enough to let von Schrapf get to Havre. I don't think we need anticipate any great resistance in that quarter." The general was insistent. "I shall not feel my elbows free until I am fairly established on the Seine, with my right flank disengaged."

The Kaiser seemed to hesitate. "Has von Schrapf received his instructions?"

"He received them six months ago; nothing could be less of an afterthought, sire. I expect to launch his movement this very night, or tomorrow morning."

"Have your own way," said the Emperor, brusquely. "This detail is of secondary importance, after all. It is a plan of larger calibre that I have come to discuss with you."

"I am at your Majesty's orders." Von Kluck seemed to bow, but, huddled in his chair, he looked more like a beast about to spring. The hostility between these two persons was patent to the eye. Their growing antagonism, since the opening of the campaign, had not been the least striking feature of the German Councils of War. It had broken out during the first week. After the check at Liège, von Kluck had had a hard struggle to prevent the abandonment of the plan of invasion through Belgium. William was strongly in favour of a second violation of neutrality, that of Holland.

A week later, on the eve of Charleroi, when the Kaiser and the Crown Prince were arguing for a sweeping offensive, it was von Kluck who insisted

that the armies should wait, safe behind formidable entrenchments, for the attack of the French infantry whose temperament was sure to drive them to this heroic folly.

On that occasion, too, his views carried the Council, and history had already proved him right. The emperor could not forgive him. But the man's prestige was already so great that the thought of degrading him, though it had occurred a dozen times to the royal mind, had never had its issue in brusque action.

On the brink of opening the question which had brought him to the general's quarters, the Kaiser appeared anxious to clear the ground.

"I want to ask you," he said, ". . . what news have you from Paris?"

Von Kluck frowned.

"None," he replied. "Communication is interrupted."

"What! In spite of your *tauben*?"

The idea of instituting a regular correspondence by means of the birds had originated with von Kluck, whose practical mind was as ready to use an old device as a new one, if it was serviceable. The emperor, on the contrary, a fanatic for the modern in all things, had clamoured for transmis-

sion by Hertzian waves, a method which the ingenuity of Trubert and Inspector Baston had put a stop to.

Von Kluck was not the man to shirk his responsibilities. "Not a word for forty-eight hours," he said. "It is annoying, certainly."

"Very annoying," said the Kaiser.

"Unless at this very moment there is some news from Post B. F."

Von Kluck pressed a button on the telephonic switchboard and took down a receiver.

"W. K. W.? 131," he demanded gruffly.

A special "central," installed in the cellars of the great house, insured extra-rapid connections with the whole network of the army. At the end of a few seconds, a faint and discreet tinkle was heard.

"Is that you, Ranke?" asked von Kluck.

"At your orders, Excellency."

"Has nothing come?"

"Nothing, Excellency."

"You see," said the general, hanging up the receiver with unnecessary energy. He got up and took a turn or two through the room.

"There is something there which I do not understand!"

An ironic smile appeared on William's face. "No one regrets more than I do to see Plan AZ in danger."

"Hardly endangered by a trifle like this, sire!"

"Our whole scheme is interdependent, interlocked; who knows whether now you are going to be able to carry out your grand design!"

"Concerning what, sire?"

"Concerning Paris."

"My design on Paris is not compromised in the least."

The Kaiser made an impatient gesture. "You admit your communications are interrupted; what becomes of the attack in those circumstances? Who can answer for its success?"

"I can, your Majesty, as I answer for my devotion and my respect."

"Even if the enemy, whose movements are unknown to us . . ."

"Pardon me, we have our aviators."

"Find means to organize . . ."

"Organize what?"

"A more efficient resistance than we suppose."

Von Kluck's manners broke down, and he shrugged his shoulders.

"Your Majesty knows very well that no fortifi-



cation can withstand our 305's. . . . The French have no heavy artillery. . . . When the time comes we shall go through them at the spot we choose,— at the spot *I* choose.”

As he heard this calm affirmation from the mouth of the great enemy of France, Fritsch shivered to his very marrow.

Von Kluck realized the moment had come to enter seriously upon the inevitable duel; what was the hidden object behind this visit, these questions? He went straight to the point.

“Is your Majesty no longer in accord with the General Staff in regard to the conduct of the campaign?”

“More than ever, my dear von Kluck. Only, I am studying, examining, the hypotheses which present themselves.”

“It is no longer a question of hypotheses. A plan of operations exists, which has been on trial now for a month.” There was visible in this answer the indestructible confidence of the great strategist in the work at which, for five years, the first technicians of the empire had been collaborating with him. It was certainly a logical masterpiece, a text-book prescribed for the generalissimo, which that hothead, von Moltke, had

nothing to do, up to this point, but follow docilely. Did the Kaiser entertain the dream of substituting for this program, a plan improvised by himself in the atmosphere of flattery that rose from the censurers of his intimates? Von Kluck was determined that his master should make a clean breast of it.

"Sire," said he, "before we act, we wish to be in full accord with your views."

With a gesture of decision, William rested on the table the elbow of his atrophied arm.

"I will be frank," he declared. "It is true that a new idea has come to me, has come to us. . . . It is my desire to submit it to you."

"To submit it to me, or to impose it upon me, sire?" asked von Kluck hotly.

The Kaiser did not reply. He opened his military cape and drew out a sealed document, which he laid upon the table.

"Will you examine this?" he said.

"When I have leisure, sire."

"Immediately, I should prefer."

Von Kluck tore open the envelope, decorated with the imperial seal.

In a tone which he strove to render careless, William continued: "From the first I have per-

ceived . . . certain modifications. . . . These last days it has been clear to me as an implacable necessity. Yes, yes, I know better than anyone else the merits of the present plan, and the work you have put into it, all of you in the General Staff. But in the application of it, I find, I think, a flaw . . . I have consulted with those about me."

"Whom have you consulted, sire?"

"My friends."

"Technicians? Soldiers?"

"Of course."

"Or sailors?"

The Kaiser winced a little. "Von Tirpitz also, I admit. I have a very high opinion of his ability."

Von Kluck made a disdainful grimace at the mention of the Grand Admiral, the intimate friend of the sovereign, whose intervention in questions of land strategy he had often resented.

"Let the cobbler stick to his last," he contented himself with murmuring, with a scornful smile.

He took up the papers from the envelope and set himself to study them, sheet by sheet. His examination seemed to be conscientious; for ten minutes he read and re-read. The Kaiser tried

to divine, from his impenetrable face, the impression they were making on him.

"Well?" he asked, when von Kluck had finished.

"Very well worked out, sire."

"Is it practical, in your judgment?"

"Practical? Ah, that is another question."

"Indeed!" said the Kaiser, whose smile was becoming a little fixed. "And what is your criticism, as a whole?"

"It is a little too ambitious, sire."

"Ambition is a German virtue!" William feverishly undertook to defend the project. He had an argument prepared. He began by quoting texts from Clausewitz: The chief objective should always be the destruction of enemy forces in the field. A city has nothing but strategic value, whether Paris or another. It was not right, for the fun of the thing, to force a victorious entry.

As his Excellency listened, he understood without difficulty that distorted psychology. It was jealousy, even more than disease, that made the Kaiser's cheeks pale and his eye troubled. It was torture to the megalomaniac to see himself completely eclipsed from the opening of the campaign, not only in the War Council but in popular favour. For all the army, for all the nation,—

tomorrow, perhaps, for all Europe,—von Kluck was the genius of strategy whose fame had risen, augmented and strengthened, from the terrible ordeal by fire.

Von Kluck! Von Kluck's armies! Von Kluck's enveloping movement! No one counted for anything but von Kluck! If a final victory should make him master of the capital of France, what a sorry figure would he, the emperor, cut, a hero of dress-parades, beside the powerful conqueror whose glory would go before them! Here lay the motive of his wish for revenge, to arrange with his own hand, the decisive action of the war. Hence this unexpected change of plan: to leave Paris to itself, not to return thither till some weeks later, with laurels gained elsewhere.

The Kaiser grew animated; he was leaning over the map. With a dogmatic finger, he pointed out the armies of the right wing in contact with the last French fortifications and sketched an abrupt leftward movement, due east, cutting off the enemy forces from Paris. At the same moment two other furious attacks were to be made—there was no lack of men—one by the Crown Prince. . . .

Von Kluck frowned.

“I know; people do not like my son. Just the same, give him the guns and he will enter Verdun!”

He continued his exposition: the chief item was a rush upon Nancy. The heights there offered no serious obstacle; they were unfortified after such a stretch of peace. The Donon would cost something, no doubt, but it would be crossed all right. The army of Lorraine would not be satisfied to rest on the laurels won at Morhange; it would force the French defence on the Seille and on the Moselle—then its advance to Neufchâteau would be manifest destiny.

The Kaiser made a generous gesture: “Then our two wings converge; our centre has nothing to do but hold its position, and tire the enemy out. Consider the enormous scope of the success! The whole French army in the field, twelve or fifteen hundred thousand men, perhaps, with all the fortified positions of the North and East, including the banks of the Meuse with their three famous fortresses, the greater part of their supplies and munitions, all that scooped in by a cast of the net! That would be a new Sedan, worth ten times as much as the old one! France

would be put out of business, and we should have a free hand for dealing with Russia. . . .”

He wound up: “Then, yes, then, it would be worth while to enter Paris!”

It was clear that William was savouring it already, that sensational march into Paris which haunted his dreams. He saw himself at the head of the Prussian Guard, the aureole of Napoleon shimmering about his brow! A splendid dream, certainly, but one which perhaps underestimated certain humble realities.

“Interesting, very interesting,” said von Kluck, quietly. “But . . .”

“There is always a ‘but’!”

“In the present case, there is this one. Paris is not, and never will be, a city like any other. Paris is the only city in the world the taking of which would be, in itself, a splendid achievement. Paris taken is Paris a hostage.”

William shrugged his shoulders. “Paris won’t fly away. We shall find it there when we want it.”

Von Kluck did not deign to argue the incomparable importance of the capture of the city, after a five weeks’ campaign directed to that end—the overwhelming demoralization it would cause in the nation, the effect on neutrals, causing many

of them to throw in their lot with Germany. Nor did he dwell on the cynical plan of bargaining, by which France was to be brought, by swift stages, to complete capitulation. No; that was all in the domain of politics, which he refused to enter. In the field of pure strategy he had an even stronger argument, and there was where he took his stand.

"There is one single case," he said, "in which a change of plan would perhaps have had to be considered; that is the case of the Governor of Paris having suddenly found himself in possession of heavy artillery, which, as a matter of fact, he completely lacks. In that case, certainly, the fortifications of Paris might seem a hard nut to crack as long as adverse pressure was exerted on the left flank of the besieger. In that case, the sane method, of course, would have been to reduce those forces to begin with. But, as matters stand, a downright forcing of a section of the enemy defence seems practicable and relatively easy; what folly, then, to go somewhere else to look for the solution which is obviously there!"

He came to the vicious point in the proposed strategy. "Let us push to the East! Very good! That is the same thing as cheerfully choosing the unfavourable position, and taking the



chance of being the enveloped instead of the enveloper! . . . What, leave on the right a formidable unknown quantity, the fortifications of Paris, a focus round which, by intelligent use of the railways, elements of a counter-offensive could be concentrated? The appointment of Gallieni was a threatening fact. What if he had time to get together, not merely one or two corps, but five corps, six, an army?"

Von Kluck pointed with his finger to the region of the Ourcq and the Marne. "If we should once get cornered in there!" A strange word for that Fate to hear, who was still balancing these matters in her hands!

William stood silent, sombre, his eyebrows arched.

"In a word, this whole plan—this plan of von Tirpitz, I believe?"

The emperor writhed.

"This whole plan appears to be based on the success of our left wing. If the left wing fails of its objective, the whole scheme falls to pieces. Well, who knows that Nancy will be taken so easily? What has von Baeseler been doing these four days? You know, sire, that the French have entered Lorraine?"

"Castelnau," said the Emperor.

"Castelnau? Yes."

"Are you afraid of him?"

"It is not I who have to fight him. It's a pity. He's one of the three men in the world I should think it worth while to meet in the field."

The Kaiser bit his lips: "In short, the—our proposal does not attract you?"

"Only moderately, sire, I must confess."

"I knew it! You have no use for anything that does not carry the trademark of the General Staff!"

"Who presides at the General Staff?"

"I do. And you are right; what do all the rest amount to without me?"

"We are simple soldiers, your Majesty."

"You above all! I drew you out of obscurity, and made your fortune!"

"My gratitude is exceeded only by my devotion to your Majesty!"

"Both are compatible, if I understand you, with a refusal to accede to my suggestions."

"My duty to the German Empire!"

"I am the German Empire!"

"You . . . and all of us, sire."

The emperor clenched his fist. "And what if I should order you to obey?"

"I should consider what remained for me to do."

"Very good, Excellency, I order it! I demand that my plan be carried out!"

The emperor was shaking, and his voice rose to a scream.

Von Kluck rose and assumed the military attitude. By the same movement, von Tanhausen, who had assisted in silence at the scene, rose also and took the same position.

"In that case," said von Kluck, "I have the honour, sire, to place my resignation and my sword"—he detached the scabbard—"in your Majesty's hands."

Profoundly impressed, Henry and Anne Marie gazed on this unexpected dénouement. The Kaiser's face, ordinarily inscrutable, reflected the violent emotions which were swaying him this way and that. His passion for domination was wont to drive him to extreme decisions. He certainly came within an ace of calling for the guard, making himself known, and consigning his rebellious Excellency to arrest and the guard-house. Von Kluck would have made no resistance. Never was a minister or a general nearer to downfall.

But the impulsive Hohenzollern's energy did

not last. He felt the weight of his responsibility before his nation and the world. How could he dismiss the great man sent him by destiny in the decisive hour of his nation's history? He was afraid of the future, of possible defeat; at the back of his mind was the dim consciousness that he himself was not a genius, after all.

His harsh voice was raised again: "Keep your sword. . . . Have your own way! I wash my hands of this campaign . . . conduct it to suit yourself!"

He settled his helmet on his head, threw over his shoulder the flap of his grey cape, and left the room without another word.

A moment later they heard the snort of his motor as it carried him away.

## CHAPTER VII

### ANNE MARIE'S IDEA

THE young girl dragged Henry a few steps into the corridor and questioned him feverishly. She did not understand German well enough to have taken in more than scraps of the conversation. Fritsch, who had not lost a syllable, quickly explained it to her. How singular was the chance which, once again, put him in possession of the most intimate designs of the enemy General Staff! But now, alas, he was deprived of means of communication with his friends, at the moment when perhaps a timely warning would have sufficed to avert the hideous catastrophe hanging over France.

Excitedly she pressed him with questions. What could they do? How could they prevent the resumption of communications between the General Staff and its confederates in Paris? With her woman's instinct, she saw that the worst danger lay there.

But Henry reassured her: he had no fear of

the resumption of those relations, since the breaking of them was his own work. He had used a method of childlike simplicity. In a last message to Paris, which he signed "von Kluck," he had expressed anxiety, given them to understand that there was danger of the detection of Post B. F. by the French, told them the police were on their trail. He informed them also that there was reason to fear the key to their cipher had fallen into enemy hands; it was possible therefore that, at any moment, the enemy might try to draw Post B. F. into a compromising conversation. Accordingly he instructed them to pay no attention to, and to refrain from answering, any communication that did not begin with the words: "*Deutschland über Alles.*"

"Since that time, Paris has kept still, like a good boy."

Anne Marie was enthusiastic. "The man that could think of that, can think of something now," she said. "You are to save the situation."

For all answer, Fritsch asked her permission to return to his post of observation.

Von Kluck had gone back to his work, his face cold and set. Von Tanhausen handed him one

by one the reports of the corps commanders. With minute care, they both followed on the map the results obtained. They could thus estimate at a glance the general advance since the day before: about twenty miles.

His Excellency took from a strong-box with a patent lock, a document which he perused with a smile of satisfaction.

"This Plan AZ foresaw everything! It even allowed for that incident at the Blaise! What a fool I should have been if I had acceded to our friend!"

The chief-of-staff went through a pantomime of assent.

The Kaiser, inadvertently perhaps, had left his plan behind. Von Kluck extended his arm to the papers lying loosely on the table and began to look through them again. "Von Tirpitz has been to our school," he said. "His form isn't half bad." He shoved the papers over to von Tanhausen. "See, he has worked out the man-œuvre, day by day."

Fritsch was beginning to be familiar with the methods in use by the high German commands. In true conformity to the Teuton temperament, their preparation was worked out to the most

minute details. In just this way, the great Moltke had sat at his desk and set going the whole campaign of '70 as well as that of '66, Sedan after Sadowa. Henry reflected that in these conditions the rôle of the commander-in-chief was reduced to rather small proportions—to the choice of commanders, nothing more. It was a highly intellectual conception, certainly, the simplicity necessary in a high-class machine. In the case of von Kluck's armies, the controlling mechanism was reduced to these two men, one of them no more important than the confidant in a play. The rest of that staff had none but parade duties; they were young men of good family, appointed by favouritism, pure and simple, to posts well behind the firing-line.

In the meantime, his Excellency had finished the day's routine. Von Tanhausen undertook the task of putting him in telephonic communication with the heads of the different formations. To each of them, von Kluck dictated a few words prepared in advance. Occasionally someone seemed to put in a timid suggestion, or a request  
• • for information, but in general it was clear that von Kluck's subordinates had not the habit of commenting on their instructions. Once or twice,



it took rather long to get a connection, and his Excellency grew impatient.

"The service is very poor tonight!"

Twice he consulted his watch with a vague air of preoccupation. At last he rose.

"My dear Tanhausen," he said, "I feel a little tired tonight."

"Isn't it tonight," ventured von Tanhausen, "that we must put von Schrapf in motion?"

"That's true," said von Kluck, yawning. He added, with an ironical smile, "since his Majesty permits us!"

Von Tanhausen touched the last button on the left, and spoke a word into the receiver. Presently he looked up: "Line busy," he said.

"Get the second line." Von Tanhausen obeyed, with the same result. Then von Kluck got up with an air of decision. "Let it go for tonight," he said. "We will give that order a night's rest. Serious affairs tomorrow."

"The first thing tomorrow?" persisted von Tanhausen.

"By all means! Go to bed, my dear fellow; we have both earned it."

In taking leave, von Tanhausen made a harmless request. Might he carry the copy of Plan

AZ to his room to read for an hour? Before the decisive action opened, he wished to refresh his acquaintance with that monument of sane strategic doctrine.

Von Kluck hesitated. Evidently he was loath to part even for an hour, even to his most intimate confidant, with that highly confidential document, of which only seven copies existed, confided to the army commanders.

He could not make up his mind to do it.

"Impossible, my friend. A question of principle, you understand. Besides, you need sleep yourself. We have to take care of ourselves at our age. And the worst is yet to come!"

Tanhausen did not insist; he knew his friend's will. He saluted and retired.

"Shall we go, Henry?" asked the young girl.

"Just a minute," our hero begged.

He was well inspired. As soon as his colleague had departed, his Excellency pressed an electric button. A man-servant appeared at a side-door.

"Well, Friedrich?"

"Your Excellency rang?"

"No answer yet?"

"None."

In his irritation, von Kluck shook a chair of delicate workmanship.

"What do you think about it?"

"I still have hopes. The answer was given till eleven o'clock to appear."

"It is now . . . ?"

"Hardly half-past ten."

"Suppose you go back and see?"

"Yes, Excellency."

Von Kluck threw himself into an easy chair. The violent swinging of his right leg told the degree of nervousness to which his state of uncertainty had brought him.

This time, Henry yielded to the urgency of the young girl. The same flash of understanding had illuminated them both.

"Lisbeth!"

"Yes, Lisbeth!"

They recalled the love-letter, with its appointment for a rendezvous. Perhaps from this coincidence a providential solution of their problem would arise. Fritsch immediately begged for further details, which the young girl, blushing a little, eagerly furnished.

Yes, von Kluck was crazy about the soubrette

—a regular old man's craze; he imagined that he could still be loved for himself, and Lisbeth's nineteen years had an unholy attraction for him. What a break-down of a life spent in puritanism—or hypocrisy! There had been a regular romantic courtship, very funny, as coming from the chief of a band of rough-riders; the little blue German flower! madrigals, sextettes in her honour! A graduated scale of presents, first, a bouquet, then a diamond ring; and prayers almost touching in their sentimental ingenuity. It was all done with absolute secrecy; not a soul in the château had any idea of the intrigue, except Friedrich, the valet, taciturn, speedy, and devoted. Of course, the girl's comings and goings had been remarked, and hence had arisen the legend of a conspiracy of some sort, of which von Lüchow had transmitted an echo.

“How had Lisbeth received these distinguished attentions?”

She had been horribly frightened the first-time she was sent for to go into that austere private office. What could she be accused of? But when she had found herself in the presence of that bald old man, with his smoked glasses, who addressed her with a thousand compliments in

French tempered by a strong German accent, and with the absurd airs of a despairing lover, her instinctive coquetry had asserted itself. Their interviews sometimes took place twice in the same day, during the absence of von Tanhausen. Lisbeth listened to von Kluck with a mocking deference, not repulsing him brusquely, but pretending not to take him seriously, and defending herself by a word or an abrupt gesture, when the suitor became too enterprising.

Bad psychologists, these Germans! Not for an instant had it occurred to the general that she might be laughing at him. He was blinded by self-confidence, by pride in his position, his fortune, his genius. Did the little French girl smile? That was a sign that the game was not displeasing to her.

Tonight, the climax had come. After the preliminary bombardment of commonplace compliments, chivalry, gallantry, had suddenly come the cynical suggestion of the note. And the request was accompanied, with a truly German touch, by a hardly veiled threat. The last words of the note were these: "To my queen, who must remember that she might be only my slave."

Anne Marie and Fritsch made their way back to the green room, where they expected to find Lisbeth and Cochefort. Nobody there! And yet it was time that they should put their heads together and make a common plan.

"We must wait for them."

They sat down, thoughtful, side by side. For a moment, their minds wandered in reverie, vague but united. The young man's arm rested on the back of Anne Marie's chair; his glance was fixed on her slender wrist, within his grasp. The nervous tension was a little too strong, that events had thrust upon them since their reunion. Facts seemed suddenly unimportant; he wished they might dwell for ever in the oasis offered them by fate at the entrance to the desert of the future. What did the morrow amount to, or the death on whose edge they were walking, since for that moment they were alive, since they were lifted, on strong wings, to the loftiest summits known in life!

"Anne Marie," Fritsch murmured; "will you ever, ever know how I have loved you?"

"Yes, Henry: because I look into my own heart."

"I had no news of you," he went on. "Your

father had sent me about my business. But there was never a minute when your face was not before me."

It was the first chance he had had to review with her those weeks of the campaign, to translate to her the hope born of love that he was always trying to overcome.

She was moved. "Ah, Henry," she said, "do you want to know why I was so determined to come here with my father? I had heard that your regiment was retreating in this direction. I wanted to be as near you as I possibly could, supporting you secretly by my vigilance, so that you might have an intuition that I was by you, crying: 'Go on, my hero!'"

"You were faithful, then?" murmured the young man.

"Faithful? Ask my father! Not a week went by that a match with somebody else was not proposed to me, but I rejected them without a hearing. If he was determined, I was too. I am a Serazereux as much as he is!"

They gazed with passion into each other's eyes, and the same wave of emotion carried them both. Their trembling lips met; in that kiss, pure and deep as a clear night sky, they tasted happiness

for a moment, with a presentiment of the joy that perhaps fate might yet have in store for them.

It was she who drew herself away, gravely.

"Henry, we have no right to let ourselves go."

"You will be my wife?" he demanded.

"From the moment my father consents."

"Let us go and find him!" cried Fritsch.

She stopped him. "If we had some good news to tell him . . ."

"Oh, dear!"

She straightened herself. "Besides, in these terrible times, what French man or woman would think only of himself!"

"It isn't our fault," protested Fritsch.

"The fate of France is at stake. You heard those men down there!"

Fritsch shuddered at the reminder, as he recalled the terrible scene, the tone of detachment with which the general had spoken of the fall of Paris, of the final capitulation, as of certainties, to happen tomorrow. It was certainly a critical moment in the history of France, and of the world. No, it was not the time for selfish preoccupations but for proud renunciation. Henry looked at the face of his beloved, so close to him, and it seemed far removed in time and space. He felt



that between him and that face lay all that stood between France and safety.

Anne Marie's thoughts had travelled along the same path. "If only," she said, slowly, "the Kaiser's plan, the one he brought with him, could have been adopted—and our General Staff informed of it . . ."

Fritsch had communicated to her his opinion; that the Kaiser's plan was a pretentious conception, bound to meet with bloody demonstrations of its fallacies, while the other, elaborated at leisure by the German General Staff, was logical, rigorous, and its success almost infallible.

"It came so near it," she went on.

"Yes, if von Kluck had weakened."

They pondered a moment on the queerness of human nature; that indomitable personage was quivering, that very evening, under the caprice of a child of the despised race!

A strange thought began to germinate in Anne Marie's mind. She gazed at Fritsch, in his audacious disguise of face and dress. She thought of his talent as a mimic, and of his great resource and presence of mind. It was a crazy idea, certainly, but in these unheard-of circumstances, was not sublime folly the best of sense?

Her perplexity passed without words to him; he opened his lips to ask whether anything occurred to her. Under her eyes, there was nothing he could not achieve!

But they both turned the next moment, for the chimney-piece was revolving behind them. Lisbeth appeared, her charming face smiling and rosy. She was looking back to someone who followed her—Cochefort!

“My little sergeant!” In a moment the two men had clasped hands.

“Didn’t I disappear as gracefully as a Hippodrome star?” cried Cochefort, with a laugh.

Henry tried anxiously to moderate his gaiety.

“Bah!” said the lively fellow. “There’s no law against making a fool of yourself to amuse a pretty girl like Mam’zelle Lisbeth who doesn’t cotton to highbrows.”

“Don’t go too far, Lisbeth,” said Anne Marie, gently. “You are my chaperon and I am yours.”

The soubrette laughed prettily. “His intentions are of the best,” she said.

“She’s a girl a fellow wouldn’t be ashamed to go to church with,” declared Cochefort.

Fritsch had still a preoccupied air. “Be

careful there aren't more Boches at your wedding than you care for," he said.

"Oh," cried Lisbeth, "there won't be any wedding as long as there's a Boche in the country!"

Anne Marie took her aside. "Lisbeth, have you answered the note?"

"Whose note?"

"The general's."

"That old bag of bones?"

"Yes."

"Never!"

"What if he is waiting?"

"Much good may it do him!"

"And what if he turns up by and by?"

"I have a strong bolt, thank heaven, and the key will be in the lock so he can't peep through."

"But what if he has the door broken in?"

"Oh, I will run to the window, scream, rouse the château . . ."

"What if he persists?"

"I am not afraid of that; he thinks too much of his reputation. It seems no one suspects him of being what he is, an old villain."

Anne Marie shook her head slowly; she had the air of calculating the chances for and against. What plan was she considering?

She turned to her companions. "What if Lisbeth *should* leave her door open at midnight?" she suggested.

Cochefort turned purple. "This is no place for me," he said.

Anne Marie calmed him down. "Don't you understand that I have an idea?"

Fritsch had raised his head. . . .

A council of war was held by these four young French people,—a council whose deliberations were weighty with no less than the destiny of France.

It was midnight. The château was quiet. An hour ago the cries of the banqueters had ceased. All lights were out save the lanterns of the guard on duty, and the camp-fires in the courtyard. Two shadows mount the great staircase. Who can these be who stroll by night, unchallenged by the sentries, and received with honours by the surprised guard in the vestibule? His Excellency General von Kluck, escorted by the faithful Friedrich, was taking a little stroll, his mind  
" reposing from the preoccupations of high strategy. What should he find upstairs—a closed door, or an open one? Open, if he could rely on the

implied meaning of the letter placed at the appointed spot.

Nothing existed for him but that . . .

They reached the third landing, and turned to the left by the pages' gallery, the dark-lantern throwing its light on the ancient tapestries.

They reached a little door, sunk in the wall. This was it. . . . Von Kluck subdued the beating of his heart. He knocked discreetly. Nothing answered but the silence. His fingers rested on the knob of the door in a moment of supreme hesitation. Then he turned it. The door was open.

As deeply moved as a boy on the threshold of his first love, his Excellency entered.



PART III  
von Kluck





## CHAPTER I

### A HOUSE-CLEANING

HIS Excellency rose very early the next morning. Beginning at five o'clock, Sergeant Mackaneff, the non-com. on duty, had heard him walking up and down in his office.

What incredible physical endurance the commander-in-chief had! He had sat up very late the night before. He had been seen leaving the office towards midnight, accompanied by his valet, probably going to the room of the chief-of-staff. He had not returned until two o'clock. Germany could safely hope to achieve her highest ambition; her fortunes were in good hands.

Seated at one end of the great table, von Kluck seemed to be absorbed in the perusal of a document. The document was not a new one for him, being the famous plan of operations worked out by the General Staff under his own supervision. But it could be easily understood that, on the

eve of decisive action, he was anxious to review, in its main lines, the audacious conception.

When he had finished his review of it, he re-read carefully the orders issued by him the day before and on preceding days, to the different army commanders, of which von Tanhausen had kept copies.

With minute care, he followed on the map the instructions for the offensive, and measured with a string the limiting points of the advance. It was clear that he was particularly intent this morning on mastering to the last detail the functioning of the tremendous machine of which he had the ultimate control.

Full two hours of hard work he devoted to the important task. And before he had breakfasted, which was quite contrary to the habit of his Excellency. His valet was not seen, as usual, entering the office at eight o'clock, bearing the slice of ham and the pâté de foie gras which constituted his favourite breakfast.

Presently the general drew another paper from his portfolio,—a shabby portfolio of worn leather, hardly worthy, in truth, of so distinguished a person.

What mental anguish it would have caused a

Frenchman, if he had seen that slightly yellowed paper in the hands of von Kluck! For it was nothing less than the key which enabled the possessor to decipher the despatches emanating from all the Allied General Staffs; a document so ultra-confidential that it was known only to commanders of armies, to the officer commanding the British forces, and to one or two functionaries of the Ministry of the Interior.

After he had studied this document at his leisure, von Kluck took from the same portfolio another paper, this one written in German. He placed both papers before him, and went to work, pen in hand, at the composition of a long despatch.

But he was interrupted; someone knocked at the door.

“Come in!”

Sergeant Mackaneff handed him a brief report. The signature of von Kräuse attracted the eye of the general, who read it at once.

Captain von Kräuse felt himself obliged to report the singular disappearance of his friend Captain von Lüchow. Von Lüchow had left his brother-officers at an early hour the night before, desirous of going to bed. No one had

seen him since, and the bed in the "green room" had not been disturbed.

Von Kluck shrugged his shoulders, and pencilled quickly on the back of the letter: "Left last night, by my orders."

"Here," he said, handing the paper to the sergeant. But he reconsidered.

"Wait." He wrote another note in these terms:

"To Colonel von Triptig: I require before nine o'clock a register of all the men at this post, officers, con-commissioned officers, and privates, with full names and service class."

He added aloud: "One thing more; I will see no one this morning, no one, you understand."

The sergeant saluted. His Excellency spoke again, emphasizing the words.

"Without any exception whatever. Even if it should be a question of my chief assistant . . ."

The sergeant appeared embarrassed. He murmured: "Except, I suppose, General von Tanhausen?"

"The order is for him especially."

The sergeant grew red: "But . . . if the general should ask admission?"

"Refuse him, and come and tell me."

Hardly had Mackanef left the room when the telephone rang. Von Kluck went to the receiver.

"Hello!"

"This is von Schrapf, commanding the army of Lille. We are awaiting your Excellency's orders."

"Wait!"

"Yesterday morning you warned us that their execution was imminent."

"I have changed my mind, as the result of fresh information."

"Is it possible?"

"The army of Antwerp is preparing for a terrible sortie."

"Von Klein's two corps are watching for it."

"They are not sufficient. I cannot allow that menace to my communications."

"I am to re-enter Belgium, then?"

"I will let you know later."

General von Schrapf did not seem enchanted by this decision. His disappointment made itself apparent.

"Your Excellency will recall that the Dunkirk-Calais objective seemed of the first importance."

"We will not discuss that, if you please," replied von Kluck, drily.

“At your Excellency’s orders!”

Von Kluck hung up the receiver. Shortly after, the sound of an altercation in the vestibule filled him with silent mirth. General von Tanhausen had come at his usual hour to the entrance of the apartment. He was crossing the antechamber when the sergeant of the guard addressed him.

“Pardon me, General; his Excellency’s orders are that he is to be alone this morning.”

Von Tanhausen, preoccupied, waved him aside with a mechanical gesture. The sergeant had to bar his way. “I beg your pardon, general, but my orders are absolute.”

A glance of anger shot from von Tanhausen’s little green eyes.

“They do not apply to me.”

“They apply to everyone.”

“Rubbish!”

“I ought to say even that you were expressly included.”

“Impudence!”

The general advanced, pushing the sergeant in front of him. True to his orders, Mackanef  
\* \* did not hesitate to seize his chief by the arm.

To lay hands on a lieutenant-general, chief-of-staff of an army! The punishment for such

sacrilege was not long in coming. With a smart blow of his swagger-stick, von Tanhausen drew a stripe across the face of the offender.

The sergeant staggered, but, terribly pale, he returned to his attitude of resistance.

“Superior orders, general,” he said.

At a sign from him, several troopers came and formed in a semicircle behind him, offering an impenetrable obstacle.

“You idiots!” cried von Tanhausen. “I tell you, you have made a mistake! This order does not apply to me. His Excellency and I are as one man! We can only work together. He will roast you alive, you triple fools!”

Impressed in spite of himself, Mackanef said: “I will go and report to his Excellency. I don’t see any other way out of it.”

He returned at the end of a minute, bearing a written order. “Order to imprison General von Tanhausen in his room, under rigorous arrest. He is to hold no communication with anyone whomsoever.”

When he heard this order read, the chief-of-staff felt his knees give way under him. What could be the motive of this disgrace? He thought he must be going mad. But he was too thoroughly

imbued with the spirit of discipline to think of rebelling against the authority of a superior. He allowed himself to be taken to his room, and locked in.

Von Kluck rubbed his hands. The arbitrary step he had just taken seemed to give him pleasure. Whistling softly, he went on with the preparation of the long message he had begun. He seemed to be following a singular method: with both the cipher-keys before him, he seemed to be using them alternately, first the German, then the French.

Finally his task was accomplished, and he turned his attention to the reports which flowed in upon him, as they did every morning, from the different staffs. After a summary perusal of these, he gave perhaps more serious study to his next task: first, the list of sixty-seven general officers, his immediate subordinates; then, the register which had been brought him of all the inhabitants of the château, with their names and ranks.

What was he doing? He seemed to be making out a list of his own, in which occurred the names of most of the young attachés who had feasted von Lüchow, the night before. Von Lübeck was on it, and so was von Kräuse.



At the bottom he wrote in his little, cramped handwriting: "They will leave at noon, will receive their route for Posen, and will there report to General von Hindenburg. The reason for this order is their disgraceful intoxication last night, in the bronze drawing-room, from eight o'clock until eleven."

Coolly he placed the paper in the hands of Mackanef, with the order to carry it with the utmost speed to Colonel von Triptig.

It can be imagined that consternation spread through the young officers' quarters, half an hour later, when they learned that they must abandon the prospect of the gaieties of Paris for a campaign of hand-to-hand fighting with Cossack hordes in the terrible lake-country. In vain their brilliant leader, Captain Count von Mohlenbach, second cousin of the emperor, begged the favour of an interview with his Excellency, in order that he might present his comrades' defence. Von Kluck's reply was categorical: They were to be out of the château by noon!

Thus the general, by a stroke of the pen, got rid of parts of the machine that impeded rather than helped. These gentlemen were naturally accompanied by their orderlies. The General

Staff was thus reduced to the strict minimum: four officers who relieved each other at the several guard-posts, and four others for special missions; fifty troopers, and enough artillerymen to man the anti-aircraft guns. That was literally all.

More completely than ever, the general, seated at the keyboard that united him with every element of his formidable machine, could call himself master of the hour. The more so, certainly, since the generalissimo, von Moltke, was detained at Trêves, too far away for effective interference; and since the Kaiser had failed in his arbitrary attempt to force his views. Von Kluck knew he had played for heavy stakes in that interview, but he had been sustained by his confidence in the correctness of his own plans. Without doubt, this confidence still sustained him, and yet—and yet . . . Perhaps the night had brought him another vision. Perhaps an obscure scruple was at work in him. Why was he studying again the document in which William and von Tirpitz had expressed their pretentious scheme? What was he looking for in it? From  
\* \* time to time he compared it with the map, measuring distances with his dividers. Had he found something he could use in the Grand Admiral's

plan—some idea that formed the basis of a series of notes he was writing to the several army commanders?

All this conduct was very strange! And Friedrich's continued absence was strange too; his familiar figure had been wont to haunt his master's neighbourhood, discreet but always at hand. Could the faithful man be ill? This hypothesis seemed proved, when, at about two o'clock, von Kluck requested von Triptig to send him an orderly for temporary use: Friedrich was confined to his bed.

Surgeon-Major von Gneisenau immediately offered to visit the sick man; and he asked at the same time at what hour his Excellency would deign to receive him, for the usual treatment of atropine drops. Von Kluck sent a short answer: he would let Major von Gneisenau know when he needed him; and in the meantime, let the major be careful not to compromise his shoulder-straps in disgraceful scenes like that of last night—it might cost him dear.

The major gave himself up for lost. The wind of panic breathed through the château.

His Excellency lunched with good appetite; but he left almost untasted the large bottle of

bad Hanover wine which had been his favourite beverage from his youth up. To the stupefaction of the butler, he asked, instead, for two bottles bearing the good French lable "Moulin à Vent," and did them honour.

He was served by von Triptig's own orderly, delegated for the purpose. As soon as the table was cleared, the man was dismissed.

Von Kluck seemed to be in perplexity. He walked thoughtfully up and down the room. From time to time, he turned to the great portrait above the fireplace, representing Anne Marie de Serazereux, 1643-1672. What inspiration could he draw from the eyes of that Frenchwoman to whom his mere presence was an insult?

He returned to the telephone: "W. K. M.—131."

That was the call number of Post B. F.

"Hoch!"

"Hoch! No news, Ranke?"

"Nothing yet, your Excellency; still no sign of a bird."

"Sapperment!" growled von Kluck, "I'm going to make a last effort. Take your pen, and I will dictate one more message."

"I am ready, your Excellency." At first the transmitter's task was easy, as usual; but soon von

Kluck gave up using German letters and numerals and began to dictate French characters. He had his motives, without doubt, which Lieutenant von Ranke was not so indiscreet as to inquire into.

For a good half hour the dictation went on; certainly, this was a very exceptional message.

Von Kluck caused von Ranke to read it over to him, carefully. When he was satisfied, he gave a further instruction: "Kindly insert, at the head of the message, the words, *Deutschland über Alles*, and underscore them twice."

"It is done, general."

"Good; send a quick bird. We shall see whether this one gets there."

As von Kluck hung up the receiver, he breathed a deep sigh, and made his way towards the side-door that led to the bedroom of the trusty Friedrich.

But did Friedrich answer to that name on this particular morning?

## CHAPTER II

### INSPECTOR BASTON

IN his conversations with Fritsch, Major Trubert had referred to a certain Inspector Baston, of the Department of General Safety. This man had entered the police at an early age, with an excellent education, both scientific and legal. For three years he had been assigned to the work of surveillance of foreigners, and in this capacity had been led, by the force of circumstances, to interest himself in the counter-spy service. In this connection, he had come into touch with the Third Division of the Ministry of War. It cannot be said that he gained much from this association. The red-tape and self-sufficiency of the military temperament had on more than one occasion shocked his realistic mind.

There was just one exception,—Major Trubert, whose great professional ability had made a conquest of him at once. They had begun to work together at what they believed would be

a good job; but it remained a beginning only, for at the end of four months, as we know, Trubert was relieved.

Baston's good qualities were absolutely unknown. He had occasionally been charged with special missions to Germany, since he had an admirable knowledge of the German language. And each time he had had the pleasure of seeing his chiefs, often incapables, take the credit and profit arising from his success. So he remained a humble inspector, with a salary of twelve hundred dollars a year.

After Trubert left him he had his hours of anguish. During the last three days, he had watched the precipitate flight—under orders, it is true—of the majority of his colleagues from the capital. He stood by and superintended the packing of the papers of the department, and their bestowal in locked vans. But he could not make up his mind to join the exodus to Bordeaux. In vain his chiefs and his comrades tried to persuade him to go with them, arguing that the new theatre of action just opening would be an admirable field for his talents.

His unvarying answer was that his business lay in Paris, as long as Paris was left standing.

Nowhere could duties more deeply interesting have developed for him. Exchanging with Trubert the fruit of his observations and intuitions he was one of the few Frenchmen who got wind of the Macchiavellian scheme known as Plan AZ.

His suspicions were hardly taken seriously by his superiors; but during the past week, how many things had happened in which he detected the finger of German "provocative agents"! In the first place, a series of false news items, passed from hand to hand and winning credence—now a report of the capitulation of the English army at Compiègne; now greatly exaggerated figures of French losses in killed, wounded, and prisoners; now the announcement of a separate peace between Russia and Austria; now an intention attributed to the government of declaring Paris an unfortified town; now one attributed to the General Staff to fall back and await the enemy at the Loire—all rumours tending to affect the morale of the Parisians, hitherto magnificent.

The sinister secret organization did not restrict itself to words. Chance brought to light every day some of their other activities. A gang of labourers, wearing the city uniform, went tranquilly to work, in plain daylight, at repairing the



pavement in the quarter of the Opera; it turned out that they were actually engaged in mining the district, the richest quarter of Paris. The investigations made recently along the whole circumference of the fortifications had resulted in a number of startling discoveries: here, an innocent tennis-court proved to be a concrete base, ready to receive a heavy gun; there, guns were actually in place, ready to fire the moment the cardboard walls were removed that hid them from the eye.

Baston had a strong suspicion of the existence of a system of underground communication, carried twenty-five miles beyond the fortifications, to permit of free circulation between the enemy within the walls, and the enemy about to appear just beyond the range of the cannon of the forts.

It seemed as though the least frequented part of the catacombs would be the likeliest spot for this tunnel to begin. Repeated sounding of the walls gave no results, it is true; but a reconnoitring party of ten men commanded by a sergeant was sent to explore, and they never came back.

Other facts were still more serious. The Bordeaux express was derailed the very day of

the President's departure; thanks to a suggestion from Baston, the presidential party had taken an indirect route. And there was the scandal, fortunately suppressed, of Fort C. At this fortress a supply of shells of all calibres had been accumulated for years in magazines guarded by a trusted personnel. An impromptu inspection, undertaken on one of these days by the military governor, resulted in a horrible revelation. Apparently the ammunition was all in place, under carefully labelled covers. But when the tarpaulins were withdrawn and the general took a shell in his hand, behold, it was of papier-maché, instead of the good steel that had come from the factory. The whole store was counterfeit.

The worst of it was, there was no escape from the impression that the thing was managed by persons very high up indeed, so high that they escaped detection, and even suspicion. However adroitly and diligently the investigations were conducted, they always ended in the arrest of subordinates—poor wretches who, faithful to orders given them from above, always asserted entire responsibility for their acts. A certain number of these were shot; others were kept in secret confinement. But these methods were in

vain as long as they did not lead to the detection of the principals.

Baston and Major Trubert had more than once compared notes on this subject. No doubt, to arrest the principals, one need go no farther than the offices where the measures of national defence were being elaborated. Nothing was more likely than that certain dubious persons, of German birth and recent naturalization, by the abuse of official complaisance, and by virtue of unreliable recommendations, had turned their energies to this career and risen to posts of eminence. And then there were the cases, certainly numerous, of falsification of papers and substitutions of one person for another. It is so easy, for example, to cause a colonial functionary to disappear as he disembarks from his steamer.

One thing was certain: not a decision was taken, whether in the cabinet council or in the sanctum of the commander-in-chief, that was not known to the enemy General Staff. It was with this handicap that the game opened of which the stake was Paris, and with Paris, the soul of France!

There was no use blinking the fact that these conditions might precipitate the fall of the city,

just as, in the months that followed, similar conditions handicapped the defence of the heroic legions of Antwerp.

One morning Baston was pondering these things with peculiar bitterness. From professional knowledge, he had a sickening consciousness of the very slight defensive value of the forts, and news had just come to him that a detachment of Uhlans were signalled at Villiers-le-Bel, twelve miles from Paris.

When the office-boy brought him the card of a visitor, his first impulse was to say: "I can't see anybody; I am out." He was, in fact, on the point of going out, to present himself in the Rue St. Dominique.

But the name on the card attracted his attention:

YVES DURAND  
Chief of Division  
Ministry of Agriculture

Baston knew by reputation this high official, a man of acknowledged competence in the matter of financial and scientific agriculture. He had recently been made Commander of the Le-

gion of Honour, in recognition of a lifetime of devotion to the public welfare.

"Show him in," said the inspector.

M. Yves Durand was about fifty years old; he was of medium height, rather stout, with regular and pleasant features and a thick blond beard, sprinkled with grey. He was near-sighted and his blue eyes behind his powerful spectacles gave him that appearance of mild revery which belongs to the typical philanthropist.

Baston received him cordially and begged him to be seated. "It is an honour to make your acquaintance, M. Durand, and to congratulate, in your person, one of the few official personages left in Paris."

Durand bowed civilly and made his acknowledgments.

"Doubtless you thought as I did," resumed Baston.

"That this is the time when we can be most useful," rejoined Durand.

"Our task is not finished."

"On the contrary, it is just beginning."

The visitor glanced discreetly round the room; evidently he wanted to be sure they were not overheard.

"Make your mind easy," said Baston. "The walls are thick."

"One has to be careful."

"More than ever!"

"Our business has become one of the super-hazardous ones," murmured the Chief of Division.

Baston was a little puzzled, and he finally put the question that had been hovering on his lips.

"May I ask, my dear sir, to what I owe the happiness of this visit?"

"I have a message, this instant received."

"From whom?"

"You know better than I!"

"Really?"

"It came by the usual route, re-established at last."

"Good," said Baston, who didn't understand a word of this. "And does this message concern me?"

"It gave me my first information that you were still in town and I am delivering it to you, as I am ordered to do."

With many precautions, M. Durand drew out his letter-case, opened it, and extracted a folded

paper which he handed to his host. In a tone which expressed a certain deference, he added: "You have the new key, have you not?"

As soon as Baston had cast his eye over the document, he declared: "Yes, I see that this is meant for me. Wait!"

His surprise was beyond words. Here was a long document, evidently entirely expressed in the cipher of which not three persons in France, outside the General Staff, had the secret. He himself had it only through the entire confidence of Major Trubert. It was an absurd assemblage of letters, numbers, and punctuation marks, to which only a special order could give sense, and this order was changed daily.

Baston did some rapid thinking. "I shall have to ask for a little time."

"I am at your orders." The phrase was odd, in its humility, coming from a man in high place. It caught Baston's quick ear, and he was suddenly certain that it was spoken with the faintest possible German accent.

It took him nearly a quarter of an hour to adapt his master-key to the present case. At last he had it. He applied it to the document, and immediately the essential symbols sprang into relief.

At the first words he read, his heart began to beat rapidly. He glanced from the document with the eye of stupefaction at the functionary, who sat benevolently waiting. This is what he read:

“Sir, I have not the honour of your acquaintance; but Major Trubert, before his glorious death, honoured me with his confidence by giving me the cipher I am using, and gave me your name as the only man in Paris who can save the situation.

“Of the individual who will bring you this message, I know nothing; not even his name or his station in life. What I do know is that he is one of the organizers of the secret affair you have been investigating for some time. He himself is entirely ignorant of the contents of this document, which I am sending him by pigeon.

“I cannot now enter into the tale of fantastic adventure that has brought me actually into von Kluck’s headquarters. Put your mind simply on the fact that I am in a position—as this letter proves—to communicate with the plotters who are his confederates in Paris.

“Begin, I beg you, by destroying that deadly wasps’ nest.”



Two pages of information and suggestions followed; and the whole was signed:

HENRY FRITSCH,  
*Sergeant of the 387th Regiment of Infantry.*

Serious, discreet, mechanically brushing his top-hat, M. Yves Durand was waiting.

Baston looked at him. Was this a trap? Was the man really ignorant of the contents of the letter? This story of a French non-commissioned officer intimately familiar with the deliberations of the enemy was certainly fishy. On the other hand, the facts he was able to state in relation to Trubert were something to think about. The 387th! That certainly was the regiment Trubert had been assigned to, a week before, at his own request.

As he studied the face and bearing of his visitor, Baston began to think he saw in it the mixture of ingenuousness and brutality that he believed to be the characteristic German expression. Could it be that he actually had before him one of those who held the clew to the net enveloping Paris?

He was the last man one would have suspected,

no doubt, this high functionary, whose laborious life had seemed to be devoted to philanthropic work for rural prosperity.

The last part of the mysterious letter specified the part he was to play; what did he risk in following it? Why should he not assume, for the benefit of this band of fanatics, the rôle which Fritsch assigned to him, the rôle of a delegate of the German General Staff?

Abruptly he made up his mind; he would have a try at it anyhow!

Raising his head, he said: "I was waiting for you; I had my orders." Then suddenly, in a tone of severity, he added: "I cannot congratulate you on your success; on the contrary, I have to report to you a reprimand from his Excellency. It seems that for two days we have not had a word at General Headquarters."

Astonishment was painted on the face of the Chief of Division. "Why, it was by his Excellency's order that we stopped sending. We have been receiving all the time a succession of messages emanating from a suspicious source, against which we had been warned. . . ."

Baston threw back his head and looked mysterious: "Unfortunate things have happened; there

may be treachery somewhere. I am ordered to investigate the responsibility."

The visitor bowed in deferential acquiescence. It dawned upon Baston that the culminating moment of his life as a detective was at hand.

"Show me the way," he said.

"At your orders, sir."

Baston rose and took his hat and stick.

In a low voice and in German, Durand began a phrase. Baston interrupted him. "Speak French; we have taken chances enough already."

He touched the bell and a plain-clothes man appeared.

"Send Nimrod and Timoleon, at once."

He explained to Durand: "They are two trusty men; I may need them!"

## CHAPTER III

### A GOOD HAUL

IN the motor which conveyed them, Baston was taciturn, thinking of the tremendous stake for which he was playing. Was he walking into an ambush? On the other hand, could fortune have favoured him to the point of bringing into his hand, at the decisive hour, the key to the terrible enigma that held the destiny of his country?

If anything could give the inspector ground for confidence, it was the presence on the front seat of two good friends: Nimrod, a detective, of Herculean strength, and his boon companion, Timoleon the chauffeur, another child of Paris.

The motor stopped in the Rue de Grenelle, at the door of the Ministry. The two occupants descended briskly. Baston signed to Nimrod to accompany him; Timo stayed behind to take care of the motor.

"Where shall I take you?" asked Durand.

"Everywhere," answered Baston.

They went up one flight, and the official pointed the way to his private office. The doorkeeper saluted. "This is Ledrain, a good man. He will not admit anyone but the initiated."

Baston assumed a distant and even supercilious manner, and spoke not a word.

"Shall we go up?" asked Durand.

Baston bowed assent. The Chief of Division turned to the doorkeeper.

"If anyone asks for me, say that I am in the Collections Office."

A private staircase brought them to the third floor. Nimrod followed at their heels. At the top of the staircase, the Chief of Division repeated his question: "Where do you wish to begin?"

"I have come to see everything; the order is indifferent to me," said Baston drily.

From the outset the inspector was taken aback. He had noted a great deal that was said the year before in the papers about the works undertaken at the Ministry of Agriculture, including the construction, in the attics, of galleries to contain various collections. Here were the galleries, certainly, partly empty, to be sure, since the

most important part of their contents had been transferred to Bordeaux several days before. In any case, their construction had been merely a pretext for the audacious centralization of all the secret services of the Boches in the heart of the French capital, in an official public building!

The sinister insult made Baston angry to the depths. With impunity, gangs of German workmen had been able, under Durand's high authority, to dispose of the spacious upper story of the building in accordance with orders from Berlin!

Durand was proud of his work. He insisted on exhibiting it to the last detail, for the admiration of von Kluck's agent. The first object of interest was the model dove-cote.

Baston remembered to have read a flattering description of it in the *Courrier des Colombophiles*. What a revelation this was! At last he understood that part of the message. . . .

"When do you send them out? The birds?"

"It varies. The average interval, from the beginning, has been six hours, but for the last twenty-four hours, the despatches have been suspended."

"For what reason?"

Durand repeated the information, received the

day before, of the danger of a surprise by the enemy. Several messages received since had been rejected as suspicious. That morning, for the first time, normal relations had been resumed.

“A long document, the first to begin with the words agreed upon, arrived, and contained the order that I was to find you at once.”

“I thought you were a good while about it,” said Baston.

The other pointed out the wireless apparatus; its antenna had been ingeniously made to borrow the form and dimensions of a lightning-rod.

Baston thought a word of warning would be suitable. “Be careful with that. The French have beaten us at that little game, with their microphones!”

“Certainly,” said Durand, submissively. “We only use it now as a receiving-station. We duplicate the Eiffel Tower.”

Thoughtfully, Baston murmured to himself: “How many mistakes we have made!”

“Don’t you think,” asked Durand timidly, “that we have done pretty well, all things considered?”

“Where are we with Plan AZ?” This shot told.

“I beg your pardon,” said Durand; “the delay

is not our fault, . . . not entirely . . . we were waiting."

"You have brought on an investigation."

"Our orders!"

"You have failed to carry them out."

"On what occasion?"

"When you let the President's train slip through your fingers."

Durand hung his head. "I admit it. That was an error of execution."

"Who was responsible?"

"Nicheling."

"I wish to see him."

"Difficult at this hour."

"No difficulty must stand in the way of my orders." Baston made an energetic gesture. "Moreover, drop everything else and send for all the members of the Central Committee to meet me here, at four o'clock."

"All the twenty-four?"

"All the twenty-four, without exception."

Durand threw back his head. "There is one, at least, who cannot get here in time."

"Who is that?"

"Kleinschroth."

"And why not?"



"Why, you know, he's aide-de-camp . . ."

"To the same party, still?"

"Why, of course."

Baston did not turn a hair. "Very well," he said. "Count out Kleinschroth. But I want to meet all his colleagues. Telephone them."

Durand bowed. "Of course; I will give the necessary orders at once. While you are waiting, would you care to examine the map?"

"What map?"

"Of the fortifications."

"Ah, *our* map!"

"Certainly."

"Up to date?"

"Accurately."

"That's important. Show me the map."

It was not without emotion that Baston bent over the confidential map, prepared with admirable minuteness and precision. Different colours indicated the greater or less capacity for defence of every sector of the entire line of fortifications. Letters and numbers, classified in the margin, enabled the student to locate at a glance the positions established here and there by the German secret service. With a thoroughness and system truly Germanic, there was noted on the map, the

composition of the batteries destined to nullify the French guns, the position of platforms to which the formidable Skoda mortars could be brought by rail, mines and saps to be used to introduce the enemy within the French works, cross-sections and points of entry of the tunnels which connected all parts of the periphery, and the location of secret magazines of ammunition.

"How many copies have you," asked Baston, coolly.

"Only two."

"I will take this one."

"But, my dear sir . . ."

Without further ado, Baston folded up the map and put it in an inside pocket. His next demand was for the complete list of the conspirators, of all degrees. And as each name was spoken, he demanded details. With what growing curiosity he realized that the list contained a goodly number of government officials and of business men, all of more than good reputation! Carelessly, he starred those names that were mentioned as belonging to the Central Committee, those who were to assemble presently at his call.

His plan of procedure began to take shape in his mind. How glad he would have been for

two minutes alone with the faithful Nimrod, whose heavy step he could hear as he did sentry duty in the corridor outside!

Herr Durand and the inspector were eating a lunch that was brought to them from a neighbouring restaurant, when an event occurred which pretty nearly spoiled everything. The office door opened, and a visitor came in. Mechanically, Baston glanced at him. Immediately a shadow passed over the faces of both men.

"Vanderwinck!" murmured the newcomer

"Sockenfeld," said Baston.

Once before, these two persons had found themselves face to face. It was at the Kiel regatta. France was represented there. At the official banquet which ended the celebration, toasts had been exchanged with particular cordiality. They had drunk to the marine, to fraternity in sports, to universal harmony. To what had they not drunk?

But the public feast had been followed by a private dinner, at which the convives were simply the German Committee on Organization, with the Austrian representatives. It is a detail worthy of note that certain emissaries from Turkey and Bulgaria were also present.

At this dinner, heavy Teutonic wit disported itself freely. A great deal of mud was slung at hated England and wretched France, whose delegates, taking as honest money the formulas of ironic courtesy, had gone home to report to all who would listen, the good intentions of Germany.

Good wine aiding, the feast wound up with a good deal of imprudent talk, reaching even to revelations of a rather serious military order. Sockenfeld, charged with the duty of seeing that none of this expansiveness got out, was notified, towards the end of the dinner, that a spy had made his way in. An anonymous informer directed his suspicions to the person of an "extra" waiter, calling himself a Hollander, whom the management had been obliged to employ at the last moment. Orders had been given for the immediate arrest of this man, who gave his name as Vanderwinck. But, at the critical moment, the man, warned by instinct or by some unknown accomplice, had disappeared.

This Vanderwinck was the man Sockenfeld now recognized before him, just as Baston had at once known the German detective.

It was a dangerous pass for the inspector, alone here in the stronghold of his enemies. He

mastered himself, smiled, held out his hand to the newcomer, and said, in good German: "How goes it, Sockenfeld? I have owed you an apology for a long time. It was hardly fair to leave you without reassuring you."

"What do you mean?"

"Why, the little affair at Kiel."

"Well?"

"That information you received denouncing me. . . . You guessed that I sent it myself."

"You?"

"I debated a moment whether I should take you into my confidence, but I had my reasons for not doing so. It was better to let you play your part in innocence. Our French friends were impressed by the report I was able to make, and by the risks I had run, and certain suspicions they had conceived melted away. I owe my promotion to that achievement. It was noticed in high quarters, and from that day I was selected for delicate missions and became the pet of the General Staff. How much I have to tell you! But there's not time just now—I must explain the rôle I am playing at the moment. I was summoned back from abroad, and dined with his Excellency night before last at his headquarters at Serazereux,

Do you know the office I hold under the French war ministry? I give you a hundred guesses! I am the Paris head of the anti-spy secret service! My dear colleague, you will have the pleasure of working with me."

His tone was so natural, his joviality so little assumed, that Sockenfeld seemed thrown off the scent. Of course he was aware that among the secret agents, maintained at great expense by the government of the Republic, there figured a number of functionaries who were also in the pay of the corresponding German service. And this method of evading foreign suspicion was in the true Teutonic note.

After a moment of jocularly, Baston resumed his air of severity. Sockenfeld in his turn was put through a rigorous examination. The inspector took notes; he would suspend judgment, he said, as to the trustworthiness of some of Sockenfeld's information.

In the meantime, Durand came to report that all the conspirators had been notified, and would be present, punctually and without fail, at the hour fixed.

Baston nodded approval. He was inwardly engaged in finding means to give the alarm out-

side; for what was the good of the risk he was taking, if he could not obtain assistance? But he realized that the difficulty of getting a minute by himself was becoming great. Since the arrival of Sockenfeld, he had the obscure impression that he was being carefully watched. Would his companions let him go away alone? He doubted it; and to attempt it would mean exposing himself to very serious consequences if they opposed it.

He considered the possibility of telephoning to Police Headquarters, which had been his original intention. But Sockenfeld and Durand would listen to what he said, and at this hour there would not be a man in the office capable of understanding a hint. His situation was a paradox; his attitude towards his companions was that of a superior, and yet at bottom he felt he was a hostage in their hands.

From time to time, he touched the butt of the revolver in his pocket. The regular tread of Nimrod, outside, was his only comfort.

The time was getting short. Baston formed an abrupt decision. Going to the door, he called the detective.

“Here, Nimrod; I have an errand for you.”

Sockenfeld was in action at once. "Don't trouble that excellent fellow," he said. "Here is Ledrain, entirely at your service."

"Thanks, but it is only to get me some cigars, and Nimrod knows my tastes."

"I beg you . . ." With a wave of the hand, Durand called the doorkeeper. Nimrod approached also. Baston shrugged his shoulders.

"As you like," he said, "it makes no difference. The essential thing is that I get some Las-Palmas, with the red band."

"How many?" asked the doorkeeper.

"Two, please; here are three francs." Baston felt in his pocket and handed the coins to Ledrain, who exhibited a clumsy zeal.

Baston turned to Nimrod. "You may go," he said. "I shall not need you until *four o'clock*." He added, quietly, "You will bring me a fountain pen, please, a Bergamo; mine is not working."

Nimrod and Ledrain turned on their heels at the same second. An expression of satisfaction appeared on Sockenfeld's face; the only possible accomplice was removed.

As for Baston, he confided the rest to destiny and his own presence of mind. His ground for hope was Nimrod's professional instinct, for



which the phrase he had used, in terms agreed upon, would be no dead letter.

Luckily for the inspector, the suspicions of the Germans were now on the wane. Durand was called to the telephone, and came back with a radiant face. The bombardment of the northern forts was to begin that very night.

"For Sedan Day! Hooray!" cried Baston, lighting up his own countenance.

"Von Kluck would have entered Paris today but for those cursed Belgians."

"Only one little week behindhand."

"In a fortnight we shall have a free hand for Russia!"

"And in two months, there will be nothing left but to do up England."

"God punish England," said Baston, rubbing his hands.

At this sign that the envoy was getting human, the situation became less tense. Sockenfeld began to smile at his original suspicions, and the three men fell into familiar and confidential conversation.

Durand admitted his dearest wish: to rejoin his wife and daughters at Breslau—for twenty years he had not seen them except during his

vacations. Baston confessed that his heart's desire was to enjoy a rest he had certainly earned, in a château of the Ardennes that he had had his eye on for a long time. Sockenfeld spoke of the position of inspector that was promised him when the German Government should reorganize the Moroccan railways.

A quarter to four! One by one, various persons, coming up discreetly by the little staircase, gained the third floor of the Ministry.

If a journalist had been present, he would have been stupefied as he penetrated their incognito. He would have asked himself for what possible purpose this group of Parisian celebrities could be gathered in that place, at that hour: two bankers from the Opera district, a famous dramatist, two flour-kings, and a bishop-in-partibus, an habitué of the Archiepiscopal palace.

Herr Durand had consulted Baston; did he wish to interrogate any of the colleagues in private?

There was nothing to be gained by this, and Baston declined with a gesture. He announced that he wished, as soon as possible, to make an important announcement to the whole Committee.

At four o'clock precisely, he appeared on the platform of the meeting-hall. With a single

movement, the company rose and assumed the military position; and in this sudden stiffening of pose one saw the visible sign of the Prussian education they had all enjoyed.

Von Kluck's special agent stood before the green table, with Herr Durand on one side and Sockenfeld on the other.

With a deferential word, Durand introduced him.

Baston acknowledged his courtesy with a bend of the head. Then he stooped and fumbled in his waistcoat pocket. What was he looking for? Perhaps for the text of a proclamation which he would read in the name of his august principal.

What he drew out was a metallic object. A whistle! He put it to his lips and blew shrilly.

Herr Durand looked at him in horror. At the same instant, the four doors of the room were filled with the forms of policemen and plain-clothes men. In a voice of thunder, Nimrod was heard crying: "You are all my prisoners! Put up your hands!"

The meeting was shaken by panic. Those who were nearest the doors tried to force their way out, but energetic opposition quickly drove them back upon their accomplices. Some drew

their revolvers. Among these was Sockenfeld, who covertly took aim at Baston, but Baston was an adept at jiu-jitsu, and in less time than it takes to tell, Sockenfeld and Herr Durand were both doubled up and thrown on the floor, screaming for mercy.

Ten minutes later, a procession of taxicabs conveyed to the prison of Cherche-Midi the most astonishing collection of high-class criminals that a menaced capital ever saw within its walls.

And a motor-car at top speed carried Inspector Baston to the Governor of Paris, with whom he had secured an interview by telephone.

## CHAPTER IV

### THE WAR COUNCIL

THE announcement of a visit from the War Council had fallen upon Serazereux like a thunderbolt. This was far more serious than a visit from the Kaiser, alone and incognito, at midnight.

What course had William determined on? Doubtless to refer to the supreme authority the haughty refusal of his lieutenant. In that case, it seemed clear, not only that he was obstinately bent on carrying through his plan, but that he had, by intelligent manœuvring, secured it a fair chance of success. No doubt his ascendancy was unlimited over von Moltke, promoted to be commander-in-chief on the strength of his name alone. He held in the hollow of his hand also the Crown Prince of Bavaria, his fanatical admirer, and the incompetent Crown Prince of Würtemberg on whom his personal influence alone had availed to bestow the rank of army-commander.

The rest, all risen from the ranks except von Bülow, were officers of the sturdy Prussian tradition, conscientious and hard-working. It was from this source only that the Kaiser had any opposition to dread; and he flattered himself that the pressure exerted on these generals by his personal magnetism on the occasion of recent visits to their headquarters would range them on his side.

But finally, there was that living enigma, his son, the Crown Prince Frederick William, the fantastic heir to the throne, whose impulses no one could foretell a quarter of an hour in advance; a poor creature, whose complete moral degeneracy was better known to his father than to anyone else, and who had been perched at the top of the military hierarchy solely for the sake of gratifying the "*Junkerthum*" of whom he was the plaything rather than the idol.

It was Sedan Day; in this circumstance he saw the finger of fate, pointing to success.

Unexpected as it was, the news of the War Council had not greatly surprised von Kluck. He had been inclined to think that the Emperor would try to have his revenge. He was pale, and stood in the slightly crouching attitude of a

beast ready to spring, which was so familiar to those about him. His brow wore a frown that never relaxed, and his glance, behind his black spectacles, baffled observation.

He confided to von Triptig that this meeting happened very opportunely. If it had not been announced, he would have tried himself to bring it about, but with a different object in view.

“What object?”

“A high court-martial.”

“To try whom?”

“You know whom!”

As soon as the Kaiser arrived, von Kluck had caused to be delivered to him the report he had prepared, indicting his chief-of-staff, General von Tanhausen.

The Emperor was stupefied as he glanced through the document. Negligence so grave, so serious a dereliction of duty, on the part of a general officer, and one who had been notorious up to that time for the rigour of his character! To try an officer of his rank, it certainly needed nothing short of the War Council, sitting under the presidency of the sovereign.

It is true that William did not like von Tanhausen; but how glad he should be if he could

uphold him against that man, more detested than ever, whose great shadow lay between him and glory!

Eight personages had already assembled around the table. The Kaiser, on entering the room, had abstained from offering his hand to von Kluck, although von Kluck was his host. He had been content to raise his hand to his steel helmet, a cold military gesture corresponding to the impeccable salute of his Excellency. Now, playing nervously with a platinum paper-knife, he wore the expression of a man who has formed a decision, equally hard upon himself and upon others.

Generalissimo von Moltke had seated himself on the Emperor's right, a thin and ascetic figure, bearing a striking resemblance to his great uncle, relationship with whom was his chief merit.

At the Emperor's left was an empty chair.

Opposite him, in the middle seat on the other side of the table, sat von Kluck, an honour due him because of his prestige; moreover, it was his proper place as master of the house, receiving his colleagues at his headquarters.

His colleagues inquired anxiously about the state of his eyes. In his slow voice, with a slight



sing-song, he replied that they were better—really there was no further trouble, he kept to his spectacles only by way of precaution.

He sat between von Bülow, blond, corpulent, with a hard, intelligent face, and von Einem, the scientific man of the group, a mathematician, with a beak like an eagle and a tired eye.

Relegated to the ends of the table were the two hereditary princes of Bavaria and Württemberg, and old General von Hoeseler, commander of the forces at Metz.

Who was there yet to come?

Why, no less a person than the crown prince.

Twice already the Kaiser, frowning, had addressed himself to the officer on duty, standing rigid and respectful at the door:

“Has his Highness been informed of the meeting?”

“He has, sire.”

“Kindly go again and tell him he is the only one absent.”

Nervousness was plainly visible on the Emperor's puffy features.

Finally Frederick William appeared. He wore his favourite uniform, of colonel of the death-regiment; two frogs were ripped, and his tunic was

unbuttoned at the bottom. With a cigar in his mouth, a monocle in his eye, his moustache still damp from the glass of champagne he had tossed off on the way, he went to his place with a dragging step, and without a word of excuse.

Without wasting time in superfluous comment, the Kaiser extended his atrophied arm over the table and spoke.

"Gentlemen, you have, without doubt, divined the object of this meeting. We are reaching the culminating point of our western campaign. It is far from my thought to blame anyone for the measures adopted thus far by you all, gentlemen. Moreover, success has crowned our joint efforts. Nevertheless, it has seemed to me useful, on the eve of the decisive action, to hold a final conference. I hope that each one of you, with perfect candour, will express his opinion of the situation."

Nobody spoke.

"General," he went on, turning to von Kluck, and speaking with perhaps a little irony in his voice, "your armies are playing a glorious part. You should speak first."

"Sire," replied his Excellency, "you will probably agree that since I am in possession of information which has just reached me, I am justified

in asking the favour of speaking after these gentlemen."

Von Moltke interrupted: "My dear von Kluck, I beg of you . . ."

"I have nothing to announce at present save this, that the armies confided to me, in spite of accumulated fatigue and constant fighting, continue to show themselves worthy of the reputation of the German army, and of the duty assigned to them."

This simple statement in terms intentionally vague had the effect of making the Emperor knit his brows; it seemed to him that his opponent was taking to cover, the old fox meant to put on airs of superiority.

"Take your time, General," said the Emperor impatiently. "We have not the slightest doubt about the troops under your command. They are the best of the best. Even after allowance is made for the talent of their leaders, their excellence accounts for their success."

Von Kluck did not move a muscle, or utter a syllable of reply.

The Kaiser next addressed himself to the heir of Bavaria. "Ruprecht," said he, in a friendly tone, "what do you think of the way things are going?"

The prince blushed, cleared his throat, and made a brief statement, evidently learned by heart. The only noteworthy point in it was, towards the end, an allusion to the danger of political objectives, to the necessity of defeating the enemy forces in the field.

This was a leaf from the book of von Kluck, who remained impassive. It was clear the Kaiser had taught each one his lesson.

The next pupil to recite was the Prince of Würtemberg, another pale representative of those shadows of royalty that William kept under his guardianship. His discourse was a little more striking by virtue of the emphasis with which it was delivered, and it wound up with remarks showing the same drift.

“It is your turn, von Bülow,” said the Emperor.

In a clear and musical voice, with perfect distinction of manner, the cousin of the ex-chancellor discoursed for ten mortal minutes. From the outset, he put the question on concrete ground. He was not afraid to allude to the project which he felt in the air, to mysterious responsibilities. He spoke of the enthusiasm of the troops, and, behind them of the nation, stimulated by a single hope—that of the entry into Paris. He expressed

himself with a freedom warranted by his name and by his personal position.

When he had finished, the Emperor said ironically, "General von Bülow reads the country's mind to the bottom!"

"Sire," replied the general, with abrupt candour, "God forbid that I should ever hold cheap the opinion of the country! Without it behind us, neither you nor I would be where we are very long!"

This sally made a chilling impression.

Just before, the Kaiser had signified by a gesture to the Crown Prince that he had the floor, but the prince had refused, with a pettish movement. At this moment he rose without an invitation, and made a proposition that took everyone by surprise.

"I have just taken Longwy," he said. "It is the greatest exploit of the war. I exposed my person several times, under the most heroic circumstances. I think the time has come to appoint me field-marshal."

His hearers looked at each other. Field-marshal! The supreme rank, bestowed on the great von Moltke after Sadowa, which was not yet expected by the present commander-in-chief, which von

Kluck or von Hindenburg saw only in visions as the final object of their ambition! This was asked as a reward for having overwhelmed four battalions of defenders with an army of thirty-five thousand men! A large order.

Frederick William affected an air of candid modesty. "What do you think about it, father," he asked. "The war ought to do something for me. Without me there wouldn't have been any war, would there?"

The Kaiser replied angrily: "There will be honours for everybody, but the present question is how to finish up these lunatics of Frenchmen."

The Crown Prince had a vague feeling that his hopes were not well founded. With a sulky air he crossed one of his large feet over the other, took out his nail-cleaner, and devoted himself to a detail of the toilette which seemed to have been neglected for some time.

An inward irritation began to work in the Kaiser. This son of his, with a voice in these grave deliberations, was always an unknown quantity in his calculations.

Von Einem, who spoke next, said only a few words, but they were highly significant. With deliberation, he ranged himself on the side of von

Kluck and von Bülow. He insisted on the merits of the program minutely worked out in studious hours by the General Staff, and he entertained a veiled regret for the absence of one of the great labourers at that task from the very beginning, thus evoking the memory of von Bernhardt—illustrious in disgrace—and touching a sore spot in the Kaiser's soul. Von Einem concluded with a eulogy of the new siege artillery, which the old-fashioned forts of Paris were still less able to resist than the modern works of Namur and Maubeuge.

Von Hoeseler was the last speaker. As usual, he was prudent to excess, but it was possible to detect, under his senile reticences, a courtier's tendency to rally to the views of the Emperor.

Everyone had now spoken but von Kluck and von Moltke. William continued to play with the platinum paper-knife.

The Generalissimo rose. He had a head like an elderly bird, which hung forward slightly when he stood. Adjusting his gold eyeglass he examined somewhat nervously the three adversaries whom he felt to be implacable.

He began, in a hoarse, nasal voice, by an extravagant eulogy of each of the generals present. The three crown princes expanded as they received

full in the face this trowelful of gross flattery. He commented on the services rendered to date by the plan of the General Staff, and here he nearly made a bad break by mentioning the name of Bernhardi. Recovering himself awkwardly, he went on to ask whether a plan, even though a work of genius, that had been worked out in advance, in an office, in times of peace, could be expected to be applicable, uniformly applicable, from beginning to end of a campaign. For his part, he did not think so. His Royal Highness of Bavaria had been quite right in recalling a moment ago the elementary principle of giving the first importance to the destruction of the enemy's armies in the field. The Plan AZ had one defect, that it left the enemy a perfectly good opportunity of re-forming on the Loire, where he could hold in check an important group of armies. From these considerations had sprung the germ of an idea—for a plan—yes, another plan, of very large scope, of which he had himself found the outline among the papers of his great-uncle and which his Majesty had deigned to study and develop. This plan he deemed it indispensable to present today for the approbation of the Council. It consisted essentially of the abandonment of Paris as an



immediate objective. It aimed at nothing less than the entire envelopment of all the French armies of the East, and of all the system of fortifications.

Von Moltke had learned his lesson excellently well. He had conveyed exactly what he had been instructed to convey, a scheme seductive by its scope and by its boldness; and the sovereign openly threw into the balance the weight of his great influence.

When von Moltke had finished there was a silence. Then the hoarse voice resumed: "Let us have a perfectly frank discussion. What gentleman would like to speak?"

Von Bülow and von Einem looked at von Kluck. His Excellency was leaning back in his chair; his moment had not yet arrived. Von Bülow for his part could not wait.

"This is a very remarkable plan for an improvisation," he said, with irony. "But if we examine the problem, the reasoning does not hold good." He repeated, brilliantly, the arguments von Kluck had urged to the Kaiser two days before. His warm and energetic style made a strong contrast to the dull manner of the Generalissimo. He captured and held the attention of his hearers.

The two princes, especially, leaned forward on their elbows and did not lose a syllable. When he had finished, Albert of Würtemberg went through a pantomime of approval.

Von Moltke, with embarrassment, attempted a rebuttal. He repeated himself in holding up the hope of a second Sedan, on a vast scale.

"You exaggerate!" replied von Bülow. "You can't envelop an army of fifteen hundred thousand men as you can one of a hundred and fifty thousand. And you can't bring them to capitulate. That theory of envelopment is a back-number. If you want my honest opinion, it has seen its day. In our discussions at Berlin, it had only one advocate, von Hindenburg; he has a fine chance to work it on the Russians. We shall see in a few weeks if events prove him correct."

Von Einem, interrupting, placed himself squarely on technical grounds.

"Given the information in our possession, the absence of heavy artillery on the circuit of the enemy works, the easy transport of our big pieces which will be liberated tomorrow by the fall of Maubeuge, I don't think I am going too far in guaranteeing that the Paris forts will not hold out more than four days."

This declaration had serious weight. Paris captured in the sixth week of the war! It was a dazzling prospect, which set the hearts of these soldiers beating, in spite of everything. The Crown Prince himself seemed to emerge from his apathy.

"Oh! Montmartre!" he cried. "There's a pretty little girl there who will be sorry she snubbed me last winter!"

The Kaiser was white. It was time he took the floor himself. With firmness he pronounced a eulogy on the new plan, conferring on it at the outset the distinction of being inspired by God. Never, not even at Charleroi, had he concerned himself so deeply. If he failed to gain his point this time, it meant the loss of his prestige—that his presence would henceforth be superfluous at the deliberations that were to decide the fate of his country. To commit himself so deeply, it was clear that he was pretty sure of the result. In fact, he had figured his chances: against him there would be three votes, or, at the worst, four; with him would be five, and among them the preponderating one of von Moltke. That was why his accent was triumphant as he concluded:

"Before we discuss the details, gentlemen, let us vote on the principle."

## CHAPTER V

### A GREAT STRATEGIST

VON BÜLOW and von Einem both looked anxiously at von Kluck. Could it be that their day was over? That an hour's discussion was to annihilate the result of ten years of preparation? As good Germans, they were horrified by the possibility of disaster thus lightly inaugurated. But a touch of comedy altered the situation. The Crown Prince leaned towards his neighbour, von Hoeseler, and whispered audibly: "It's my settled policy always to vote against papa!"

"Why is that, your Highness?"

"For the prestige of the dynasty. The result is that in the eye of the people there is always one Hohenzollern on the right side of every question." He wagged his head. "And then, you must have noticed, he's not exactly a man of the world, my papa!"

William bit his lips till the blood came, pretending not to hear.

Von Bülow felt the decision was still in doubt. It was the time to make a superhuman effort. He gathered up into a logical whole all the arguments previously advanced against the new plan, dwelling particularly on the peril of a manœuvre which exposed the flank of the armies to an attack from Paris. This reasoning made an impression on the two princes.

Timidly, his Highness of Würtemberg asked: "Could we not postpone the enveloping movement until Paris is taken?"

"Certainly," declared von Einem. "The time to throw down our cards is when that ace of trumps is in our hand."

Von Moltke wanted to retort. He was a poor speaker, and he stumbled about, losing the thread of his argument. He no longer had the warmth of enthusiasm necessary for defending a plan which his mediocre intelligence had not fully assimilated, and of whose excellence he was not, in his heart of hearts, convinced.

The Emperor had turned green, and his throat contracted nervously.

"Perhaps General von Kluck will now condescend to give his opinion," he said.

"I am at your Majesty's orders," said his Excellency.

"We are listening," said von Bülow.

Every man turned, with curiosity, towards the great general. His opinion was already known to the Emperor, and the others were not ignorant of it.

He began to speak, in his thick voice with the slight sing-song.

"I must confess," he said, "that my opinion has entirely changed. For a long time, I have not dreamed of deviating from the plan of the General Staff; today, I am no longer prepared to cry up, at all costs, the immediate rush upon Paris."

This was so startling that von Bülow supposed some irony was intended.

But von Kluck went on: "For some days, our information-service has been working poorly."

"That is certainly a surprise," said the Kaiser, bitter-sweetly. "It was under your personal control."

"This very failure has been of service to us, your Majesty. It is the ground for my favouring today an idea to which, yesterday, I was opposed."

"Are you serious?" asked von Bülow.

“Never more so.” And in a grave voice, with folded hands, his Excellency gave his explanation.

He admitted that he had been shocked at first by the adventurous,—he might say,—the gambling character of the new plan. The rapid attack upon and capture of Paris was a certainty; it had been thoroughly studied, and a great many circumstances facilitated its execution. It was a hand that would play itself. But the proposition to pen in and tie up, capture, two enemy armies, the English and the French,—that was altogether a different matter. What exact information had they about these armies? Very little, since their precipitate retreat, which was beginning to be seen to be a masterpiece.

“That’s a fact!” said von Bülow. “In spite of my airmen, I confess I don’t so much as know how many corps I have before me.”

“Nor I,” said von Einem.

“Nor I,” said the Prince of Bavaria.

“So an attack would perhaps be dangerous.” Albert of Württemberg drew this sage conclusion.

“I tell you, the conditions have changed,” said von Kluck coolly. “At this moment I am in possession of information of a singularly exact and important character. I leave it to you to

judge whether it justifies a modification of our plans."

All waited, in surprised attention.

"Paris in the first place . . ."

"Well, Paris?"

"Paris may resist; Paris is no longer at our mercy."

"What do you mean?" asked von Einem.

"I am telling you what I have just learned. In the hands of Gallieni the situation in that quarter is completely changed, in an unfavourable sense."

"How can that be?"

"What was the fact on which we based our hopes of being able to pierce the western sector?"

"The enormous superiority of our heavy artillery."

"Exactly; their forts, bombarded by us at a range of twelve miles, were incapable of replying. We are a unit on that; that was our ace of trumps. Now, let me inform you of something; within the past week, under the guidance of the military governor, Paris has accomplished the most incredible feat in all her annals. These Frenchmen have changed their character; they have developed initiative and organization; they have



found means to transport the heavy guns of their fleet—they have plenty of them—from their batteries in the Channel and on the Atlantic, and have quite simply massed them against us!”

“How have they done it?”

“Easily enough, with a leader! And these guns, if I am to believe several reports which confirm each other, are not set up in the interior of the forts, where they could be located and destroyed, but outside, in the open country, under covers and shelters which they are constructing with feverish haste. It’s no longer a case, for us, of simply bombarding works that cannot reply; we shall have tit for tat. And, my heavens, their calibres are as good as ours!”

He made a gesture that signified the respect in which he held the enemy explosives, and continued: “It follows necessarily that we must abandon the hope of overcoming the defence of Paris in three days!”

“What have they, apart from these guns?”

“I tell you, they are making, and with success, a splendid effort. They are adaptable by nature, and they have learned our methods. Barbed wire, obstacles of every sort—they’ve had time to rig up everything. Don’t imagine for a moment

that we are going to take them napping. If we are going to take the Paris forts, we shall have to lay siege to them!"

"But our friends inside!"

"Plan AZ!"

"It is my duty to tell you the truth. The execution of the plan is compromised, or at any rate delayed. The enemy learned that something of the sort was in the wind. A number of our friends, at this speaking, have been arrested and shot. Some of them were imprudent, and they have been punished for it."

Von Kluck's manner gave the impression that he was trying to minimize the shock of his revelation, perhaps by holding something back.

"The lost ground can be recovered," he said. "Plan AZ will have its revenge, whether tomorrow or three months hence."

"Distressing news, all this," said the Kaiser, drily.

"True, sire, but it is this news alone that has brought me round to the support of the plan just submitted to us by his Excellency, General von Moltke."

"But," interjected von Bülow, "did not you say, yourself, a minute ago, that it was hazardous

to push the pursuit of the enemy without positive information of the morale of the troops and the spirit of the commanders?"

"But that information is precisely what I have at present."

"On all these points?"

"On all these points. And it is my intention, gentlemen, to share my knowledge with you."

The attention of his hearers was redoubled. Had von Kluck really been able to obtain those facts, the lack of which, in regard to his own sector, had been felt as a heavy handicap by each one of them? Were they about to receive one more demonstration of the superiority of his system of espionage over the intelligence department?

His Excellency took his time. He drew out a little red memorandum-book and read as follows:

"The English army no longer amounts to more than 75,000 men; it is cut off from its base and surrounded by hostile populations; the Horse-Guards yesterday burned two French villages of the Marne; this act was followed by a hand-to-hand combat with a battalion of Chasseurs; the value of these troops, moral and effective, is approximately zero."

"I am not surprised," commented von Bülow.

"Wretched little army," said the Kaiser. "I expected to see them melt away even sooner."

"And the others?" Each man was eager to get the facts about the force opposed to his own position.

To von Einem as well as to the princes of Bavaria and Würtemberg, to each of them in short, von Kluck furnished details before which they could only bow. From these details one stark fact emerged; the defeat of the French was more complete, more decisive, than they had been able to believe.

"We were not doing any better in '70, at the same stage."

It appeared that the morale of the allied forces had deteriorated as much as, nay, more than, their physical resistance. Could it withstand a fortnight of failure and retreat? The French soldiers were at the end of their tether, wild with shame and with impotent rage! They realized that their numbers were inferior, their artillery unequal, their leaders incapable. Mutiny was beginning here and there. There was an appalling scarcity of munitions and supplies. Whole corps were starving; gunners were seen tearing their hair before empty caissons. The ranks were

upset by losses; of these von Kluck recited impressive totals, and there was no prospect that they could be made good from the depots. Everywhere the very essentials were lacking. Certain detachments of reserves arrived on the firing-line without bayonets, others armed with old-fashioned rifles, and some with shot-guns.

To sum up, circumstances like these seemed to offer the incredible opportunity in which he, personally, had for a long time been unable to believe, of finishing the campaign at a blow by the colossal envelopment which brilliant theorists (he bowed to the Kaiser) had approved in the abstract, without dwelling sufficiently, perhaps, on the actual conditions. And it is only a fool who never changes his mind.

Von Moltke, with fright in his face, consulted by a glance his royal prompter.

"Then our proposal, in its broad lines, has your approval?"

"Entirely."

"Our right, which you command, will then pass Paris by and swing round abruptly towards Coulommier-Troyes?"

"While our left will go down, by Nancy, towards Neufchâteau."

Von Hoeseler raised his voice. "I have the honour to demand a supplementary army-corps."

"For what purpose, general?"

"Apparently it will be my job to do the dirty work in Lorraine. I have to take Nancy by frontal attack, more easily said than done; my enemy is strongly entrenched in famous works, on the heights. . . ."

There was apprehension in his voice.

It was clear that the old soldier did not relish the idea of meeting Castelnau, the famous.

Von Kluck reassured him with a word. "The forces at your disposal are more than adequate, my friend. The French who oppose you on the rivers, on the Seille as well as the Vezouze and the Moselle, are nothing but the wretched phantoms of armies, ridiculous southern troops who are worth about as much—as much as the Grenadiers of Victor Emmanuel!"

"Hoch, hoch!" A murmur of hilarity greeted this sally; all were charmed by a sarcasm at the expense of their recent antagonists. But von Hoeseler, in his heart of hearts, did not find it so very funny, recalling that these troops, so ridiculed, had held him up for four days, inflicting enormous losses on him, to the north of the Amance plateau.

Von Bülow was by this time inclined to submit to the force of von Kluck's reasoning, but he could not forbear a return to the capital objection.

"But how about the danger from the Paris forts?"

"That is the only thing that could stop me," said von Kluck, "and I believe I should still be undecided if I had not learned this morning, from a sure source, that the governor of Paris has neither fresh troops nor field artillery at his disposal."

"But you declared," objected von Einem, "that he was in a position to check a rush on the forts."

Von Kluck was not disturbed by the remark. "All that Gallieni has at his disposal are groups of territorials, some from the Paris garrison and some from the three adjacent districts, gathered in hastily during the retreat from Belgium. These are first rate material for sustaining a siege or repulsing an assault, or any work that keeps them snug in their trenches; but he couldn't get them out at any price. They are not the stuff to make 'troops of shock,' or troops for march and manoeuvre, such as he would need to offer a serious menace to our flank guard on the Ourcq. From

what command could the poor devil take such troops as would be absolutely necessary for this? Of their twenty-one corps, twenty-one are engaged; we are driving them before us without giving them time to breathe!"

The thick voice of the Crown Prince declared: "I'll be damned if I have the slightest idea how many there are left on my front."

Von Kluck did not take up this naïve contribution.

"As for their marine artillery," he resumed, "they have certainly brought it and set it up in the fortifications, but I defy them to employ it in battle in the field. They have no tractors for the purpose, and besides they would never dare let them go from the works." He struck the table: "I assert that without a hundred thousand fresh troops, and heavy artillery proper for the field, the enemy is incapable of exerting any pressure on our flank that we need worry about."

Von Einem raised another question: "What does your flank guard consist of?"

"A corps! It is more than enough."

"Are you sure of that?" asked von Hoeseler.

Von Kluck smiled. "In the plan which General von Moltke submitted to us just now, there was



assigned for this purpose, if I remember rightly, just a division."

"To sum up, then," said von Bülow, "we seem to be all of one mind."

"Which doesn't happen here so often," said von Einem, ironically.

"I had no doubt it would be the case this time," said von Kluck, sententiously. "As soon as the facts I have mentioned came to my knowledge—last evening, that is to say—I gave the order to my advance guard, which had reached the vicinity of the forts, to oblique to the left."

"Without reference to anybody!" growled the Kaiser.

"I ask pardon, sire. In fact, I was informed that the Council would meet here today, and that gave me a most opportune chance to justify my conduct."

"Excuse me; you were not notified until this morning, by telephone."

"My intelligence agency is not inactive, your Majesty." Von Kluck spoke more emphatically. "Overlook the fact that I took this initiative. The thing has happened before, without any great harm coming of it."

This allusion to Charleroi met with evident

approval from the Council. Words could hardly express the disappointment and jealousy which filled the Kaiser's soul at this moment. Evidently von Kluck was going to emerge greater than ever from this meeting, which had been designed to bring him to confusion. By what sleight of hand did he manage to turn against the Emperor a situation which should have been a personal triumph for the sovereign? At the very moment in which his plan was adopted, von Kluck had contrived to make it look pretentious and imprudent. This plan was going to be carried out, but von Kluck would have all the credit for it; it would be one flower the more in his garland! The Kaiser's anger rose against his son, whose conduct had made so painful an impression, and against von Moltke, his mouthpiece, whose mediocrity had never been so clearly manifest. He wrapped himself in a bitter silence.

The Council sat for an hour longer; there were a thousand details to arrange.

Each general took notes of the new sectors successively assigned to his efforts, of his next bases of operation, of his future objectives, both tactical and strategic.

Each also demanded from von Kluck a written

memorandum of the strength and composition of the forces opposed to him.

Towards the close, von Moltke recalled to their attention a problem not deprived of its importance.

“What about von Schrapf and his two corps?” he asked. “What are we definitely going to do with them?”

“They remain to be disposed of,” said von Kluck.

“I supposed,” said von Moltke, “that we were going to use them to obtain a hold on the Channel coast.”

“An invaluable asset, in case of a final reverse,” said von Einem.

“But why anticipate a reverse?” said William, nervously.

Von Kluck turned to the sovereign, with a somewhat forced deference.

“What use has your Majesty in mind for these troops?”

“Send them to von Hindenburg! He will soon be the centre of interest!”

“Very good,” said von Kluck. His Excellency having gained his point, the Kaiser was able to count a polite majority.

"No more time to lose, now," said von Einem, rising.

"Pardon me, we must now constitute ourselves a court martial!"

It was true. Von Tanhausen was waiting till the Council should pronounce his fate. To form a court, it was necessary that at least three army commanders should be in attendance. The generals commanding the most distant sectors asked that they might be excused, and allowed to return to their posts. Receiving permission, von Hoeseler and the Princes of Bavaria and Württemberg took their leave. The Crown Prince also hastened to depart. As he went, he waved an adieu to his father with the air of a well-wisher, not to say a protector.

Von Bülow and von Einem remained, as their commands were the nearest. The Emperor and von Moltke also prepared themselves for the rôle of judge in this singular case.

Von Kluck was invited to read his accusation.

## CHAPTER VI

### THE DEFENCE

IT was no light charge that his Excellency had felt himself obliged to make, in bringing before the supreme tribunal his own chief-of-staff, the man who passed for his *alter ego*, the faithful follower who had risen in his wake to the high regions of the service. In vain had von Bülow striven to intervene in favour of his old class-mate at the military academy. Von Kluck had shown himself inexorable. Justice must be done!

No one was really surprised by this inflexibility on the part of a man like the general, accustomed to demand from others what he demanded from himself, the most rigorous discipline of soul and body.

What were the charges against von Tanhausen? The four judges listened to them with the closest attention.

Von Kluck began by paying a loyal tribute to

the services rendered him by the accused for a period of fifteen years. But, he added, at the present hour, when tremendous interests were at stake, involving the destiny of the nation, no individual weakness could be tolerated. He dwelt on the capital importance of the problems discussed day by day in his office. In these rooms, where he himself lived and slept, protected by a guard from every possible intrusion from without, there were accumulations of documents vital to the functioning of the great machine. Of these documents, only one man besides himself had full and direct knowledge; that man was General von Tanhausen. Occasionally the latter asked for authorization to carry to his bedroom, on retiring, some paper which he said he wished to go over and study at leisure. Von Kluck had consented to this with extreme reluctance. On such occasions he did not fail to recommend to his colleague the same prudence which was with himself not only a rule but almost a superstition.

One evening—it was the night before last—he and Tanhausen had passed two hours in examining the most precious document of all, the copy in his possession of Plan AZ.

His listeners raised their heads at the mention

of this paper, which was, in fact, of inestimable importance.

On this occasion, von Kluck went on to say, the chief-of-staff had asked, for the first time, to take this document with him. Von Kluck had objected, certainly, but the other had persisted, and von Kluck had finally yielded (needless to say how he reproached himself now), but with the request that his colleague would bring it back the same evening, when his study of it was finished.

At eleven o'clock he, von Kluck, had gone to bed as usual. At one o'clock he awoke as the effect of a subconscious anxiety: had Plan AZ been returned?

Apparently not. He had at once despatched his faithful Friedrich to knock discreetly at von Tanhausen's door. No response. Was he asleep? Von Kluck had himself got out of bed and gone, in his pajamas, to knock in his turn. Silence as before. The key was in the lock. He had gone in, as was his duty. No one was there. The bed was not disturbed. The general was not sleeping there. Where could he be?

Friedrich, who was an intelligent fellow, had shown signs of knowing something about it, and on being questioned disclosed a secret which he

had learned from an indiscreet comrade. That night, and many another night as well, General Baron von Tanhausen was out on an amorous adventure. Such an impropriety would hardly be excusable in a truant college-student; there was no excuse for it in the case of an elderly man, carrying the highest responsibilities.

But the worst was yet to come. Friedrich, left on guard, reported the general's return at two o'clock in the morning. He was immediately sent to him with a note from von Kluck, demanding the immediate return of the document.

"What document?" von Tanhausen had asked.

Decidedly the measure was full. Von Kluck had believed it his duty to subject the general to arrest. Severe as this action was, he held that he could not even stop there. Nothing short of the present tribunal could properly deal with the case, for a careful investigation had revealed certain other facts.

In the first place, the young woman whom von Tanhausen had pursued with his assiduities, ever since his arrival at Serazereux, was a lady's-maid, belonging to the household of the château. Information furnished concerning her had led to her immediate arrest. She was not a common



soubrette; and moreover she had not been for more than three days in the service of the young chatelaine. She was neither more nor less than an agent of the French counter-espionage. It was by instruction that she had adopted a provocative demeanour with von Tanhausen, whose senile weakness must have been well known in advance. . . . The whole thing was an organized plot. Why had an attempt been made to draw the general out of his room? To be able to enter it during his absence. There was the crowning imprudence of the key left in the lock. The upshot was, Plan AZ had disappeared!

His (von Kluck's) conviction was that the theft had not been committed by the young woman herself, who must have been occupied at the time, but by an accomplice.

“An accomplice?”

Yes, there was a second mystery, growing out of the first one—the story of a French prisoner who was to have been—who *ought* to have been—executed the night before last.

But apparently this Frenchman had escaped. This affair, too, would be cleared up presently. The chain of events was alarming any way it was looked at. Was there a connection to be traced

between this robbery, committed only the night before, and the arrest, reported from another source, of some of the most important workers at Paris? Certainly there was a leak in the hitherto watertight tissue of the secret service.

Von Tanhausen was responsible for the trouble. Von Kluck wound up by demanding a practical dismissal, under the guise of withdrawal of his functions.

The Kaiser's mind immediately jumped to the accomplished fact of von Tanhausen's dismissal, and busied itself with the question of a successor from among his own creatures.

"What witness shall we call first?" asked von Bülow.

"It would have been interesting to have you interrogate my good Friedrich," said von Kluck, "but unluckily . . ."

"Well?"

"The poor fellow is ill—a high fever. He caught cold the night before last."

"Is his room near by?"

"Next door; I did not want to turn him out  
\* \* of his own room."

Von Kluck went to the little side-door, opened it, and called to von Bülow.

“There he is!”

Von Bülow came, looked, and shook his head. The unhappy patient, his face red, his eyes blood-shot, his features almost invisible beneath his cotton night-cap, did not, in fact, look like a possible subject for examination.

“He couldn’t be identified,” murmured von Bülow. Then he asked, “What does the doctor say?”

“I have no confidence whatever in that young fool, Gneisenau; so I sent for von Purgotz, of the Ninth Army, who is taking very good care of him. He recognized it at once as an attack of swamp fever. The poor fellow is subject to it; he brought it back from the Cameroon.”

Von Kluck turned toward the patient and said: “Well, Friedrich?”

Nothing but a sort of gasp issued from the parched lips of the sufferer.

“Don’t bother him,” said von Moltke, who had also approached.

Von Kluck added that, taking advantage of a relative improvement in the sick man’s condition the day before, he had obtained from him a deposition which he had carefully written down and which Friedrich had signed. This paper figured

in the *dossier* and the court admitted it as evidence. It repeated and completely ratified, in vulgar language, adorned with gems of the Brandenburg dialect, the narrative as told by von Kluck; and it gave, in addition some not unreasonable conjectures in regard to the mysterious rôle of the French prisoner, whom he called Cochefort.

"It would be proper," said the Kaiser, "that we should now hear von Tanhausen in his own defence."

A few minutes later the general was introduced. His face showed the ravages of insomnia and mental anguish. During his confinement of forty-eight hours, he had refused all nourishment. He had completely lost his aggressive manner; it was not the same man as the pompous official who had struck the sergeant in the anteroom two days before.

He remained standing, near the table, and examined with a troubled eye his colleagues of yesterday who were his judges today.

"Why am I here?" he muttered. "Why has this disgrace been inflicted on me?"

Von Moltke interrupted, drily. "You are about to learn. Listen to the charge made against you."

In an expressionless voice, he read the whole accusation.

Von Tanhausen listened with open mouth; he was stricken either with surprise or with remorse.

“What have you to reply to this, General von Tanhausen?” inquired von Moltke as he finished.

With difficulty the general stammered: “I do not understand.”

“What do you not understand?”

“These lies!”

“You deny everything?”

“I tell you, I don't understand.”

“Do you deny your rendezvous with this girl? That you left your room unlocked?”

“I don't understand.”

“Do you deny that you have any acquaintance with this woman?”

“I had met her, I think, yes.”

“And the document?”

“The document?”

Von Bülow interrupted. “This is particularly serious. General von Kluck, who personally placed it in your hands, finds a connection between the loss of this paper, owing to your imprudence, and the regrettable incidents reported to him from Paris.”

"But his Excellency refused to entrust me with that paper!"

"You are true to your system!"

"His Excellency, after apparently deciding to let me have it, changed his mind."

"Really?"

"I swear it before his Majesty."

"And I," said von Kluck, "swear the contrary!"

Von Tanhausen, in despair, looked from the Kaiser to von Moltke and to von Kluck, whose eyes, hidden behind his smoked glasses, he tried in vain to meet.

"This is a nightmare," he cried. "Can it be that his Excellency is really making this outrageous charge against me, who have always served him to the measure of my ability?"

"I regret the confidence I have placed in you," said von Kluck, harshly.

"I! I, running after women, at my age?"

"It is shameful, certainly."

"But what proofs does he offer after all?"

"Proofs? What do you say to this?"

Von Kluck passed to von Moltke a note, which the latter read aloud. It was a love-letter, written in French, containing an invitation to the fair one to leave her door open that night.

“Who wrote that?” asked von Tanhausen.

Von Moltke showed him the letter. “See for yourself.”

The missive was not signed, but von Tanhausen recognized the handwriting. It certainly was his own, unless it was . . . his Excellency’s! It was a well-known fact that after fifteen years of collaboration his manuscript had grown to have a close resemblance to von Kluck’s.

“I did not write this,” said von Tanhausen.

“Who did, then?”

Von Tanhausen was about to mention von Kluck, but a sort of modesty restrained him. His Excellency’s fierce austerity of life was too notorious throughout the country.

“It is a resemblance, certainly,” he stammered, “but it isn’t . . . it isn’t . . .”

He broke down. Von Bülow took pity on the comrade of his youth.

“My friend,” he said, “his Excellency’s accusation is not unreasonable. As he says, your fault is not so important in itself . . .”

The unhappy man pulled himself together as he heard a friendly voice.

“I am the victim,” he cried, “of a frightful conspiracy! I did not write that letter! I did

not leave my room that night! I did not lose Plan AZ, seeing that it was not confided to me!"

Von Kluck shrugged his shoulders.

Nevertheless, the accent of despair with which the accused a second time denied all the charges did not fail to produce a strong impression on the minds of his auditors. They had expected a confession; this obstinate denial had something perplexing in it. Had von Kluck made a mistake? But mistakes were not in von Kluck's line.

His Excellency now confined himself to asking a hearing for the various witnesses. The first to be called was one demanded by the accused himself, his own valet. He made an abject appearance, and declared he had slept through the whole of the night in question and knew nothing of what had occurred. Pressed more closely, and questioned as to the alleged escapades of his master, he flushed, made a clumsy denial, and finally stated that it was not his habit to spy upon his master.

This evidence, so evidently hypocritical in character, had a disastrous effect.

Von Tanhausen asked to hear again a certain passage of the accusation, and it made him open his eyes. It stated that the chief rôle in the



affair was attributed to that French prisoner, the accomplice and very good friend of Lisbeth!

“But,” said he, “that non-commissioned officer was shot!”

“Not so,” said von Kluck.

“How is that?”

“A criminal confusion of identity saved him from execution.” Von Kluck explained that it was Captain von Lüchow who had put him on the scent; suspicions had arisen in the captain’s mind; he had recalled something irregular in the report of the execution. Accordingly they had investigated the matter further, and caused the body of the French spy to be exhumed.

“What was the result?”

“Call Sergeant Gröningen!”

Gröningen was a rough-looking fellow. In a wooden voice he read his report, according to which, in the place where the body of the condemned man should have reposed, the excavations of the day before had revealed nothing but the body of Sergeant Frauenberg, his comrade of the Cuirassiers.

The members of the court looked at each other.

“What is the explanation?” asked the Kaiser.

“This, your Majesty; by the aid of secret ac-

complices, this Cochefort, I repeat, was able to evade punishment. . . .”

“But these accomplices?”

“I don’t know why I described them as secret. This young soubrette, who was doubtless his mistress, must have given him word. He came here at her summons. A complete scheme was framed between them.”

“And this scheme?”

“Was successful in part, as far as it consisted in abusing the . . . indiscretion of our friend.”

“But is there a shred of evidence to go upon?”

“When I questioned the girl, privately, yesterday, I detected signs of nervousness. I expect to be able to get a confession from her today in your presence.”

“But the other one, her accomplice—or rather, I understand, the principal actor?”

“Principal, yes.”

“Where is he? Have you arrested him?”

“No, I admit I have not.”

“A mistake,” growled the Kaiser. And, at a sign from von Kluck, he added: “Did he slip through your fingers?”

“He has certainly left the château.”

“His capture was the only thing that mattered!”

“It seemed to me preferable . . .”

“What?”

“To have him watched.”

“What do you mean?”

“I had no doubt that the rascal remained in close communication with the French secret service.”

“And you have been able . . .”

“Von Lüchow, pretending to be deceived by his German exterior, has attached him to his person, and never lets him out of his sight.”

“Von Lüchow? I was told he had been sent to the Russian front!”

“A false report circulated simply to deceive the adversary.”

“The spy, then, is under arrest?”

“Virtually, at any rate. Von Lüchow has just been telephoning me about him. The information von Lüchow is able to give me is very valuable; I learned from him, for example, of the existence in this house of a wireless apparatus.”

“Here?”

“Here.”

“And employed by the enemy.”

“Employed by the enemy, certainly; that was

the prime object in sending Cochefort to Serazereux."

The obvious objection rose to von Bülow's lips. This mode of communication was practically abandoned, since it was possible for enemy microphones to gather all messages in transit.

In two words, von Kluck explained the ingenious way in which French inventiveness had met the difficulty. They no longer used apparatus of more than very moderate strength, whose power of transmission did not extend more than fifteen miles. A series of machines of this sort, if their location was cleverly chosen, had a fair chance of relaying messages to Paris without being picked up by the more powerful instruments of the enemy.

Von Moltke seemed to be overwhelmed by this revelation.

"But these other stations," he said, "we must *find* them!"

"That is what von Lüchow is out to do. He has spotted the first one, situated not far from the confluence of the Oise and the Blaise. He is in constant telephonic communication with me."

The accused had followed this dialogue with stupefaction. Von Bülow brought the discussion back to the point of departure.

“This girl, this Lisbeth, of whom you speak,—is she here?”

“She is here.”

“And you say she admits . . .”

“No, I say she *will* admit.”

Von Būlow turned to the chief-of-staff. “And you, my friend,—do you persist in denying everything?”

Von Tanhausen straightened himself up and said, in a hoarse voice: “Everything . . . everything . . . as far as this concerns me.”

The Kaiser consulted his fellow judges with a glance. “Let the witness be produced,” he said.

## CHAPTER VII

### COMEDY AND TRAGEDY

LISBETH entered. She was neatly and simply dressed in black, with an apron of fine white muslin, and a little brooch at her throat. Von Moltke frowned as he saw her come; she was one of those dangerous creatures who make sinners of saints. Von Bülow, on the other hand, smacked the lips of a connoisseur; she was a choice morsel, worthy of the palate of any general-officer! Von Tanhausen wasn't such a fool as he looked!

Lisbeth stood modestly waiting to be questioned. It was the Kaiser who began the attack.

"You are under the shadow," he said, "of a very grave indictment. Do you swear to tell the truth, the whole truth?"

She smiled. "The whole truth is not always fit to be told."

\* \* "Really!" The full meaning of the French adage escaped him; he asked to have her words repeated.

"My good girl," interposed von Bülow with a fatherly air, "tell us what your relations were with General von Tanhausen, here present."

"Which of these gentlemen is he?" asked the girl, with a marvellously innocent accent, whether real or feigned.

The chief-of-staff made a gesture which said, "What did I say?"

"Oh, come; you know him well enough," said von Kluck, sternly.

Lisbeth raised candid eyes. "I do not know which one you mean."

"You know what you are accused of, don't you?" said von Moltke.

"I haven't the slightest idea!"

Von Kluck answered angrily: "You are accused of having used your French airs and graces in culpable attempts on the virtue of the general named."

The girl flushed. "Oh, that is a hateful lie!" she cried. Her frankness might well disarm suspicion. The judges connected it with the undeniable air of truth in von Tanhausen's denials.

Von Kluck resumed, in his penetrating voice: "The worst of the case is that your conduct was not merely vicious. My inquiries have shown

me your whole game. It was very well thought out. While you detained the general, your accomplice stole into his room."

"My accomplice?"

"Shall we say, your lover?"

The girl shivered from head to toe. "My lover!" she repeated, in a tone of resentment that had its effect on her hearers.

Von Kluck only seemed unmoved. "Yes," he said. "The French soldier, Cochefort."

"The French soldier, Cochefort!"

"You play astonishment, do you?"

"Astonishment? Yes, I never heard the name in my life!"

Through his smoked glasses, his Excellency bent on her the severity of his glance. "I mean that spy they brought before me here, the day before yesterday. You met him as he went out with the firing-squad."

"That man died bravely," said the girl. "Let him rest in peace."

"But I assert that he is not dead the least in the world—that, thanks to you, he got away."

"Thanks to me? Me, unarmed and a prisoner?"

"Thanks to you, who made use of the liberty you were permitted to enjoy—that was an im-



prudence, I admit—to maintain an understanding with him from the moment of his arrival.”

“Impossible!”

“Do you deny that you knew in advance of his coming and his mission? We know everything; don’t play with us any longer. We have visited ourselves the north-east tower, in which Post T.S.F. was installed by his care. . . .”

“His, perhaps.”

“Who but you could have given him access to the place?”

“I declare to you,” cried Lisbeth, with energy, “that I did not know this man’s name, and up to this moment his fate left me—I won’t say indifferent—but resigned!”

The court consulted.

“General von Tanhausen,” said the Kaiser solemnly, “look well at this young girl. Her presence perhaps will bring you to make the confession you withhold from us.”

“Do you know her?” jerked out von Kluck, impatiently.

The chief-of-staff fixed the soubrette with a melancholy eye. “I know her by sight, from having met her once or twice on the stairs, in your company, your Excellency.”

"I noted at the time your way of looking at her," remarked von Kluck, severely.

"And you, my girl, do you recognize the general?" asked von Bülow.

An imperceptible pink stole into Lisbeth's cheeks. "I have . . . seen him," she said.

"Did he not go to your room on the night of September 2-3, at seven minutes before twelve? And did he not remain there until two o'clock in the morning?"

The two defendants burst out together in denial.

"I am well-informed," said his Excellency. "That same night, you had received Cochefort until eleven, and he returned to you as soon as his theft was accomplished. He remained there in hiding until yesterday morning at eleven, when he quitted the château, disguised as a hussar and escorted by six troopers, commanded by Captain von Lüchow."

Trembling with indignation, the young girl protested. It was infamous! For what did they take her? She was engaged to be married to a young man in the 13th Artillery! And to think of being insulted like this!

Her voice trembled and failed on a sob. She stood perfectly quiet, with crossed hands, but the

big tears flowed down her cheeks. She was the figure of outraged modesty, and inspired respect, even in those stern hearts.

Von Tanhausen seized the favourable moment. Pulling himself together, he declared that the suspicious circumstances on which the charges rested were either hallucinations or coincidences. It was clear that in view of the scanty evidence and the complete denial of both the accused, the court inclined to mercy.

His Excellency had shown himself too plainly partisan. A verdict of acquittal would be a personal snub for him, and this fact did not escape the Kaiser, who would have been delighted to get even with him by such a petty and sly revenge.

Suddenly an inspiration seemed to come to von Kluck. He looked at his watch; then, taking down the telephone-receiver, he asked to be connected with W.K.M. 131.

To his surprised colleagues he explained that this was von Lüchow's destination. In a moment he was speaking: "Is that you, Ranke? Has von Lüchow arrived? What? I don't get . . . Oh, yes, Cochefort arrested. I understand. Difficult to watch him. . . . Exactly. . . . But what are we to do with him now?" He turned to the

court. "Leave it to his discretion, shall we not?"

All nodded assent and he turned to the telephone again. "Does the prisoner seem to have weakened? No? Have you examined him? . . . Ah, he won't answer? . . . Have you searched him?"

Several seconds passed. "Nothing? You don't find anything on him? Wait! Rip the lining of his tunic, on the left-hand side, at about the line of the third button. . . ."

A moment later, von Kluck, with an air of triumph, offered the receiver to von Bülow, who put it to his ear.

"Describe the document to me," said von Bülow. "Read me the first few phrases. Thank you, that will do!"

He turned to his colleagues, convinced. "It is Plan AZ, all right," he said.

These words fell upon the silence of a general excitement.

Von Kluck addressed himself to von Tanhausen: "That is the document, general, which I entrusted to you the night before last, and which was stolen through your carelessness."

Von Tanhausen made a feverish gesture, im-

pressed in spite of himself by this fatal combination.

As for the young girl, her face was serene. Questioned afresh, she still affirmed her innocence and this was the last item left that was favourable to von Tanhausen.

At this juncture, a diabolical idea occurred to his Excellency. The girl refused to admit the facts; perhaps she could be made to!

Taking the receiver, he asked: "What does the Frenchman say? Is he obstinate? Does he stick to his denial?"

Unconsciously, as though moved by a magnetic force, the young girl drew near the instrument.

Von Kluck exchanged a meaning glance with his hard-hearted colleagues. He returned to the telephone, and said, in an incisive tone: "Very good; get out the firing-squad, at once!"

Evidently surprise was expressed at the other end.

"At once," he repeated.

Then he turned to Lisbeth, with an infernal grin. "This man . . . whom you don't know . . . is about to expiate the treason . . . with which you had nothing to do."

The soubrette had become horribly pale; all

her blood flowed back to her heart. She took two more steps forward, without saying a word.

He continued: "If you like, you can say good-bye to him."

In vain she tried to maintain her reserve. Her will-power gave way, and, coming to the telephone, she took the receiver in a trembling hand.

Von Kluck, before giving it up to her, spoke again: "Bring the prisoner to the 'phone; someone wants to speak to him."

"Hello!" said the girl, faintly. "Hello . . . ah, Francis, is this you?"

The voice which answered her completed the loss of her self-control, and she cried: "They are going to murder you! I won't survive you long, Francis! You are dying for France! You have done your errand! Speak to me! I love you, I . . ."

But her tone changed abruptly: "What do you say?"

She burst into a sob. "What! You reproach me for that! It was your advice . . . it was to help you! Love that horrible old man! Love him! He made me sick! . . . But he didn't touch me, I wouldn't let him! Oh, Francis, say

one kind word, . . . they're taking him away . . . oh, it's horrible!"

She dropped the receiver, fell back a few steps, and, wringing her hands and shaking from head to foot, she cried: "Murderers! Brutes! You kill your prisoners! But you will pay for your crimes! We know your secret! From this day, your luck will change!"

Suddenly she turned upon von Tanhausen, to his stupefaction. "You old wretch! I fooled you for an hour! But you had nothing for your pains except to cheat me of my lover's last blessing! It does me good to see your shame discovered, your career ruined! Ah, how I hate you all!"

Her strength gave out and she fell, lying on the carpet in a poor little motionless mass.

The result was obvious: this evidence, above suspicion, finished von Tanhausen's case. What was his denial worth in the face of these facts?

The young girl was carried out. Cynically, von Kluck telephoned an order to postpone the execution of Cochefort. Perhaps some information could be extracted from the fellow after all. All that he wished to gain from the threatened summary action had been achieved.

Once more, his colleagues had to acknowledge that von Kluck was master of his art.

The chief-of-staff tried again to speak, but von Bülow advised him to keep still. "Better give it up, my friend; no use to struggle against the evidence. Or perhaps," he added, jocosely, "you might plead that you were sleep-walking."

"Perhaps I was," stammered von Tanhausen, whose reason was going.

"In that case, you know, you are hardly fit for your responsibilities. You need a rest. . . ."

To do its entire duty, the Court felt obliged to call as witnesses the master of the château, the aged Marquis de Serazereux, and his daughter, Anne Marie. Those persons were not included by von Kluck in his charges, in spite of his natural suspicions. Perhaps there had been moral complicity between them and the others, but nothing more. In the first place, they were not in a position to be of any assistance. The old gentleman had been confined to his room under guard since the first day, and the young lady, so the sentries affirmed, had not for a moment quitted the oratory in which she had taken refuge.

Their examination was not pushed far, and shed no new light. The marquis, as he came down the



stairs, had cast an eye into the *salon des bronzes*, still showing traces of the recent orgy, and he made this pleasant remark: "In the course of its history, Serazereux has suffered from the Ostrogoths, and from the Visigoths; not till today has it housed gutter-snipes!"

He refused to call the Kaiser "his majesty," and gave his reasons: "The Electors of Brandenburg, his ancestors, were of very inferior family compared with the Serazereux, of whom Frederick Barbarossa was a collateral."

He withdrew with his head in the air. As for his daughter, delicate and proud, no one was so discourteous as to subject her to a detailed examination.

Sentence was passed. Lisbeth was to be held, in secret, until she should be confronted with her accomplice, Cochefort. The sequel of the affair was left to the discretion of von Kluck.

On the question of von Tanhausen, the Court did not deliberate long. All seemed agreed that it was impossible he should continue his function. Von Bülow made the friendly proposition that he should be given a purely ornamental job, attached to von Hindenburg.

To this, von Kluck objected formally. He

declared that he was profoundly wounded by the attitude and lack of loyalty of his former collaborator. He was determined that he should receive indefinite leave of absence by retirement from the service.

Finally he gained his point. The unfortunate von Tanhausen heard his sentence with hanging head. The revelations of the session had crushed him; he asked himself whether perhaps he had not really done all this under hypnotic suggestion. He left the room, and went to bed.

The next thing was to appoint his successor. Discreetly, von Moltke and the Emperor began to suggest this name and that for von Kluck's approval. It was a fresh surprise for them to learn that from this time forth, von Kluck proposed to do without a colleague. He declared that by a still more complete centralization of authority he should be able to carry the responsibilities of his office alone, as he had done for the past two days.

"All by yourself?"

"All by myself."

His colleagues were under his domination. Not one of them ventured to protest against this flagrant infraction of the fundamental principle of

military organization. Here was the general in command of the most important group of armies, a man entrusted with the capital manœuvre of the campaign, depriving himself, at the critical moment, of his only collaborator, and refusing to replace him! But then, it was so clear to them all that he was the man to bring their formidable task to a glorious conclusion! His would be all the merit, and his all the credit! Pale with this last disappointment, the Kaiser and the generalissimo took leave of their host.

: The same motor carried them along the roads where passed the procession of trucks, laden with the enormous material of war, while across the fields, as far as the eye could see, came the interminable files of combatants.

Their own passage was hardly noticed. This flowing tide of men which advanced, irresistible, to the promised land, had but one master, one leader; one name only floated on their lips, one name only made their hearts throb to the rhythm of coming victories: "Von Kluck! Von Kluck *über Alles!*"



PART IV

To Victory with a Song



## CHAPTER I

### THE BATTLE OF THE OURCQ

THESE were the historic days, when the fate of France was in the balance.

After their initial defeat, after their retreat, which, in some directions, extended three hundred and fifty miles, the Franco-English armies were neither destroyed nor demoralized. Certainly their losses had been heavy, both in men and in supplies. But reserves had arrived from the depots to fill up the ranks all along the line, and there was fine feeling between these and the heroes of the first engagements.

These good troops had leaders worthy of them. Mediocre strategists would have failed to secure, after Charleroi, the time and the ground that were essential. They would have clung, at any price, to the line of the frontier, at the risk of being cut off and wiped out.

But Joffre had seen at a glance the necessity

for a sweeping retreat. The disposition planned by him had been carried out to the letter. On the extreme left, a precipitate withdrawal of the English and Laurezac's army—a withdrawal punctuated by striking successes, such as that at Guise.

At the centre, where two corps only were struggling with the entire army of the Crown Prince, a folding back was also ordered, subject to the condition that the forts of Verdun must not be exposed. This movement was entrusted to the defensive genius of Sarrail.

And on the right wing, the heaviest task of all fell upon Castelnau and Dubail: that of presenting a sudden front to the devastating torrent that had just drawn them from Morhange.

Thus the entire front pivoted, with Épinal as a hinge, without being broken at any point. Where should the retreat of the left wing stop? That was the fundamental question. For a moment, Joffre had thought of forming his line along the Loire; but von Kluck's enveloping movement was constantly enlarging its radius, and, surpassing all expectations, threatened to reach in succession the points selected by the French for holding-ground. Péronne and Amiens



had fallen into the hands of the enemy. It was very proper for French and Laurezac to withdraw from contact with overwhelming forces, but by doing so, they left the road to Paris practically open.

On the 30th of August and the 1st of September there was not the slightest doubt, in the minds of the Ally Staffs General, that the next step would be a blow at the Paris fortifications. To parry this blow, everything that it was humanly possible to do, had been done. Trees had been felled, trenches dug, a network of barbed-wire erected, semi-heavy batteries installed in the most unlikely places, and disguised with the most cunning art. It was an astonishing achievement, which will remain as one of Gallieni's strongest claims to glory.

With the closest possible team-play, General Headquarters and the Governor of Paris had worked out a plan, which depended on the obstinate resistance of the garrison, combined with a general counter-attack by all the armies of the East. This was the most reasonable scheme, certainly; but its success was, to say the least, highly problematical, since it left the forts at the mercy of the gigantic 420's.

And then, on the morning of September 2d, a most unexpected, most romantic hope of safety was born of the message so strangely delivered to Inspector Baston.

The first result of this message, naturally, was the arrest, in the top-story of the Ministry of Agriculture, of the ringleaders of the German conspiracy in Paris.

After that, the unnerving rumours set going by German treachery ceased as by a miracle. The air cleared; a more wholesome tone prevailed; the fair face of Paris smiled again with courage and hope.

It must be admitted that at first some doubt was entertained by the Ally Staffs General of the mysterious correspondent who veiled himself behind the modest signature of "Sergeant Fritsch." Was it not another enemy trap?

But it had become impossible to doubt the good faith or the ability of this personage. Without giving details, he declared, and was able to prove, that he was admirably placed in the very heart of the enemy organization.

Soon there came from him news of capital importance. The German plan had been completely modified; the General Staff gave up, provisionally, the attack on Paris; an attempt

at envelopment on an enormous scale had been decided upon.

General Joffre and his staff refused at first to believe this statement. General French received it with an exclamation of incredulity. To accomplished strategists, such as they were, the supreme mistake the enemy was committing was too striking for belief.

Immediately all available airmen were despatched to reconnoitre. They returned a few hours later, bringing confirmation from every quarter.

It was a fact that the whole German line was deflecting towards their left. The advance-guards had reached St. Souplet and Villiers-le-Morhier, and were going in the direction of Rheims. By night, the list of objectives announced by the unknown correspondent had been reached, but not passed.

And Sergeant Fritsch was able to communicate, always by carrier-pigeon, not only the objectives of the day, but for two days ahead.

Mistrust was no longer possible. Certainly this information came from a Frenchman, preserved in the midst of the enemy by some miracle and by his own sagacity.

There was no time to lose, if they were to work out a plan of safety. A menace for the German right wing, diverted eastward, must be held in reserve in the Paris forts. But, to be effective, this menace must consist of important forces; a hundred thousand men, at the least. And they must be fresh troops, troops of shock.

There lay the difficulty. At that moment Gallieni had at his disposal nothing but a small number of territorial divisions; solid regiments, to be sure, and admirably adapted for a defensive action, but certainly insufficient as elements of manoeuvre. He set on foot at once one of the most splendid efforts of that crisis, so fertile of prodigies. The 7th Corps was brought back from Alsace in one hundred and four hours; the 4th from the Argonne, in eighty-six. At the same time, two divisions of zouaves and tirailleurs, who had just disembarked at Marseilles, were hastily directed, by way of Lyons and Moulins, towards Paris. These made up the hundred thousand first-class troops needed by the Governor, and this concentration seemed to have escaped the knowledge of the enemy.

The enemy, in fact, advancing towards the valleys of the Seine and the Aube, showed an

insolent disdain for the fortifications of Paris, against which he detached as flank-guard merely one army corps.

Gallieni took his time. He let the stream go by; the heavy columns, encumbered with impedimenta, passed out of the zone of action of his forts.

At the utmost, he felt of them, in the region of Betz-Montrolles, with a few territorial regiments; and this feeble intervention merely served to emphasize, in the eyes of the German leaders, the physical impossibility of a more efficient diversion from that quarter.

At the other extremity of the front, Castelnau and Dubail, using an ingenious tactic, feinted at preparing a new movement of reply, which von Hoeseler's staff would naturally interpret as eminently favourable to their own offensive.

Such was the situation on the evening of September 6th.

On the 7th, it was destined to transform itself, from end to end.

The German left wing encountered a surprising resistance. Were these French troops those whom von Kluck had described at the Council of War as discouraged beyond the possibility of resistance? Lo and behold! Von Hoeseler's attack

was broken by Castelnau, established on the plateau of Amance, while, twenty miles from there, Dubail offered victorious opposition to von Pschimmel's push.

The emperor had taken his position half-way between the two masses of the offensive. He had gathered about him his escort of White Hussars, in readiness to make his entry into Nancy, the first conquered capital.

He had long to wait! Though, to clear his roads, his lieutenants sent on regiment after regiment, who melted away under the French volleys.

At the other extremity of the titanic battle-line, under the walls of Paris, Destiny cast her tremendous dice.

Von Klaustow's corps, detailed to keep an eye on the forts, was thunderstruck. Who were these new adversaries? These were not those territorials, who had been massacred like heroes the day before. These considerable French forces, reported by scouts as having arrived during the night in the neighbourhood of Nanteuil-le-Haudoin were . . . the 7th and 4th Corps! Why, they were supposed to be in the east!

Orders were given to the artillery to stop them

at any cost. Seldom has there been a more pitiless barrage of fire. The horizon, like a flaming throat, vomited shell upon shell. Their sinister breath swept the combatants. There were no troops in the world, it seemed, that would not be stopped or routed by that avalanche of fire. And perhaps there were no others in the world, besides these admirable legions. As those infantry battalions, already veterans in courage, came forward without hesitating, under the fire of the machine-guns, rising, running, lying down again, at the word of command, their steady advance was like nothing so much as the incoming tide of the sea.

They came on through the curtain of enemy fire, the finest soldiers France ever produced. And, once across the most perilous part of their road, they came into contact with the enemy infantry, who, imprudent for once, had neglected to intrench.

Von Klaustow yielded and sent to ask for reinforcements. He received it soon in the shape of two divisions of Landwehr, who were brought up against the guns by the vigour of their leaders.

The French army in its turn was threatened with envelopment. The situation was highly critical for both parties.

But the Germans alone were deprived of the liberty of manœuvring. It was too late for von Kluck's columns to be able, by a general right-movement, to crush in the embryo the menacing attack on the right flank. They were seriously entangled themselves, at that very time, on the Ourcq.

The violent counter-offensive of the British army, from the region of Signy-Signets, and of Franchet's corps from Esperet, were launched at a fortunate moment. From that time, the more far-seeing of the German division-commanders became aware of the risk they ran of being surrounded,—that spectre that has constantly haunted military minds of every epoch. To guard against this, beyond the shadow of a doubt, the proper course was to retire, with the least possible delay, the masses that had ventured beyond Meaux, towards Coulommiers, and to effect a fresh grouping of forces on the banks of the Ourcq and the Oise. Certainly, that was equivalent to renouncing for the present the ambitious conception of the Kaiser's brain; but it was the only possible move, cost what it might.

At German Headquarters, imploring telephone calls came in, one after the other. Cyclists and



airmen from the First Army brought to von Kluck the most urgent prayers of the several corps-commanders.

No use; von Kluck was obstinate. He made light of the warning given by the first recoil of von Klaustow's divisions.

He repeated his orders, without qualification. All positions to be maintained!

Such a chance as this could not escape Gallieni's penetration. The moment had come to strike with his entire force, not keeping in reserve, and therefore useless, a single battalion. The man who was charged with the duty of defending Paris to the end needed great vigour of soul, and he had it! The African divisions had just reached the capital, after a seven days' journey. All depended on getting them into the fight; could this be done in time? Not by rail; there was not enough rolling-stock on hand. The transfer of the other two corps had used up the whole resources of the North-East lines. It was a question of hours.

Gallieni's inspiration is destined to take its place among the most characteristic war-legends of France. He sent for Manoury, eager and audacious, and put in his hand an order requisitioning

the taxicabs of Paris. The vehicles assembled after nightfall, at Levallois.

The Africans, with their faces and hearts of bronze, were wild with jealousy of the laurels their comrades had won, and with the knowledge that they had a decisive part to play. They jumped into the autos by fours and by sixes, equipped and armed, every man carrying two hundred and fifty cartridges; and off went the mad procession, with lights out, at forty miles an hour, to the point of danger.

Senlis was in flames. Nanteuil, where von Klaustow himself lodged, was quiet. Into both places, just before the dawn, rushed a torrent of fiery-eyed demons, with rifle at shoulder and knife at wrist.

It was the most tragic surprise of the war. After a furious hand-to-hand struggle, the zouaves and tirailleurs, with a single push, drove back the enemy lines for nearly four miles. The two other brave corps, the 4th and the 7th, which had been in the breach for three days, forgot their fatigue. They held, nay, they advanced. At the point of the bayonet, the magnificent 101st Infantry saved Silly-le-Long, while with equal gallantry the 49th dislodged the Germans from Vacherauville.

It was a night of glory never to be forgotten, the night of Barzy-sur-Ourcq, of Lizy d'Etrepilly! On a front of twenty-five miles the German lines were broken, as the buglers played the Marseillaise.

## CHAPTER II

### AT SERAZEREUX

ALL was quiet, that morning, at the château of Serazereux. The night was hardly spent. The drawbridge was still raised. The old manor-house still slept, melancholy, in the hands of German masters. It seemed to be very far now from the breath of battle. Long ago, the innumerable columns of shock, streaming along the two banks of the Oise, had disappeared to the south. Even the sound of the guns had ceased for two days. All that still told the tale of the needs and the resources of the immense German army, was the railway, carrying its files of trains laden with material of war.

But, deserted as it seemed, Serazereux still retained its capital importance. Von Kluck had not quitted it for almost a week. Isolated there, his telephone connections kept him really in the heart of the action of which he was the controlling

spirit. During these last days he had received a succession of congratulations, now from the Generalissimo, and now from the Kaiser himself, whose bitterness seemed attenuated, on his masterly method of putting the new plan in action. The fact is, that his touch was plainly visible, in the order "to the left" and in the rush on the Marne. The night before, to be sure, his neighbour on the left, von Bülow, had reported his slight disquiet at the admitted delay of the Saxon divisions, who ought to support his right. It was dangerous for continuity, nowhere so important as between one army and the next.

"Don't worry," von Kluck had replied. "My Saxons will have regained touch with you tomorrow. You can push straight ahead."

Such was his Excellency's intrepid confidence in a plan which he doubtless had adopted simply because he saw victory ready-made and waiting to be grasped.

Since he had parted with his chief-of-staff, the great captain had led a more cloistered existence than ever. He rose with the dawn, and often sat up half the night, grimly bent upon his gigantic task. Friedrich, only partly recovered, had resumed some of his duties. Von Triptig's orderly

supplemented him by running all the necessary errands within the château.

Von Kluck had almost entirely ceased to have recourse to the collaboration of even the handful of officers whom he had kept with him. In his mania for solitude he sometimes went so far as to lock himself in, through superstitious fear of an indiscreet eye or ear.

Anyone who had surprised him that morning, by peeping through the carefully drawn curtains, would have had a shock. The General was not alone; he was sitting on a footstool, at the feet of a lovely girl, the heiress of Serazereux. She, with a gesture both ardent and pure, had passed her slender arm about the neck of her fiancé. For the love that had been germinating for a year in their hearts, had come to its glorious flower.

Fritsch's impersonation of von Kluck had met with a success at which he was more astonished than anyone else. He had thrown himself into the adventure blindly, without hope of success, eager only to please Anne Marie. She could but marvel at the fantastic prowess which she inspired and which her lover in the midst of extraordinary perils and possibilities of blunders was carrying to its prodigious consequences.

The genuine von Kluck had been kidnapped on the night of the 31st of August just as he was about to step across the threshold of Lisbeth's room and incarcerated in an inaccessible corner of the attic of the château. His servant, Friedrich, had also been throttled and sequestered. Cochefort had taken his place—the invaluable Cochefort, whose gifts adapted him for rôles ranging from a bed-ridden invalid to an officer reporting by telephone!

His Excellency's unusual habits had greatly favoured the plans of our two friends. Except the chief-of-staff and one or two orderly officers, no one was ever admitted to the privacy of the chief. Therefore, when von Tanhausen was removed and the group of young officers transferred to the Eastern Front, his hands were free. The great black spectacles were a wonderful stroke of luck; they served, by the happiest of coincidences, to veil the piercing glance of the audacious sergeant of infantry.

But the tension of those days had brought unspeakable fatigue. The session of the War Council alone had called for an enormous expenditure of nervous energy. For two mortal hours, he was at the mercy of the slightest suspicion.

More than once he had trembled, thinking himself discovered.

And since then he had had to deal with the preparation of messages which he despatched by pigeon to the French General Staff, in which every word had to be weighed. He had his assumed rôle to live up to, without hesitation or weakness. He had incessant orders to give to his collaborators. He had to keep in touch with his colleagues of the other army-groups. And he had the immediate duties of his position; these fortunately could be performed briefly and with the air of dry authority which was characteristic of his Excellency.

It will be admitted that in these conditions, Henry's opportunities for rest and relaxation were few. That morning, after transcribing a long document addressed to the French General Staff, he gave himself a treat. Anne Marie thrust aside the portrait of her ancestress and came down to him.

Ardent lovers though these two were, they rose above their fleeting personalities at these times, and though their eyes were gleaming with tenderness, it was of France they talked—of France and their hope of saving her.



"Any news from Paris?" she asked.

"Yes, the Governor is entirely with us!"

"Then you hope . . . ?"

"For victory!"

"It will have been somewhat your doing, Henry!"

"And yours, Anne Marie."

Eagerly she asked for details, all of them. Technical terms had no terrors for her. He was delighted to go over with her the recent developments of the strategic situation, and to show her the German positions growing worse hour by hour.

"They are getting on to it!"

"Who are?"

"My army-commanders."

The telephone rang; Henry took up the receiver, listened, and replied with an abrupt negative.

"That was another of them," he said. "Von Harkung asks me for heaven's sake to let him retire."

"And you won't?"

"I certainly won't!"

"What pretext do you give?"

"I tell him that our flank-guard will hold the attack."

"And what if it doesn't?"

"Then, dearest love, we shall have the German Sedan! Von Kluck's army cornered and captured! Two hundred thousand prisoners! Among them, the best troops of Germany!"

"Do you believe it?"

"I do."

"But when they take in . . ."

"Take in what?"

"Your folly, your Excellency!"

"Please note that I am executing, point by point, the plan drawn up by my imperial master."

"Yes, but if it is demonstrated, in the course of executing it, that you ought to have . . ."

"Pooh, what risk do I run?"

"If they discover . . . your identity, Henry?"

"Well, what if they do?"

"It's death, simply!"

"Well, what is the death of one man, if it is the price of France's life?"

A shudder passed over Anne Marie.

"Now that the action is begun and the first results obtained don't you think . . . that it . . . that it's time for you to escape?"

"Never! Trust in our star!" He looked at

her with tender regard, and his voice grew tender. "Don't you approve of me any longer, Anne Marie?"

"With all my heart!" Their lips met.

Someone knocked at the door from the vestibule. The young girl, alarmed, took a step towards the panel. Fritsch detained her, and then pushed her to the end of the room. "Wait there," he said. "I will soon dispose of this unseasonable visitor."

In the little room adjacent she found Cochefort and Lisbeth. At sight of them she smiled: "Always whispering in corners," she said.

"Like our betters!" answered the cheeky Parisian.

In the salon, von Kluck was receiving von Triptig.

"Your Excellency . . ."

"Speak."

"I bring painful news."

"Speak, I say."

"Your son . . ."

"My son?"

Fritsch grew nervous; he knew only vaguely the make-up of his family! How stupid he had been not to get that up more carefully! So he

had a son! Perhaps several! German families are numerous.

"Which son?" he murmured.

Von Triptig looked at him in surprise. "Rudolf, your Excellency; the aviator!"

"Well, what has happened to him?" asked von Kluck, quietly.

"An accident."

"Serious?"

"Very serious."

"Killed?"

"Badly wounded."

The general's self-control was admirable.

"Whence did you get the news?"

The colonel, stammering, explained that the accident had occurred a few miles away; when the young man was found he asked, before losing consciousness, that he might be transported to the château; his wish had been complied with, in spite . . .

"In spite of what?"

"In spite . . . of your displeasure, which he was so unfortunate as to have incurred."

Fritsch recalled suddenly the series of dramas that had upset von Kluck's domestic life—that he had broken with his son, as he had with his

wife, was not surprising, but these quicksands made difficult walking.

The colonel ventured to go a little farther: "Was that an error, your Excellency?"

"Not at all. It is all right. Gneisenau will look after him."

Not a word more. Fritsch was glad to seize the pretext offered him for expressing but cool interest.

"But," said von Triptig, "what if the lieutenant should . . . venture to . . ."

"I will see. I am busy now; leave me."

Henry returned to the study of his map, and the colonel retired.

Anne Marie was recalled, and briefly informed. Her brow clouded.

"An unlucky coincidence!"

Henry pretended to make light of it. "It doesn't bother me at all."

"Still, his son . . ."

"Well?"

"Aren't you afraid his eyes will penetrate more deeply than other people's?"

"I haven't said I would see him."

"It will be hard to get out of it."

"Von Kluck may carry his severity . . ."

“Not to that point! Everybody has to go to his son’s deathbed.”

Fritsch was silent, becoming thoughtful himself. This was a fatal stumbling-block. If he refused that dying wish, what suspicions might not arise?

After a moment of silence, he said: “We must gain time! Then, it is on the knees of the gods!”

“And our happiness?” sighed the young girl, sadly.

He took her hand. “Anne Marie, the day when you said you loved me, I was happy enough for a lifetime!”

## CHAPTER III

### HIS EXCELLENCY'S WORD

A CERTAIN uneasiness began to manifest itself in the château.

By what mysterious channels did the news come? The evening of the day before, there was already in circulation one of those rumours that are the sinister forerunners of calamity. And since Rudolf von Kluck had been brought in gasping on his stretcher, sombre confirmations were spreading. Not that the young officer gossiped; he was ordered absolute rest, and Gneisenau was not yet ready to answer for his recovery. But his companion, Krentz, the pilot, was less seriously injured, and he had talked—talked too much.

He told how his officer and he had flown that morning from Beauvais, absolutely confident that definitive victory was near at hand. They were specially enchanted with the duty assigned them, of dropping bombs on certain public buildings and certain populous districts of Paris.

They had been quickly disillusioned. In the first place, they had to give up their projected exploit. In the neighbourhood of Chantilly they had been pursued by two enemy biplanes, from whom they had escaped with the greatest difficulty, by rising to a formidable altitude.

From that height, they had a panorama a hundred miles round, and the great battle in progress about the capital was spread clearly before them. They could identify the spots where the struggle was fiercest by the flash of the discharging pieces, and the columns of smoke that rose where the projectiles struck.

Well, Krentz made no secret of it, that the situation of their armies looked very perilous. They were forced to fight on two fronts, and their right flank was slightly thrown back by superior forces, so that its communications were threatened.

This story corroborated the secret that had escaped the commander of a company of Uhlans that had passed through the village. He had spoken of a disaster near Senlis.

More than one inmate of Serazereux was troubled by the agreement of the two tales. Already the more cautious spoke of a possible retreat. But their comrades laughed at them, because of the



German pride rooted in their souls, and because of their confidence in their commander.

A man like von Kluck lead his forces to disaster? Hardly. Those demoralized Frenchmen win out? Never!

At this very moment, the general was giving sublime evidence of his devotion to his task and his control over himself. Absorbed in his work, he had not yet found a minute to go to the bedside of his seriously wounded son.

The young man seemed to resign himself. He ceased his asking, for fear of distracting, even for a moment, the man whose hands carried the destiny of Germany.

At his Excellency's ear, the telephone rang almost without interruption. From all sides came requests from the commanders under his orders, in tones that ranged from pressing to despairing. Some begged for reinforcements; some for permission to retreat.

Nothing more, however, was heard from von Klaustow! Perhaps he had been cut off by Manoury's manoeuvre.

Von Bülow had reported the check suffered by his right wing, which was being hustled towards Sésanne by the unexpected counter-offensive of

Franchet's corps from Esperet. With an ill humour he did not dissemble, he complained because his warning of the day before had been neglected. What he was afraid of had happened. What a misfortune that his right had been left in the air, entirely deprived of the support agreed upon!

As often happens, this reverse of von Bülow reacted in turn on the situation of the neighbouring armies. Von Einem, near Châlons, was fighting in a poor position. Foch's energetic rush on his thin centre had taken him unawares. The Guard, hampered in its movements, was making unheard-of efforts to prevent itself from being driven into the swamps of St. Gond.

The news from the extreme left was not more comforting. Von Hoeseler, charged with the duty of breaking a way between Nancy and Epinal, had nothing to report except a demonstration, bloody enough, to be sure, against the forts of Nancy.

The Crown Prince alone had a song of triumph to sing. He assured his Excellency that he had just reduced the fort of Troyon, while his other wing was advancing, inexorably, in the direction of Ste. Menehould-Bar-le-Duc. The complete in-

vestment of Verdun was now only a question of hours; but he was going to indulge his troops by carrying the fortress at a blow, as he had done at Longwy.

However true this might be, it was clear that the imperial plan was encountering terrible difficulties. It seemed the part of wisdom to mark time for awhile. Von Bülow, von Einem, and their staffs were of this opinion.

But von Kluck disdained all advice. He forbade his corps engaged towards Meaux to take so much as a step to the rear; it seemed as though he did not take in the fearful pressure that was being exerted on his right. For von Klaurow's corps might be considered lost. The Bavarian corps, outflanked, was giving way and throwing itself in disorder on the Prussian reserves. From minute to minute, the general might have followed on the map the constantly growing menace of encirclement.

In fact, that was just what Fritsch was doing, with perfect composure.

Suddenly—it was nine o'clock—the château was shaken by a noise. More serious still was the moral result of the concussion. That dull sound, that low rumbling that was beginning to

grumble off there, to the south. . . . It was a sound they all knew very well: the guns, which they had not heard for four days. But by this time everyone supposed the game was being played out on the banks of the Aube and the Seine. Could it be that the enemy were coming back on the offensive?

In the twinkling of an eye, without orders, the alarm was given. The hussars donned their equipment. A breath of nervous inquietude passed through the château.

Below, on the highway, one could distinguish, with a field-glass, the disorderly retreat of a rations train.

Anne Marie came to find Henry. She was pale, excited, and her errand was an extraordinary one.

She said that, to her great surprise, the real von Kluck, the old general, their prisoner, who had maintained for five days a savage silence, had asked an interview with her, through Lisbeth, who took him his food.

She had gone to him, and what a spectacle she had seen! He was a very different man from the great personage with despotic ways with whom she had had to deal when he took possession of

the château. The poor soul, with hollow cheeks and trembling on shrunken legs, received her with polite words of apology and thanks, and even with tears. . . .

He had confessed to her at once the secret of his misery. His only distraction in that attic, where he was nearly dead of ennui, was to look out through the barred window, let into the wall at a man's height from the ground, at the vast dome of blue sky stretching above the chestnuts of the park. One morning, after a sleepless night, he noted the sound of an air-thrust propeller, and saw an aeroplane of a new model passing at a short distance. There was a coat-of-arms painted on the machine, in which he recognized the insignia of his own recently founded family; and he knew that the son who had displeased him, and whom he had not seen for fifteen years, was in the habit of carrying those arms with him into danger. Pleased in spite of himself, he watched the flight of the plane, and was a witness of the ensuing drama.

Suddenly, from far above, like a bolt from the blue, there fell another aircraft, English, apparently. There was a brief duel with a fatal ending. The defeated plane was constrained to a precipi-

tate descent which looked like a sheer fall. Like a flash, it passed out of the plane of von Kluck's observation.

The old man forgot his animosity against his son. This was his Rudolf, the eldest of his blood. Had he been crushed to pieces by his fall, or was he still breathing?

He begged his enemies to give him news.

Fritsch could not bear to refuse this favour to the intercession of Anne Marie. When Cochefort heard of it, he dissented. He was for thorough measures, and declared he could not understand the policy of leaving their most dangerous adversary in a position to resume some day his fatal trade. And he invoked the right to reprisals, justified in his eyes by the discovery among von Kluck's papers of a formal order to take as few prisoners as possible.

But Cochefort had only a voice without vote in the council. He was sent to interview the doctor, and returned without delay bringing a bulletin signed by von Gneisenau. The lieutenant was suffering from fracture of the right shoulder-blade, and serious internal injuries; he was still in danger, although he had recovered consciousness.

Henry caused this report to be carried to the prisoner without comment. But the situation thereupon became more painful than before. Von Kluck, completely broken down, gave himself up to senile despair. Could they deny him the last satisfaction of standing by the deathbed of his eldest son—the son whom he had banished with too much severity?

He summoned Anne Marie a second time and renewed his entreaties.

When she refused, he addressed a letter to the old marquis under the title of "Governor of the Castle," in which he invoked him as the master of his fate.

This flattery beguiled the marquis. He eluded his own guards and paid a visit to the general.

"Monsieur le Marquis," said von Kluck, "I appreciate all the impropriety of my action and all the reasons you may have for refusing to accede to my request. My passionate desire for an interview of a few minutes with my poor boy is not founded solely on my wish for a reconciliation before he dies. It rests also on the fact that there is a confidence which I feel bound to make him at such a time."

He lifted his right hand. "I give you my word

that I will not try to escape, nor to betray to a soul the secret of my situation."

"Do you give me your promise as a gentleman?" said the marquis.

"My most solemn word of honour."

"We have only one word of honour in France."

"Honour knows no frontiers."

The marquis leaned to the side of humanity. He did not wish it said that anyone had appealed in vain to his chivalry. He had only learned of the intrigues of the château within a few hours, and he was inclined to judge adversely Fritsch's whole conduct. These disguises, this elaborate scheme of deception, did not seem to him quite gentlemanly. And he was utterly unable to believe that these private theatricals could influence in any way the result of the impending conflict.

Anne Marie had reconsidered; she finally sided with her father. It seemed a piece of gratuitous barbarity to refuse such a request from a heart-broken father. How could they deny his sacred right to carry a word, perhaps of pardon, to his dying son! And then, the risk was infinitesimal.

But Fritsch hesitated a long time. Instinct warned him that he must not at any price treat



with one of the class and nation who professed a systematic indifference to solemn agreements.

Still his Excellency was not an ordinary man. His word must be worth something, German though he was. And could that agonized face be the face of a liar?

So Fritsch yielded.

It caused a mild surprise when the order came that the sentries, the attendants, and even the doctor, were to abandon for a few minutes the bedside of the wounded aviator. But the quarrel between father and son was matter of common knowledge, and it was easily guessed that the general might have his reasons for wishing no witnesses of the interview.

It had been agreed that Fritsch and Cochefort were to be present, and it was curious to see the two von Klucks advancing side by side, so like that one who knew the secret would have found it hard to distinguish them.

The Frenchmen carried each a service revolver and it had been pointed out to von Kluck that at the first suspicious gesture, his brains would be blown out. It is well to be explicit in these matters.

Rudolf von Kluck lay, very white, upon his

couch. His bandaged shoulder prevented him from making the slightest motion.

He opened his eyes as he heard the door open, and when he saw the general he smiled, with a sad, far-away smile.

Von Kluck came slowly to him and took his hand.

"My boy," he murmured.

"Father!"

It was a trying moment for two men whom life had separated so cruelly. For a few seconds, neither spoke. Rudolf was too weak, and the old man too much moved.

Fritsch, who was standing outside the field of vision of the injured man, drew the general aside and reminded him that he had only five minutes.

Von Kluck stifled a sigh of nervous irritation.

"Rudolf, I insisted on seeing you . . ." he began, speaking with an effort, "because," and here, in spite of himself, he lowered his voice, "because I think it my duty to deliver myself in your presence of a secret, a secret of importance." He ground his palms together in savage uncertainty.

Suddenly he turned to his companions, with supplication in his eyes. Clearly, it was torture

to him to think that third parties were to be admitted to his confidence.

Fritsch consulted Cochefort with a look. He realized how humiliating family confidences may be.

The wounded man, with his great eyes wide, awaited the revelation about to fall from his father's lips. There was an interrogative movement of the eyelids. Then, speaking with infinite difficulty, he said: "Tell me, father."

Von Kluck's distress was very moving.

"Your mother," he began.

But he could not go on; his repugnance was too great.

"I cannot tell you my boy," he said. "The secret is not mine alone. It involves a woman's honour."

This was too much for Fritsch's French chivalry. Without speaking a word, he withdrew to the other end of the room. As Cochefort did not budge, he called him, twice. Reluctantly and slowly, Cochefort obeyed.

From their new position, they could not distinguish a word that was uttered, in a low voice, at the bedside.

With an inclination of the head, von Kluck had

acknowledged their action. Feverishly, he bent over the couch of the sick man.

Important as his confidence was, it did not take him long to make it.

The invalid received it with closed eyes, and expressionless face.

Soon von Kluck straightened himself, and recalled his guards with a gesture.

"Thank you, gentlemen," he said.

He seemed relieved of a terrible weight. Fritsch inwardly congratulated himself on his conduct. He had acted as a Frenchman should, and Anne Marie would be proud of him.

His Excellency seemed to have no wish to prolong the interview. For the last time, he took the young man's hand.

"Good-by, Rudolf," he said. "I have unburdened my conscience."

Docilely he suffered himself to be led away, without a word spoken, to the obscure room that served as his prison.

## CHAPTER IV

### BEFORE THEIR EYES!

NIGHT had come on, a dark, stormy night.

A heavy wind was blowing. After a day of suffocating heat, low thunderclouds coming up over a livid sky announced the approach of a storm. The wild light brought out strongly the tragic aspect of the ancient château.

Since nightfall, the sinister rumble of cannon, which had been audible all the afternoon, had come closer, advancing from the south with the line of battle. A little before sunset Fritsch had gone up to the lookout tower that crowned the castle. Sweeping the horizon with a powerful glass, he had seen a sight that made his heart beat.

The whole horizon was on fire.

It was the same spectacle of rout that had lately horrified him on the Belgian frontier. But this time, panic was in the opposite camp. And this time it was not a frightened mob of wretched

civilians that led the retreat, but troops, picked troops, the invincible troops that made the flower of the German army.

When he returned to his study, he found Anne Marie there, wild with anxiety.

“Now it is certainly time to go!” she cried.

“Not yet.”

“What are you waiting for, in heaven’s name?”

Fritsch knew in his brave soul that the German rout was not yet complete. Clinging to the slopes that form the watershed between the Oise and the Aisne, two Pomeranian corps were offering desperate resistance to Manoury’s advance. If the Prussian forces engaged at the Ourcq should at last decide to retreat, the principal mass of von Kluck’s armies could be saved from disaster, and might be able to re-establish their whole position.

To that, Fritsch decidedly objected. He was bent on a decisive defeat, irremediable, monstrous defeat. That was his motive in sticking to his post with the courage of a lunatic, holding his German subordinates to their positions with insults, and accelerating, by his individual efforts, the splendid flight of victory towards the French arms.

A knock at the door surprised them.

"I receive no one!" cried Fritsch gruffly, without turning round.

The knocking redoubled. Fritsch walked towards the bolted door, with a rough word ready for the intruder. Anne Marie had already made her retreat.

Fritsch stopped, surprised to find, from the sound, that a crowd had gathered in the ante-room.

Von Triptig's voice came to him, recognizable by its sugary inflections.

"Your Excellency, are you not considering the evacuation of the château?"

"Why should I?"

"Why, the news . . ."

"Who has better news than I?"

"The hussars who are asking admission say . . ."

"Damn the hussars!"

"Really, doesn't your Excellency think . . ."

"I forbid a soul to move. I forbid everyone to make the slightest preparation for departure. Do you hear me? And I hold you personally responsible!"

The colonel appeared to yield, but the crowd did not leave the antechamber.

A few minutes later, von Triptig knocked again.

"I beg pardon for disturbing your Excellency."

"What is it now?"

"It has become absolutely necessary to leave."

"Why?"

"Fire has broken out in the apartment next yours."

"Von Tanhausen's?"

"Just so, your Excellency."

"There is no fire without smoke!"

"The staircase is full of smoke!"

Suspiciously Fritsch sniffed the air. He could not detect the slightest trace of smoke. The news seemed to him singular, and the slight embarrassment audible in his informant's accent put him on his guard. Weren't they laying a trap for him?

He lifted a flap of the tapestry, and put his eye to a small hole which he had found it convenient to bore in the wooden partition.

Although there was only a half light in the antechamber he saw . . . Good heavens, how lucky that he had not opened his door at once! . . . There, leaning against the jamb of the entrance-door, shaking with weakness but encouraging by his presence the crowd in arms,



stood Lieutenant Rudolf von Kluck, risen by a miracle from his bed, to which he would return to die!

The sight of him was a flash of light. Fritsch's heart contracted as he took it in. This was what he got for trusting a German's word! It was perfectly clear. It wasn't his family honour that the general was discussing with his dying son during those few minutes of tête-à-tête. Quite the contrary; it was his personal dishonour he was consummating by revealing, against his solemn pledge, the whole story of his sequestration.

Another case of the Bismarckian theory that the end justifies the means; and of the psychology of the "scrap of paper"!

But there was no time for moral reflections. The enemy had now abandoned any further attempt at dissimulation, and were trying, quite frankly, to break in the door. Fortunately it was stoutly built of oak, and offered satisfactory resistance.

Fritsch reported the situation to Anne Marie. Horrified by seeing at hand the danger she had all day felt hanging over their heads, she made another effort to drag him away.

"Just a minute!" he pleaded.

Quietly he gave her orders to inform her father, Lisbeth, and Cochefort.

“But how can we get away? They are on guard everywhere.”

“By the underground passage,” he said, reminding her of the tunnel indicated on the old plan of the castle, an underground passage which debouched two miles away, in the open country. It had probably not been used for three hundred years, and it might be obstructed, for anything they knew. All they were sure of was the entrance to it which was situated at the north angle of the tunnel that followed the line of the ramparts.

In the meantime, the attack on the door was gaining strength.

Fritsch heard the order given to bring beams and axes.

Since he had made up his mind to leave, what was he waiting for?

As Anne Marie left him to pass the word to their companions, she cried: “I shall leave von Kluck to Cochefort!” And that was equivalent to a sentence of death.

Left alone, Henry coolly set himself to compose a final cipher despatch.

The door was nearly broken down. The ante-

chamber was full of an indescribable noise, above which was heard the clash of arms. Splintered by the blows of an axe, the principal panel of the door gave way. Fortunately, a bronze brace held back for still a few seconds the wave of assailants.

Phlegmatically, Fritsch took his place at the telephone and called for W. K. M. 131. He obtained the connection immediately, for, in their excitement, the assailants had forgotten to cut the wires that connected with the numerous exchanges.

"Von Ranke, is this you?"

"It is I, your Excellency."

Fritsch dictated his last message.

"Read it to me! . . . Correct! Send it on immediately!"

"I understand, your Excellency."

Fritsch leaped to the strong-box, and snatched from it the bundle of papers he had long ago collected for this occasion.

Thirty seconds later the great door fell. Von Triptig sprang in through the opening, foam on his lips and a revolver in his hand. He was just in time to see the portrait above the fireplace swing slowly into place.

He threw himself upon the panel, but he had not the secret of the spring. In vain he pressed at all the corners, on all the mouldings. In vain the soldiers pierced the canvas with their bayonets. The wall remained solid, and the features of Anne Marie de Serazereux of an older time seemed to smile in mockery of their efforts.

It was finally decided to blow up the wall. But a good hour was spent in laying the mine. When part of the château lay in ruins, von Triptig was able to trace in the smoking débris the plan of the labyrinth of secret communication that ran through it. He saw how, from the day they entered it, the stones of this old French stronghold had made sport of the invader.

Making their way through long dark passages and up hidden staircases, they came to the garret where the real von Kluck was crying for deliverance.

He was alive. In spite of his bloodthirsty talk, Cochefort was a true Frenchman, and when it came to the point he could not put to death in cold blood an unarmed prisoner. But he had sat down before the general, and conveyed to him, in his most picturesque language, his opinion of German honour!

Von Kluck had been so ill-advised as to assume his monocle to give greater effect to his stare of silent scorn, whereupon Cochefort had knocked it off. With this sweet revenge he left him.

To his deliverers, von Kluck could only repeat the sorry tale of his horrible situation. The sound of the guns, now not more than ten miles away, sounded to his ears like an intolerable personal reproach.

The decisive battle was lost!

Already the push of the enemy threatened his retreat. Serazereux must be evacuated without a moment's delay.

With a white face, he sat down to work out plans for the attenuation of the disaster. But his head was bowed.

He saw written on the wall his own disgrace and the catastrophe he had brought upon the empire.

## CHAPTER V

### THE ORDER OF THE DAY

AFTER walking all night in the tunnel, the fugitives saw light at the end. Sweet as was the sight, they did not know what it might mean for them.

They emerged into a hollow full of bushes, on the edge of a wood.

The whinnying of horses close at hand alarmed them; was the end of their journey to bring them out in a camp of Uhlans?

Fate was kinder than that. The rapidity of the French advance had brought a troop of their cavalry to this point.

Lieutenant Delbos, commanding, was considerably surprised as the little procession approached him. Their clothes were covered with mud and their faces haggard with hunger and fatigue. But the marquis had not parted with his grand manner, and Anne Marie and Lisbeth were always two pretty girls.

What really staggered Lieutenant Delbos was

the apparition of a German division officer, accompanied by a German private soldier.

Unabashed, Fritsch insisted on being taken to the brigade staff.

There, luck was with them, for the commanding officer was General Count de Froment, a frequent guest of the marquis in Paris. There was a recognition scene worthy of the stage.

Fritsch told his tale in a few guarded words, with the result that a motor was at once put at his disposal to carry him and Cochefort to the French General Staff. He was anxious to make his report by word of mouth, and to hand over to the commander-in-chief certain documents the importance of which would at once be evident to the general's eye.

He went off with joy in his heart, for he was the accepted betrothed of Anne Marie. It had come about in the simplest way in the world. Of his own accord, the marquis, in presenting him to General de Froment, had called him "my future son-in-law"! And as the sight of French uniforms had brought to the old gentleman a realization of the success accomplished by the young man, he had made a little speech, full of genuine emotion.

"Twice," he said, "the Serazereux have saved France. You have saved her today, and you are worthy to become one of us. These times are favourable to promising young Frenchmen! A new nobility is arising among us, and the old nobility must bid it welcome."

The two men had shaken hands, and, under her father's eyes, Fritsch gave his beloved the kiss of betrothal.

A line from General de Froment to Joffre's chief-of-staff opened all doors. It was at Pont-Ste.-Maxence, a few miles up the Oise, that they succeeded in finding "Papa Joffre." On this day, so great for France, he had just been telegraphing to Castelnau the thanks of his country. He was seated at table with French, Foch, and Manoury, discussing the failure of the famous "March to the Sea."

Nevertheless they did not keep Fritsch waiting, when they realized that he was the signer of the confidential communications that had set the time for the great counter-offensive.

Our friends were abashed as they entered this distinguished company, but the general rose, came to meet them, and took their hands.

"Welcome, my lads," he said.



Henry was immediately questioned, and rendered a lucid account of the events of the week. The generals hung upon his words, not knowing which to admire most, the almost miraculous combination of events, or the extraordinary use made of them by this young man.

When he had finished, Joffre stroked his moustache. "Do you know, sergeant," he said, "without you . . ."

"Without us," said Fritsch, laying his hand on Cochefort's shoulder.

"Without you two, the task would have been hard, — too hard, perhaps, for human powers!"

He turned to General French: "What do you say? Suppose we had not received word, on the morning of the 3d, of their change of direction towards the south-east?"

"Inspector Baston was an invaluable collaborator," said Fritsch, modestly.

"What are we going to do for these brave fellows?" asked Joffre. "What do you want yourselves?"

With a spark of mischief in his eye, Fritsch said: "General, my heart's desire is to have you as a witness of my marriage."

"With the greatest pleasure, but what is the date?"

"The end of November, please God!"

The general reflected a moment. "The end of November? Yes, that's all right. By that time the German advance on Calais will be disposed of, and we shall be masters on the Flanders line. Certainly, the end of November suits me perfectly. I'll be there!"

He turned to Cochefort. "And you, my lad?"

"Might I be so bold as to ask the same?"

"Good; two birds at one stone!"

Our friends saluted and executed a rear movement.

"One moment," said General French. "We can't after all let them go like that."

"Let's drink to France," ventured Cochefort, who saw a bottle of Château Yquem on the table.

"By all means," said Joffre. "Cochefort is right."

Glasses were filled.

"To France!" they all cried, with one voice.

"And to your crosses, boys!" said Joffre.

Our heroes looked at each other. With a friendly gesture Joffre detached the Croix d'Hon-

neur from his own breast and fastened it on Fritsch's coat. Foch did the same for Cochefort.

"These chaps have jolly well earned a citation," said French.

"In the Army Order," said Foch.

"Better than that," said the commander-in-chief. "I propose their names for mention in the Order of the Allied Armies!"

"Quite right," said French, approvingly.

This unique honour, never repeated throughout the course of the war, entitled our friends to the Victoria Cross, the Black Eagle of Russia, the Serbian order of Saint Elizabeth, and the Ny-Bar of Japan.

But suddenly Foch asked: "What is the text of the citation?"

The generals were taken aback. They had not thought about that. It would be difficult, certainly, for more than one reason, to publish any part of the fantastic adventure.

General Manoury, who had not spoken hitherto, had an inspiration.

"What is the number of your regiment?" he asked. "The 387th, isn't it?"

"Yes, general."

"Colonel de Laroque?"

"Yes, sir."

Joffre's face took on an expression of gravity.

"A fine regiment," he said. "After having held the enemy for thirty-six hours at the Blaise, it covered itself with imperishable glory on the plains of Betz."

"Poor Laroque," sighed Manoury.

Fritsch was moved. "Is he dead?" he asked.

"He fell nobly. May we all have such a death when our time comes, for he saw the enemy in flight."

The victor of Nanteuil searched his pockets. "I visited his deathbed," he said, "and received his dying wish. He gave me a list of non-commissioned officers and privates whom he deemed worthy of citation. There is where I first saw your names, Fritsch and Cochefort."

The general had found in his hat the object for which he had been searching.

In a firm voice he read: "Cochefort, Leon, private of the second class; Fritsch, Henry, sergeant in the 387th Infantry; have acquitted themselves with remarkable courage and ability of the dangerous and delicate task confided to them; have succeeded by their devotion in assur-

ing the safety of the army corps, in the most critical circumstances.”

“Instead of *army corps*, read *armies*,” suggested Manoury. “Do you men accept this text?”

“It is sacred to us,” said Fritsch.

Profoundly moved, the young man recalled the colonel’s handclasp and his manly farewell.

Cochefort had the last word.

“Good old von Kluck!” he said. “Did you ever expect to be cited in the Order of the Day of the Allied Armies?”

THE END



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