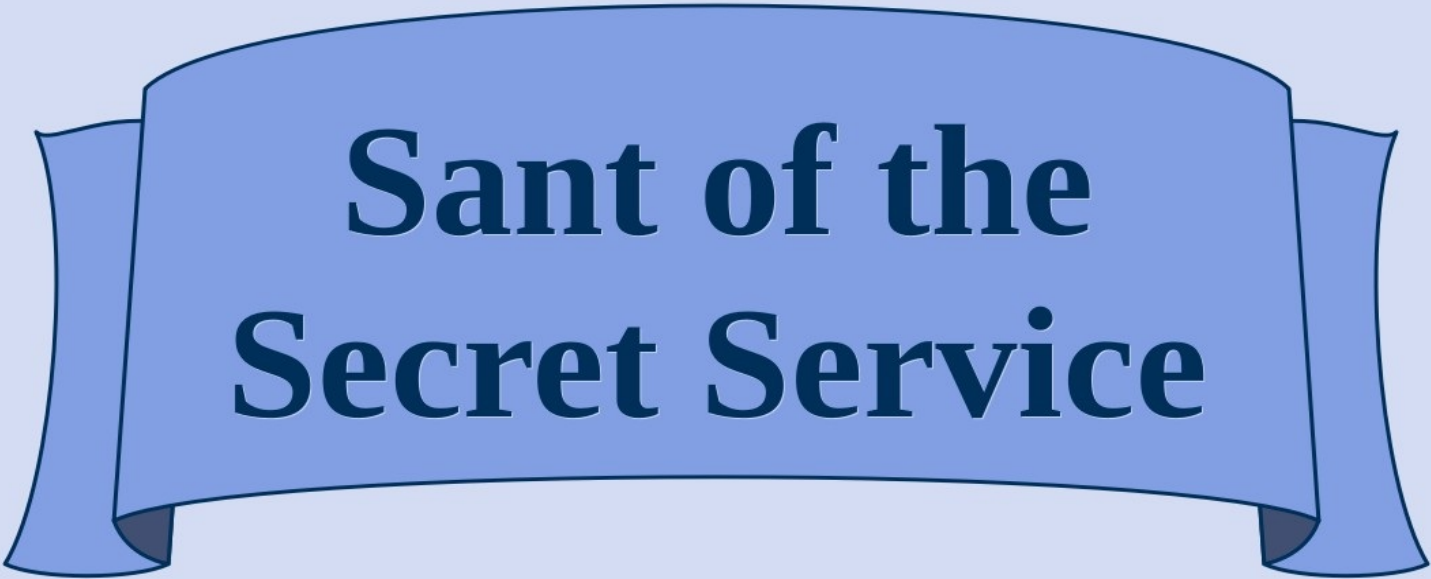




Sant of the Secret Service

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Some Revelations of Spies And Spying

By William Le Queux

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About Gerry Sant

To those who, like myself, have moved in the Continental underworld of spies and spying, the name of “Sant of the Secret Service” is synonymous with all that is ingenious, resourceful, and daring. In the Intelligence Departments of London, Paris, Rome, and New York, the name of “Sant of the Secret Service” is to-day one to conjure with.

Cheerful, optimistic, and the most modest of men, Gerry Sant has seldom spoken of his own adventures. The son of a certain nobleman who must here remain nameless, and hence the scion of a noble house, he has graduated through all stages of the dark and devious ways of espionage.

Our first meeting was ten years ago, in the tribune at the Battle of Flowers at San Remo, where, to be exact, we were fellow-members of the committee, and it is because of our old friendship, and the fact that we have been fellow-spies up and down Europe, that he has permitted me to write down these intensely absorbing memoirs of exciting and unrecorded adventures in defeating the Hun.

William Le Queux.

Devonshire Club, London, 1918.

I Espionage in Piccadilly

The place: The kerb in front of the Criterion at Piccadilly Circus. The time: Five minutes past three on a broiling afternoon in July. As an idle loungeur, apparently absorbed in contemplation of the ceaseless tide of human traffic that ebbed and flowed, I stood gazing along the famous London thoroughfare. In truth, I was keenly alert to every movement about me, for I had extremely important Secret Service work in hand.

I took out a cigarette, tapped it mechanically, and slowly lit it preparatory to crossing the road to Shaftesbury Avenue, when suddenly, from the procession of hurrying vehicles, a taxi detached itself and drew up to where I stood. I caught a momentary glimpse of a woman's eager face half shaded by a fashionable hat. The next moment I was seated beside her, and we were bowling smoothly along Piccadilly.

"Ah, mon cher Monsieur Gerry!" exclaimed my pretty companion. "Well, has anything serious occurred?" she asked breathlessly, with her fascinating French accent.

"Listen, my dear madame, and I will explain," I replied. "Hecq has sent me over from Paris in order to see you. I arrived only this morning, and am returning this evening. Something very serious is on foot, and Hecq wants you to get leave of your chief, and come over to help us."

And here perhaps I may introduce my companion a little more fully. Gabrielle Soyeux was a female agent of the British Secret Service, who had distinguished herself in her profession times out of number, both before and since the outbreak of war. Dark-haired and handsome, she inherited from her French father that seemingly irresponsible and irrepressible gaiety which so many of her countrywomen exhibit. From her English mother, no doubt, she had acquired the sterner, almost masculine, qualities which her femininity concealed but did not suppress. A splendid linguist, speaking several European tongues to perfection, she could, on occasion, pass as a native of some other countries. And one of her most amazing feats had been a journey right across Germany from Holland in wartime, in the character of a young German fraulein travelling to take up a position as governess in East Prussia. Added to her linguistic abilities, she possessed nerves of steel and a quick, subtle brain which saw the real

significance of many an almost unnoticeable incident. Nothing was too big or too small for her attention.

I knew her well. I had worked with her in more than one affair of international importance, and it was at my suggestion that Armand Hecq, the astute chief of the French International Secret Service Bureau, had applied for her to assist in the difficult task that lay before us.

“Something fresh this time?” queried the chic little lady, as we drove along.
“And, pray, who has applied for me?”

“I have,” was my reply. “A very difficult task is before me, involving the risk of many lives, and you are the only woman I know in whom I can place absolute trust.”

“Except Doris, eh?” she flashed out, turning to me with a quizzical smile. She was referring to Doris Rae, my well-beloved, who lived with her mother in a quaint old timbered house buried deep in Worcestershire. In the stress of my war-work I had seen her but seldom for the past two years, for I was constantly on the move, but the bond between us was none the less true and perfect. And I nodded to my companion, with a laugh.

The time slipped by as I gave Madame Gabrielle her instructions. “To-day is Tuesday,” I said as we parted. “I shall expect you on Friday in Paris at the Orleans station. The express for Bordeaux leaves at eight twenty-seven. Watch for me, and enter another compartment of the train without speaking. Somewhere on the journey I will contrive to hand you your passport.”

“But what is the nature of this inquiry, Monsieur Sant?” Madame Gabrielle broke out.

“Well, to be frank,” I replied, “the French Admiralty report that the enemy has established a new secret submarine base off the Spanish coast. We are out to find it, and, what is more, to carry out reprisals on the pirates.”

Madame, seeing a good chance of a desperate adventure, grinned with satisfaction. “Tres bien,” was her only comment.

So we parted, she to her hotel, I to wile away the few hours that remained to me before the departure of my train from Victoria. I went along to “White’s,” in St.

James's Street, for a cup of tea, and, after buying some packets of Dutch cigarettes, which I purchased with a purpose, looked in at my own flat in Curzon Street. The place seemed close and musty nowadays. After a brief conversation with Doris over the telephone, I started out to walk to the station. But I was not to get away from London without a startling surprise.

I have never been able satisfactorily to account for the adventure which befell me as I strolled through St. James's Park on my way to Victoria. Whether I was the subject of an attack by a mere footpad, or by some tool of our enemies who knew of my work and mission, I cannot say. But one of those strange premonitions, which come so frequently to men who, like myself, carry their lives in their hands, as all spies do, undoubtedly saved my life.

Since I left Madame Gabrielle the weather had changed. Heavy clouds had rolled up, as if a storm were threatening, and it had grown very dark. Having time to spare, I had intentionally made a detour from my direct road, and I was in a lonely pathway when something, I know not what, made me suddenly face round, with every nerve and muscle braced for instant action.

I was only just in time. From the grass at the side of the pathway a man leaped at me. In the gloom I caught sight of his up-raised arm and the flash of a knife.

It is hard to catch the practised student of jiu-jitsu unawares, and that fascinating form of self-defence has been one of my special hobbies. Like a flash I jumped in to meet the charge of my assailant. Before his knife could descend my right arm was crooked into his and I had his wrist in the grip of my left hand. Flinging my whole weight forward, I wrenched his right arm savagely backward and downward. With a half-stifled scream of pain the man toppled over backward, his head striking the ground with a crash that left him senseless.

Here was a pretty coil! I dared not wait to give the man into custody, for that would have meant police inquiries and endless publicity, to say nothing of missing my train and a fatal delay to my important mission. And just now I could not afford publicity. So I decided to leave him alone, to take his chance and make his own explanation, if necessary. Picking up his knife, I thrust it deeply into a flower-bed, and, stamping it well down with my heel, hurried on to the station, and was soon on my way to France. Who and what my assailant was I never heard. But I pondered over the incident a good deal on my journey, for it may have meant that my mission was already known. Still, this was unlikely, so

I merely decided to keep an extra sharp look-out.

On Friday, at the hour I had appointed with Madame Gabrielle, I passed the barrier and walked along the platform of the Orleans station in Paris, where in the summer twilight the express, with its powerful, constantly exploding locomotive, stood ready for the long run across France to the Spanish frontier. I bought a copy of *Le Soir* at the bookstall, and while doing so my eye fell on a rather shabbily-dressed, insignificant-looking little man who apparently was lounging absently about.

Every “natural” spy, if I may use the term — and I think I am one of them — possesses a large measure of that intuition which is somewhat akin to a woman’s power of frequently jumping to a perfectly correct conclusion without the trouble of logically working a problem out. The things which matter in our calling are often seemingly the most trivial. There was nothing about this shabby little stranger to call particular attention to him, yet from the moment I saw him I felt instinctively that in some way my lot and his were bound up together. And, try as I would, I was unable to shake off that feeling.

How far I was correct the sequel will show.

As I entered the train, I saw Madame Gabrielle, carrying her dressing-bag and followed by a porter with her hand luggage, pass the window of my compartment and enter a first-class carriage nearer the front of the train. Her eyes met mine as she passed, but she gave no sign of recognition. Of the little shabby man I saw nothing, though I kept a sharp look-out, and I concluded at last that he had left the platform.

All through that night the train roared onward by way of Orleans and Tours down to Bordeaux. I slept, as I usually do, but dreamed in a manner quite unusual with me. Throughout the night my sleeping thoughts were harassed by that shabby little man who had, I seemed to feel no doubt, witnessed my departure with a perfectly definite object.

Perhaps I may be permitted to say here a few words about myself. I am a cosmopolitan, the subject of no country, though through my parents my sympathies are more English than anything else. British when in England, I am a Frenchman in France, an Italian in Italy; I can be a German in Germany, or a Spaniard in Spain. The explanation is, of course, that I have led a wandering life,

being of almost every nationality by turn and nothing for long. My adventures have been facilitated by the fact that I happen to have known several languages from my earliest childhood. Whoever is born in Smyrna, as I was, has truly a ready-made profession in the matter of languages. At ten years old most lads in Smyrna can speak four or five tongues, and, in addition, I developed early a peculiar gift for languages, and an insatiable desire to speak as many as possible. Thus, all the principal European languages became equally familiar to me, and I speak them all almost as well as if each were my mother tongue.

It was to this gift of languages that I owed my entrance to the ranks of the French Secret Service. When still quite a boy I found myself, through a peculiar chain of circumstances, a homeless outcast in Paris. I had been tramping the boulevards, and, tired and hungry, had sat down with my back resting against a big tree. I was half asleep when I was roused by two men talking in a queer Dutch patois which I happened to understand. I suppose they thought they were alone, or, at any rate, that no one who might overhear them would be likely to understand their lingo. They were laying their plans for a daring raid on the house of a famous Paris banker. Boy as I was, the situation fascinated me, and as night drew on I shadowed the men and was the means of bringing about their capture under dramatic circumstances. They proved to be a much-wanted pair of international crooks. The affair brought me some credit with the French police, and in the end, finding out the value of my linguistic achievements, they began to employ me on small undertakings. I did well, was gradually entrusted with more important work, and was finally given regular employment. Such was my introduction to the world of espionage.

But to return to my story. At six o'clock on Saturday morning we drew into the great Bastide station at Bordeaux, where the train had half an hour's wait. I alighted with all the other dishevelled passengers, to scramble to the buffet for our cafe au lait and brioche. In the scramble I pushed past Madame Gabrielle, who looked somewhat untidy after an obviously sleepless night, and as I did so I slid into her hand a little parcel screwed up in brown paper. In it was a note containing certain instructions, together with her passport, bearing her photograph in the name of Gabrielle Tavernier, described as "variety artiste." So perfectly self-possessed was she that, although she had not seen me — I had pushed up behind her — she never even turned her head as the note slipped into her hand. It was this self-control which made her an invaluable helper; nothing ever seemed to take her by surprise, or to betray her into a hasty word or action.

I had just taken my first sip of coffee, when, glancing across the big restaurant, I caught sight, among the crowd of third-class passengers who were thirstily quaffing their bowls, of that same shabby little man whose presence on the platform in Paris had given me such an unpleasant shock. Evidently he had managed to elude my observation, and had joined the train without my seeing him.

I had been beaten at my own game! I had thought I had shaken him off, and his presence was an intensely disagreeable surprise.

There was, of course, no very obvious reason why he should not be a perfectly harmless fellow-traveller, but I was absolutely convinced in my own mind that his presence here in Bordeaux was in some way connected with my mission, and that it boded me no good.

Slipping from the station, I hurried across to the Place du Pont, where I knew there was a public telephone. I knew, of course, the password which “cleared the lines” for official messages, and in less than ten minutes I was in communication with Armand Hecq, at his house at St. Germain, outside Paris. To him I briefly explained how matters stood.

“I quite understand, Sant,” he said. “Leave matters to me and continue your journey. Bon voyage! I shall read the *Matin* every day.”

Then I rang off and hurried back to the station, just in time to catch the train as it drew out for the “Cote d’ Argent,” “the Silver Coast,” as the French call that beautiful Biscayan seashore between the estuary of the Gironde and the golden sands of Spain.

Through the miles of flat pine woods of that lovely marsh country called the Landes, where the shepherds stride on their high stilts and watch the trains go by, we sped ever south, by way of the ancient town of Dax and on to sun-blached Bayonne.

Now we were rapidly approaching the Spanish frontier, and I wondered what was transpiring between Hecq, in Paris, and the officials at Hendaye, the last French station, where the agents of police were stationed to prevent German spies from entering France by that particular back door.

I was soon to learn that Hecq had not been idle. Late in the afternoon the train

pulled up at Hendaye, and, as it seemed to me, had hardly halted at the platform when I caught sight of my shabby little man being escorted from the station in the relentless grip of a couple of stalwart French gendarmes. Evidently Hecq was taking no chances, and I breathed a sigh of relief at the removal of my incubus. It turned out later that the shabby little man was a clever German spy, and, of course, he paid the invariable penalty.

Very soon the train moved across the long bridge over the river to Irun, and beyond. Thus we arrived at length at San Sebastian, the Brighton of Spain, at that moment in the full height of the sea-bathing season, and crowded with a motley assembly of Europeans of all nationalities, with, of course, a liberal sprinkling of desperate adventurers ever on the look-out for any crooked undertaking that promised plunder and profit.

Our plan, of course, was to avoid the slightest appearance of hurry. Anything in the shape of undue eagerness and haste might well mean arousing the suspicions of the Spanish authorities, who, being neutral, might very easily arrest us both (especially if I were recognised, as was always possible) as secret agents of the Allies. I entered an open cab and drove to the old Hotel Ezcurra, where in past days I had eaten many a meal and drunk many a bottle of choice wine. Madame Gabrielle, in accordance with our arrangements, had gone to the Hotel Continental in the Paseo de la Concha, the establishment most patronised by the gay society of Madrid, who loved to show off their Paris gowns and to exhibit, too often in the most plebeian fashion, the wealth which had come to them as a result of the war.

For three days I remained at the Ezcurra, so pleasantly situated behind the lovely lime-trees in the Paseo de la Zurriola, and to which the smart, chattering officers of the unwarlike garrison, in their grey uniforms and peaked caps, resorted every evening. I had previously decided upon the character I would assume; it was that of a Dutch theological student. I gave out that I spoke no Spanish — of course I spoke Dutch — and pretended a vast interest in visiting the ancient churches — San Vincente in the old town, Santa Maria at the ascent of the Mont Urgull, and the beautiful old churches of Hernani and Azpeitia, as well as the prehistoric rock caves of Landarbaso. All the time, of course, I was keenly on the alert, my ears ready for any scrap of information that might chance to come my way.

One day I had been visiting the little village of Azcoitia, the birthplace of Loyola, the founder of the Jesuits. At a pleasant old fonda close by I had

dropped in for a dish of olla, that kind of stew so dear to the Spanish palate, when, at a table near by, I noticed two middle-aged men who quite obviously were not Spaniards. Apparently they were Italian, for they spoke that language, and their clothes had obviously been made by an Italian tailor. But I noticed instantly a fact which at once aroused my suspicion — the boots they wore were of German manufacture!

Men's nationality and habits are often betrayed by their footwear, and my observations on the boots and shoes of people of both sexes have seldom led me wrong. Indeed, I always pay the closest attention to clothes, for nothing will so completely "give away" an assumption of a pretended nationality so promptly as an error in dress. Every scrap of clothing I was wearing had been bought in Holland, and I was sure of my disguise. My suit I had purchased of Buijze, in the Kalverstraat in Amsterdam. The pseudo-Italians, carefully got up as they were for the part they were playing, had forgotten one important item, and I had little difficulty in coming to the conclusion that they were really Germans. I decided to keep a sharp watch on them. The question was: were they watching me?

I dawdled over coffee and cigarettes till they rose to leave, when I paid my bill with the intention of tracking them back to San Sebastian. Unfortunately I was balked immediately. Fond of exercise, I had walked out to Azcoitia; the two strangers had driven, and I had the mortification of seeing their carriage start for the city. It was useless to attempt to follow; they were out of sight long before I could have hoped to get the slow-moving Spaniards to provide me with a carriage. There was nothing for it but to return as I had come, and keep a sharp eye open for the mysterious strangers. It was evident that, if they really knew me, they must have satisfied themselves that for the present, at any rate, I was actually idling, and that there was "nothing doing."

Returning to the Ezcurra, I wrote out an advertisement which I sent to a certain address in Paris. I knew that it would appear immediately in the "personal" column of the *Matin*. It was in French, but the English translation read: "Isis. — Mother has fortunately passed crisis, and going on well. — FELOX."

This advertisement, I knew, would appear both in London and Rome, as well as in Paris. To the uninformed it would appear innocent enough, but certain persons in the Allied capitals knew that "Felix" was myself, and, reading the announcement, would be reassured as to the progress of my secret mission.

Next day I spent idling about the beautiful blue bay of La Concha, taking my evening aperitif at the Casino, and after dinner I spoke to Madame Gabrielle over the telephone. I told her, of course, about the two mysterious strangers, giving her as full a description as possible of their appearance, and urging her to keep the keenest watch for them.

When I returned to the palm-lounge, a page-boy brought me a telegram addressed to van Hekker, the name by which I was known at the hotel.

Opening it, I found that it had been sent from London. It was a cryptic message which read:

“Fontan remains here. Goods marked C.X.B. arrived fourteenth, twenty-three cases. Awaiting samples second quality.”

Without giving the least sign that the telegram was of any special interest, I read it through and carelessly slipped it into my pocket. But the news it contained was startling. It put an entirely fresh complexion on affairs, and it meant that I must act without delay. Unless within twenty-four hours or so I secured a triumph, my mission would be unsuccessful, and in all probability some two thousand human lives would pay the price of my failure.

It was absolutely essential that I should discover without delay the identity of “Fontan,” for there lay the crux of my difficulty. With that knowledge in my possession I should have more than a chance of success; without it I was merely a blind man groping in the dark.

II Spying on Spies

The bold course was the only one possible. I walked straight to the Correo Central, and, entering the poste-restante, inquired casually for a telegram addressed to the name of Fontan.

“It was called for half an hour ago,” was the gruff reply of the little old Spaniard at the counter, who shot a quick look of suspicion at me, wondering, no doubt, how it came about that a second inquiry should be made for the same telegram. I bit my lip, but tried to appear unconcerned, and, after dispatching another message, went out rilled with chagrin at having missed my objective by so narrow a margin. The time left me for action was growing desperately short, yet, rack my brains as I would, I could think of no way out of my difficulty.

But my suspense was not to last long. As I walked slowly back to the Ezcurra, my heart gave a sudden leap as I recognised, walking parallel with me on the opposite side of the road, one of the two mysterious “Italians” whom I had encountered a few days previously in the little fonda at Azcoitia. He was walking at about the same pace as myself, and I very quickly realised that he was carefully “shadowing” me. But that was a game at which two could play!

Turning into a shop where there was a public telephone, I rang up Madame Gabrielle at the Continental, swiftly explained the circumstances to her, and implored her to hurry to meet me, so that she could take off my hands the task of watching the “Italians.”

Purposely I set my steps toward the Continental, making a sharp turn from my direct road to do so, and my suspicion that I was the object of the “Italian’s” attention was instantly confirmed. He turned at once to follow me, though apparently with so little of set intention that no one whose suspicions had not been aroused would have dreamed that he was being shadowed by a clever hand at the game.

Ten minutes later a grave-looking Spanish lady, wearing an ample mantilla, came slowly towards me. I was eagerly on the look-out for Madame Gabrielle, but I confess that for a moment I never suspected that she and the Spanish lady were identical. Indeed it was not until she had attracted my attention by a slight but peculiar flip of the hand, which was one of our recognised private signals, that I realised who she was, so perfect was the disguise.

However, my course was easy enough now; all I had to do was to indicate the “Italian” to her, and I knew I could safely leave in her hands the task of finding out all there was to know about him.

I had crossed the road and the “Italian” was some fifty yards behind us. As Madame Gabrielle approached I turned down a side street, and, when I judged the “Italian” must be near the entrance, walked smartly round the corner to meet him. I had judged the distance well; we came into violent collision, and with every indication of helplessness that I could assume I fell headlong into the roadway.

Instantly the “Italian” was all helpfulness and apologies. He assisted me to rise and helped me to brush away some of the dust with which I was covered. Of course I could not, for this occasion at least, speak Italian, but the language of signs was sufficient, and at length I left him apparently much distressed, and started for the Ezcurra, limping with an ostentatious painfulness which I hoped would effectually convince my antagonist, firstly, that I was really hurt, and, secondly, that I had not the smallest suspicion of his real identity and object. We signalled good-bye with every appearance of cordiality.

I took good care not even to look round on my walk back to the hotel. I knew the “Italian” would be safely under the observation of Madame Gabrielle, and that I should get the information I wanted in good time. My spirits rose. I felt sure that at length I was on the right track.

Returning to the hotel, I volubly explained my dirty and dishevelled appearance in full hearing of a small crowd of idlers in the lounge. I did not know whether among them there might not be another agent of our enemies, and, by way of concealing my suspicions, I spoke warmly of the essentially Italian courtesy of my late antagonist. It came out afterwards that I had done a good stroke of work. The lounge did contain an enemy agent who was watching me, but so naturally was I able to speak that he actually reported that I had obviously not the smallest suspicion of the real calling of the mysterious “Italian.”

Until I received some word from Madame Gabrielle there was absolutely nothing that I could do, and I passed hour after hour in an inward fever of impotence and anxiety, though outwardly, I dare say, I was cool and unconcerned; one does not wear his heart upon his sleeve in the Secret Service! Dinner came and I ate with an appetite, well knowing that at any moment a call

might come which would tax my physical and mental powers to the uttermost.

Having finished my dinner, the big Swiss porter came into the room and handed me a note, remarking in French: "This has just been brought by a boy, monsieur."

Inside it I found a plain visiting-card of the size used by gentlemen. There was nothing else.

Here, indeed, was the call to action. That plain visiting-card was a signal from Madame Gabrielle that she was hot on the scent, but that either because she feared she might be under suspicion, or would not run the risk of her message falling into the wrong hands, she could not write a letter.

In any case it was an urgent call for urgent help. The hunt was up! Towards us, urged by the full power of her twin screws, a British liner was being driven at top speed by her giant engines; awaiting her, securely hidden in some sheltered spot I had yet to find, was one of the undersea assassins of our enemy. And the lives of two thousand men, women, and children were at stake. At last the hour for swift, dramatic action had come.

Certainly matters had now assumed a very critical aspect. I hurried out along the broad, tree-lined Paseo, where the moon was now shining brightly over the Bay of San Sebastian, to the Hotel Continental. Here the gold-laced concierge told me that Madame Tavernier had left about an hour before.

"Did she say where she was going?" I inquired.

"Yes, to Santander," replied the concierge; "the Hotel Europa she gave as her address, so that we might forward her letters; she said she had not expected to leave so soon."

The meaning of the visiting-card was now plain. Evidently the resourceful Madame Gabrielle had made some important discovery. She dared not communicate with me, but, of course, she knew I would make inquiries, and for this reason she had left her address with the hotel porter. But why had she gone to Santander? Cost what it might, I must find the answer to that question.

"What about the gentleman who was with her?" I asked the porter, making a blind shot to try to find out something.

“Gentleman?” he queried. “Madame was alone in the omnibus except for an Italian gentleman, who went to catch the same train to Bilbao.”

“An Italian gentleman!” I echoed. Here might be the key to the mystery. “He was about forty — pale, with a dark-cropped moustache and rather bald — eh?”

“Yes,” replied the man, “that is Signor Bruno.”

“What about his friend?” I asked.

“He left for Madrid by the early train this morning,” was the reply.

Matters were now becoming clear. Evidently the second “Italian” had cleared off, leaving “Signor Bruno” in charge of the developments of the plot. I had now to find “Bruno,” and through him to get on the track of “Fontan.”

Pleased with my success, I slipped a few pesetas into the willing hand of the concierge and left the hotel, directing my steps back to the Ezcurra. Why had Madame Gabrielle left for Santander when obviously San Sebastian was the real centre of the plot? The cryptic telegram I had received told us that. It was, in fact, a spy message sent from Holland, which had been intercepted by the French Secret Service and duplicated to me; the real message, of course, had been duly handed to “Fontan” at the post-office in San Sebastian.

How to get to Santander was now the problem. The last train had gone. But after half an hour’s deliberation I hit upon a plan which at least held out a good promise of success. I returned to my hotel and gave strict orders that, as I was not feeling well, I was on no account to be disturbed until noon the following day.

It was just two o’clock in the morning when I rose and exchanged my Dutch-made clothes for another suit so glaringly redolent of the American tourist that no one, seeing me in them, would have associated me for a moment with the demure and retiring Dutch theological student, whose absorbed interest in old churches had been the source of many a friendly joke at the hotel. A false moustache helped further in the metamorphosis, and when I looked at myself in the glass I felt tolerably certain that I should pass even a close scrutiny without arousing suspicion. Still, I meant to take no chances.

The hotel was now profoundly silent. Here and there a single electric light

glowed, left for the convenience of visitors who might be moving about late; but there was no night-porter, a fact which I had previously ascertained.

Carrying my boots in my hand, I stole noiselessly to a little side door, and, dropping a few spots of oil on the lock and bolts to obviate any sound of creaking, I opened it noiselessly and stepped out into the old-world courtyard. The moon was high and it was almost as light as day. But I had little fear of being observed; the courtyard could not be seen from the street, and at that hour there was little likelihood of anyone being about.

The hotel garage was my objective. I had noticed a day or two before that among the visitors staying at the house was a young fellow who possessed a swift and powerful "Indian" motor-cycle. I decided that the urgency of my business amply justified what might have looked like theft had I been detected.

Drawing from my pocket the bunch of skeleton keys which I usually carry, I succeeded after a few minutes of perplexity in opening the sliding door of the garage. With the help of my pocket flash-lamp, I picked out without difficulty the machine I wanted and filled up the ample petrol tank with spirit from one of the many tins lying about the garage. I was ready at last for my race to Santander.

After a hasty glance up and down the road to make sure no one was in sight, I wheeled the machine through the courtyard, under the old archway and out on to the broad roadway, closing and locking the door of the garage behind me to avoid suspicions being aroused. I knew the removal of the machine would probably not be noticed for a day, or perhaps two, as the young owner had gone off with a companion on a fishing excursion.

When I had reached some distance from the hotel I lit the head-lamp, started the machine, mounted and rode away.

From the map I had carefully committed my route to memory, and I let the powerful machine "all out." Travelling at considerably over fifty miles an hour, with the engine pulling as smoothly as a watch, I first went along the winding sea road, then away into the fertile valley of the Oria and by the village of Aguinaga, down to Zarauz, which was on the Biscayan beach again.

The early morning came, balmy and beautiful, as, covered with dust, I shot down the steep winding road into the chief centre of the life of Santander, that spacious

promenade known as “The Muelle,” with its luxuriant gardens, from which I could see the blue mountain ranges of Solares, Valnera, and Tornos beyond.

Once in the gardens, I dismounted, and, watching for an opportunity when I was unobserved, I wheeled the motor-cycle into some low bushes, where I abandoned it. Thence I strolled down to the dock, where in a narrow, unclean street I soon found a dealer in second-hand clothes, of whom I purchased a most unsavoury rig-out. It was evident that the man was well used to proceedings of this kind, and, as his business quite clearly depended upon his knowing how to hold his tongue if he were paid for it, I paid him generously, and was quite assured my secret would be safe with him. He took me into a dark little den at the rear of his stuffy shop, where he helped me into my disreputable disguise, adding here and there a skilful touch which showed me plainly that he was no novice at the business.

Arranging with him to keep my own clothes until I called again, I sallied forth, quite confident that I had effectually destroyed all traces of my identity, and evaded the men who had been watching me at San Sebastian. To further my plans I bought in the market a basket such as street hawkers carry and a quantity of oranges.

Having done this, I sought out a quiet corner, and, sitting down on the pavement, began eating some bread and olives I had bought, just as any other equally disreputable Spanish pedlar might have done. I could hardly help laughing at the incongruity of my surroundings — Gerald Sant, to whom pretty well every fashionable hotel in Europe was intimately familiar, taking his breakfast of bread and olives seated on the pavement in a Santander slum.

But my breakfast was only a part of the work I had to do. Taking a cigarette from my case, I carefully slit it open, threw away the tobacco, and wrote a message upon the paper. Then, rolling the thin scrap, I placed it within a quill toothpick, plugging the sharpened end with a scrap of orange peel. Afterwards I inserted the quill into the centre of one of the oranges, carefully covering up the puncture and drying it. Inside the quill was the translation, for Madame Gabrielle’s benefit, of the “Fontan” cable.

Then, in the guise of a poor fruit-seller, I sought out the hotel in the Calle Mendez where I knew that Madame Gabrielle had arrived. I knew, of course, that she would be eagerly on the look-out for me, and that, as she would guess I

should be disguised, she would station herself in some prominent place, where I could see her at once.

Evidently, however, she did not expect me so soon. No doubt she had looked up the trains, and, knowing that I must have missed the last one the previous night, would naturally conclude that I would arrive about midday. The stratagem of the bicycle had evidently not occurred to her.

I drifted slowly backwards and forwards in front of the hotel, and after a time had the intense satisfaction of seeing the “Italian,” Signor Bruno, come lazily out and seat himself in a comfortable chair in the ample porch. It was obvious that he was expecting someone, for his eyes constantly searched the long, straight roadway.

A moment later Madame Gabrielle, daintily attired in the latest Parisian mode and carrying a sunshade, strolled leisurely into the porch. She was accompanied by a lady, obviously Spanish, with whom she had no doubt scraped a breakfast-table acquaintance.

Despite the need for hurry, I could not help being amused at her evident failure to recognise me. Twice or three times I slouched past the hotel. The next time I caught her eye, and, as I made the almost imperceptible signal, I saw the answering flash of intelligence in her eyes.

“What lovely oranges!” I heard her say to her companion. “I really must have some.”

And she rose indolently and came down the steps to me. As if I had heard and understood nothing, I placed myself directly in her path, saying in a loud, whining voice in Spanish: “Buy some Naranjas, lady — do buy some. Very fine Naranjas.”

Taking out her purse, Madame Gabrielle handed me a coin, and, as she did so, swung her sunshade round so as to interpose it directly between the “Italian” and myself. With the coin came a tiny folded note, which passed so swiftly into my hands that there was no prospect of the “Italian” observing it.

“What beautiful fruit!” she said aloud; adding in a faint whisper: “Be near the fountain in the gardens in half an hour.”

“Thank you, lady,” I whined in Spanish in true hawker fashion, handing her the oranges. As I did so, I tapped one of them three times, taking care that she observed the action. It was enough for her swift intelligence.

The next moment, touching my battered hat in respect, I slouched off, my basket on my arm, while she, apparently a summer visitor, carried the fresh-cut fruit, each with a leaf attached, just as dozens of others were doing when out for a walk before luncheon.

I watched her return to the hotel, of course, to examine her oranges. Lazily drifting along the road, I made my way to the gardens, and was soon stretched indolently in the sunshine within easy sight of the great fountain. Under cover of my battered hat I read Madame Gabrielle’s tiny note. It had evidently been written to be ready for a hurried meeting, and ran:

“They will meet tonight on the coast road a mile out of the town near the big oak. Bruno and Fontan will be there at ten-thirty. The attempt is to be made shortly. I dare not risk speaking.”

But it was essential we should speak, and I had my plan cut and dried.

When Madame Gabrielle came in sight, I was startled to see the “Italian” following her. Could his suspicions have been aroused, I wondered? Hitherto Madame Gabrielle had been shadowing him; were the positions now reversed? I noticed she looked pale and anxious; it was evident something untoward had occurred.

Long before, we had taught ourselves to send messages in the Morse code by finger movements, the raising or dropping of a finger representing the dots and dashes of the code. Thus so long as we could see each other’s hands we could communicate rapidly and silently; failing direct sight, we had only to tap out the message. Gabrielle seated herself negligently on a seat and produced a book, which she read industriously, quite unconscious to all seeming of the disreputable fruit-seller lying asleep on the grass, his face shaded from the hot sun by his broad-brimmed hat. The “Italian,” in the meantime, had seated himself on a seat a few yards away.

Whether he suspected me I do not know; probably not. But beneath the brim of my hat I could see Madame Gabrielle’s delicate hand and arm flung carelessly across the back of the seat. Her fingers, screened from the Italian’s sight, rapidly

ticked out their message.

“I got your note; it confirms what I have found out. The attempt is to be made to-morrow night. Bruno has been talking with a dark, sailor-looking man who, I think, must be Fontan. I overheard them from the balcony outside their room. I suppose I must have made some sound, for Bruno came out hurriedly on to the balcony. He looked as if he could kill me, and ever since he has been following me. I dare not attempt to follow him when he leaves the hotel this evening. The arrangement may be a blind; you must watch him all you can. I will risk everything to get a message to you if I hear any more, but I am afraid I can do no good now.”

“You have done very well,” I signalled back. “Go to the hotel and get on the ‘phone to the British Consul. Tell him to recall Jeans by wireless at once for instant action. I shall stake everything on tonight. After that, go straight back to San Sebastian, and let it be clearly known in the hotel that you are going. We must throw Bruno off the scent.”

Madame Gabrielle signified that she understood, and soon after got up and moved listlessly away. She had no sooner turned the corner than the “Italian” rose and followed her. Of me he took no notice whatever, and apparently he had not the least suspicion that Madame Gabrielle and I had been in communication.

I was burning with impatience to be off, but I dared not hurry. The “Italian” was evidently no fool. I lay still, apparently asleep, but keenly on the look-out. A few minutes later the “Italian” suddenly returned; evidently he meant to make sure I had no sort of association with Madame Gabrielle. Had I foolishly got up at once as soon as she went, his suspicions would almost certainly have been aroused. But I lay still, seemingly asleep, and, after a scrutinising gaze at me, he turned away, obviously satisfied.

The course was clear now, always assuming that the rendezvous arranged between Bruno and the supposed Fontan was real and not pretended. But that I had to chance. As a matter of fact, the spot was well chosen for any business connected with the Huns’ submarine activities. It was in a lonely spot, the road ran near the edge of the cliffs, and the coast at that point was studded with deep coves where a lurking U-boat could lie concealed without much fear of detection.

During the afternoon I saw Madame Gabrielle leave for the station in the hotel omnibus, the “Italian” following in a cab. So anxious was he to make sure she had gone that, as I heard afterwards, he actually followed her to the train, and did not leave the station until after it had started. Probably his suspicions were lulled by the pretty little Frenchwoman thus leaving the field apparently clear for him; but, be that as it may, he later walked straight into our trap.

III Berlin’s Secret Code

Towards sundown I wandered along the coast-road for some three miles, until I caught sight of a great crooked tree, which stood remote from the road at the head of a narrow cleft, through which a steep track descended to the beach. I had very little doubt, when I had thoroughly examined the place, that it was an ideal spot for the Hun purposes. The pebbly beach sloped steeply into the water; it was evident that deep water came close in to the shore. The spot was far from any human habitation; the road was a lonely one, set back at this point at least a mile from the edge of the cliff. I knew that the superstitious Spaniards were not fond of being about the cliffs at night, and that if the U-boat pirates were really using the coast as a secret base, they would, if they took ordinary precautions, run very little risk of detection.

My first task was to find a hiding-place. After some deliberation I selected a thick clump of brushwood which grew about half a mile from the point at which the track from the beach rose to the top of the cliff. Lying down at full length, I felt satisfied that I could see without being seen, and, pulling out the excellent pair of night-glasses with which I had taken the precaution to equip myself, I prepared for my vigil.

Just as sunset was darkening into night I caught sight of two men coming along the road. Through my small pair of powerful glasses I instantly recognised one of them as the “Italian.” The other, no doubt, was Fontan. Their figures showed black and sinister in the last gleam of the sunlight. They were walking quickly, and Fontan, if indeed it was he, carried in his hand a well-filled sack.

As they drew near they left the road and made straight for the edge of the cliff, disappearing into the cleft almost beneath the very branches of the big tree. It was now or never for me, and, loosening my automatic in my pocket, I cast all prudence aside and raced at top speed for the cliff.

Arriving at the edge, I flung myself flat on my face and peered over. Below, to my intense gratification, I could see assembled on the sands a dozen sailors in German uniforms, while only a few yards from the shore lay a big German submarine, its conning-tower and fore and aft guns showing clear of the long grey hull, which lay almost awash. The crew were being exercised along the sands, while Fontan was handing to an officer a quantity of fresh vegetables, with a packet of letters and telegrams, from the sack. Close by, the “Italian” and another officer, evidently the captain of the U-boat, were in earnest talk.

The light was failing rapidly, and soon it became too dark to see more. A lantern twinkled on the beach, and I could plainly hear steps and voices ascending the rough path to the top of the cliff. It was essential I should hear more, therefore I took the desperate course. Swiftly climbing into the tree, I laid myself down at full length on a big branch which jutted out over the path.

Preceded by a sailor bearing a lantern, three men came up the path. Two of them I knew to be the “Italian” and the captain of the U-boat. The third was Fontan, at whom I particularly wanted to have a look, for something in his walk reminded me of someone I had failed definitely to recall.

As the sailor reached the top of the cliff he turned and swung the lantern so as to show the last few steps of the rugged path. Its rays fell for a second upon the face of Fontan, and I nearly fell from my perch with amazement. Willi Bernhard, by all that was wonderful! One of the Kaiser’s most expert spies, who was head of one of the departments of the Koniggratzerstrasse, posing in Santander as a humble boatman. No wonder I had failed to recognise him until I saw his face!

“No need for me to come any farther,” said the deep voice of the U-boat captain in German. “We shall lie here until midnight to-morrow, and will expect you at sundown with the latest instructions. I only want to make sure the others are ready at their stations. And then,” he added, with a cruel laugh, “good-bye, *Athabasca!*”

The *Athabasca* was the liner I had come out to save!

I gritted my teeth with rage at his brutal callousness, and when I thought of the two thousand or so lives dependent on the *Athabasca*’s safety I could barely restrain myself from emptying my revolver into his head. That, however, would have been merely suicide, so I bided my time.

The “Italian” and Bernhard, as I may as well call him now, wished the captain *au revoir* and started to walk briskly to Santander; the sailors returned to the shore. Once the way was clear I wasted no time. I am a good runner, but never in my life have I covered three miles as quickly as I did that summer night in my dash for Santander.

I was elated beyond measure. For I had quite obviously dropped right on to the submarine supply-base, the existence of which had for months been a practical certainty. And, further, I had discovered the identity of “Fontan,” the German spy who was acting as the “post office” of the U-boats, and supplying them with all necessities. It now remained only to smoke out the pirates’ nest and destroy the whole brood!

That cryptic telegram which was delivered to me at the Ezcurra in San Sebastian had been sent to Bernhard in the name of Fontan at the *poste restante* in San Sebastian and called for by the “Italian.” It was originally sent out by wireless, intercepted by the International Bureau, and retransmitted to me for my information and guidance. In the code of the maritime department of the German Secret Service at Kiel, when decoded it read:

“Fontan remains here.” (The following message is sent to Fontan at your *poste restante*.) “Goods marked C.X.B.” (the wireless call letters for the British liner *Athabasca*, from New Zealand, bound for London) “arrived” (meaning due to arrive) “fourteenth” (to-day was July 12th), “twenty-three cases” (twenty-three o’clock Continental time, in our time 11 p.m.). “Awaiting samples second quality” (“samples” in the spy code meaning submarines) “second quality” German “first quality” meaning British).

Thus the submarine commander was informed of the coming of the great liner and was lying in wait in the calm, secluded cove, ready to pounce out and sink the great ship with two thousand souls on board, including a large number of New Zealand troops.

Racing into Santander, I made for the British Consul’s house, presenting so disreputable a figure that it was only with the utmost difficulty that I secured admission to the Consul himself.

“Has *Jeans* arrived?” I asked breathlessly, and, hearing that he was on his way at full speed, I told the Consul what I had learned.

Clearly it would be touch and go, but we had a little time in hand. The submarine would not leave the cove until after midnight on the thirteenth♦to-day was the twelfth♦so as to be just in time to place herself across the path of the oncoming liner.

About seven o'clock next evening, lounging in the garish Cafe Suzio, with its noisy crowd, I saw a tall English traveller in grey tweeds saunter in. After he had swallowed a drink, I rose and went out, and he followed at once. It was the commander of the British submarine 85, and on receipt of my wireless he had come full speed to Santander. At that moment his boat was lying off the port, skilfully screened behind a big British tramp steamer that was being used as a decoy. He had come ashore, apparently from the tramp, but really from his own boat, which had submerged the moment he left it.

"Well, Sant," he said eagerly, "you've made a grand discovery. I got your wireless off Finisterre last night, and came here full speed. Wilson is outside Bilbao, and Matthews at Gijon, both waiting. I have sent out a message to the squadron, and we hope to make a big bag. But we'll get this friend of yours in the cove first, anyhow. You'll come, of course?"

I eagerly assented, and we went down to the water's edge, where the tramp steamer's boat was lying in charge of two men whose merchant jack rig-out hardly concealed the purposeful British bluejacket. We were soon on board the tramp. A few minutes later the submarine rose noiselessly to the surface, close alongside, and we went on board.

"Now for the cove," said Jeans, as we dropped below.

Crawling along dead slow in order that the noise of our propellers might not betray us to the enemy, we approached the cove. By this time it was dark. A mile from the cove, screened by a promontory of rock, we rose noiselessly to the surface. A collapsible Berthon boat, containing half a dozen armed men, put off to guard the approach to the beach, and once more we submerged and made for the cove, showing only six inches of our periscope above the rippling waves.

There was just enough moonlight for our purpose, and as we drew near we were able to make out the enemy submarine, lying just awash, and presenting a magnificent target. Very few of the crew were on shore; obviously they were getting ready to leave. We could make out the captain, walking up and down

with two men that we knew must be the “Italian” and Bernhard.

Jeans swung our ship slowly into position; the torpedo crew grouped themselves round the bow tube and we waited the exact moment. It was necessary that most of the crew should be on board, for our landing-party dared not risk a possible fight on Spanish soil, and if only one man escaped we should lose our chance of a big bag of the pirates, since a warning that the plot was discovered would at once be sent them by wireless.

At last the men began to go aboard. They were using a small boat which would hold only three men, and, as luck would have it, only the captain at length was left on the shore, talking to the “Italian” and Bernhard. The small boat, with only a single sailor in it, was being pulled ashore to fetch him when Jeans gave the single word “Fire!”

Our boat reeled slightly to the shock of the departing torpedo. At the range of a few hundred yards, under such circumstances, a miss was out of the question. A few seconds later a ponderous “boom!” blanketed by the waters, told us our torpedo had exploded and, gazing eagerly into the mirror of the periscope, I saw a blood-red flash as the enemy ship apparently flew to pieces in a confused column of spray and smoke. She must have been ripped open from end to end and, of course, disappeared instantly, with every soul on board.

“Now for the rest,” was Jeans’s laconic remark, as we swung out to the spot where we had put the landing-party ashore.

They were there almost as soon as we were, bringing with them the captain, Fontan, and the “Italian.” Dazed with the surprise and shock of the explosion, they had made no resistance to the rush of our men. The captain, indeed, had recovered himself sufficiently to throw into the sea a case of papers, but a sailor had dived and recovered it, and to our intense delight we found it gave details of the exact plans which had been made for the destruction of the *Athabasca*, with the precise points at which five successive U-boats were to lie in wait for her. This was luck indeed.

Soon we were on our way to intercept and destroy the first of the lurking Huns. Running at full speed on the surface, we kept our wireless busy, and soon had the satisfaction of knowing that our dispositions had been made to circumvent the enemy’s plots. Finally, nearing the scene of action, we submerged.

I need not here describe the tension of the hours which followed. Amid the steady hum of the machinery, Jeans was constantly busy, now scanning the surface of the sea through our periscope, now giving a watchful eye to every detail of the submarine's complicated machinery.

At last, just as the first grey streaks of dawn showed on the horizon, he called me to the periscope, and, reflected in the mirror, I saw faintly the thin plume of smoke from the funnels of the approaching liner.

We knew that somewhere in that zone an enemy submarine lay awaiting her prey.

For half an hour we were keenly on the alert, as we watched the approaching liner. The captain had been warned by wireless, and we knew there would be no lack of watchfulness on board. We could imagine the gun-crew standing at their stations, every eye strained for the first sight of the enemy.

It came at last. Almost directly between us and the liner a German U-boat thrust her periscope out of the water and launched a torpedo. We saw the big liner swing suddenly to her swiftly ported helm, and we heard afterwards that, owing to her steersman's promptness, the torpedo missed her bow by not more than a few feet.

Just as the liner turned the submarine broke water why, I never could understand. Probably her commander was too supremely certain that his shot had gone home, or else some error in navigation had brought him to the surface earlier than he intended, for obviously it was his duty to remain submerged until he was sure his work was done.

Be that as it may, it was his last mistake. As the grey whale-back of the submarine rose above the water the gun of the *Athabasca* spoke. The first shot was over, the second short. Before the third was fired we had also bobbed up suddenly, and the U-boat found herself the target of two antagonists.

There could be only one end to such a fight. Almost simultaneously the third shot of the *Athabasca* and our first rang out, and both shells found their mark. One struck the conning-tower fair and square, blowing it clean away; the other crashed into the upper part of the hull, tearing a huge gap, and in a few seconds the enemy vessel had sunk with all hands, leaving only a flood of oil on the heaving surface of the sea to show where she had disappeared.

Next day I was on the Sud Express for Paris, while Madame Gabrielle, whom I had recalled by wire, followed me a few hours later.

From Hecq in Paris I learned the full sequel of our adventure. No news of the affair ever leaked out to the public. But it appears that, owing to the discovery of the plans from Kiel in possession of the submarine's captain and our wireless messages, French destroyers and British submarines, operating together, had within twelve hours cleaned out the pirates' nest, sinking four more submarines and taking nearly sixty prisoners, most of whom are now behind barbed wire in Wales.

IV The Hidden Hand in Britain

"Ah! my dear Hecq — you have now set me a very difficult task — very difficult indeed!" I found myself saying a few weeks later, after I had mastered, with a good deal of trouble, a formidable dossier which had been laid before me by the astute chief of the French Secret Service, now promoted, by the way, to be chief of the International Secret Service Bureau of the Allies.

Though the time had been short since my return from Spain, much had happened. At length "unity of command" in contra-espionage work had been realised as an absolute essential for securing a definite mastery over the incessant plottings of the Huns, and, with the cordial goodwill of all, Armand Hecq — whose brilliant abilities had given him a commanding position — had been unanimously chosen for the much coveted post.

"I admit it is extremely difficult," said the short, grey-bearded, alert little man, knocking the ash from his excellent cigar, leaning back in his cane deck-chair, and regarding me with an amused smile. "It is so difficult that I confess I do not see my way at all clearly. For that reason I have put the matter before you."

"There can be no doubt about the seriousness of the affair," I said. "The French Service have done very well so far, and so have our friends in London. We are quite well aware that during the past few weeks there has been an amazing recrudescence of German espionage, both here and in England, and even Whitehall is seriously alarmed. There is good reason for believing that working drawings of the new British trench-mortars have, by some means, been smuggled over to Germany. How they got out is a complete mystery, for the control at all the ports has been stricter than ever. Yet van Ekker has managed to

get through to Holland a message from Berlin which leaves very little doubt as to the fact. It is undeniably serious, for the new mortar is a wonderful production, and I happen to know that it was intended to be one of the grand surprises in the Allies' spring offensive."

Hecq grunted, and I paused. Then I went on saying:

"We have a pretty good idea of the traitor in the department concerned, and he is now safely under lock and key. Unfortunately the mischief was done before he was even suspected, and the closest inquiries have failed to unearth any of his associates who would be regarded as in the slightest degree doubtful. It looks very much like a case of a hitherto thoroughly reliable man yielding to a sudden and overpowering temptation, while the real culprit — the man who pulled the strings — remains undiscovered. No doubt Count Wedell and his precious propaganda department have a first-class man at work, and they have so cleverly covered up the tracks that the method of their latest coup remains a mystery. It is perfectly obvious that the subterranean work of Germany is even now proceeding in France, Italy, and Great Britain."

"Exactly, mon cher Sant. And you must take this particular matter in hand at once, and try to discover at least one of the fingers of what your good friends across the Channel call so appropriately 'the Hidden Hand.' For myself, I feel quite sure that at last, after much seeking, we have alighted on the source of the whole affair, so far as England and France are concerned."

Our conversation had taken place at Armand Hecq's house out at St. Germain, beyond Paris. I had come post-haste from Lausanne, where I had been engaged with Poiry — an exagent of the Paris Surete — upon another matter. An urgent telegram from Hecq had warned me that the new business was most important, hence I had lost no time in answering his summons.

It was a warm afternoon, and we were seated out on the terrace overlooking the pretty garden, which was the hobby of the most remarkable and resourceful secret agent in all Europe.

To outward seeming Armand Hecq was a prosperous Parisian financial agent, whose offices in the Boulevard des Capucines, opposite the Grand Hotel, were visited by all sorts of persons of both sexes. None, excepting those "in the know," suspected that these handsome offices, with the white-headed old

conciierge wearing the ribbon of 1870, were in reality no mere financial establishment, but the headquarters of the international espionage of the Allies. None realised that the crowds of "speculators" who flocked thither in the pursuit of ever-elusive wealth, included among them dozens of men and women who day by day carried their lives in their hands in their never-ending warfare with the unscrupulous and resourceful agents of Germany. None dreamed that to the busy staff finance was a mere side-line; that their real interest was not the daily fluctuations of the Bourse, but the thread of Hun intrigue which ran through all the crowded life of the gay city, and was nowhere stronger than in the department of finance.

"Now, Sant," said Hecq abruptly, after we had sat silent for a few minutes while I ran over in my mind the essential facts of the new and tangled case. "You have seen the photographs and the dossier, and you understand the position. What is your opinion?"

"There can be but one," I answered leisurely. "Before the war, Jules Cauviri, of Issoire, in Auvergne, was a struggling corn-merchant. He has since, in some unaccountable way, blossomed out into a man of wealth, and has purchased an important estate with money which has come from some mysterious source. Constant payments appear to reach him from a firm of motor-engineers somewhere in England.

In his sudden prosperity he has bought a villa at Mentone, where he lives during the winter with his wife and family, and he is often seen at the tables at Monte Carlo. Among those who have stayed with him at the Villa des Fleurs was the Russian Colonel Miassoyedeff, who was recently hanged as a spy of Germany. There can be only one conclusion from all this."

"Ah! my friend. I see you have mastered the essentials," said Hecq approvingly. "Now Cauvin and all his friends are under the strictest surveillance; the question is how we are to secure evidence to convict him of the espionage he is undoubtedly concerned in. We can arrest him, of course, at any moment; he has no chance whatever of getting away. Every letter he sends or receives is opened and photographed, yet, up to the present, he has been too clever for us. If he were put on trial for espionage to-morrow, not even his friendship with Miassoyedeff would prevent him from being acquitted. We have no evidence against him whatever, beyond the fact of his sudden wealth, and that, even in these times, is not enough." And Hecq looked at me with an appeal in those soft,

strange eyes of his. I could see that the case of Cauvin presented itself to him as supremely important, and that it must be solved if we were ever to grapple successfully with the mysterious, deadly influence whose workings we could feel and trace all around us, but the real wielder of which appeared constantly to slip through our fingers.

“I quite understand you,” I said, sipping the little glass of Cointreau he had offered me. “There is only one thing to be done. We must find that finger of the Hidden Hand in England.”

“Exactly, my dear Sant,” exclaimed my chief, with a quick gesture of approval. “We seem to be losing ground day by day. Why? At all costs the position must be retrieved. You will want Madame Soyez to help you. Let me see; she is at present in England. I sent her across only a week ago to make some inquiries. Excuse me a moment while I speak to Guillet,” and he left me to go to the telephone.

Monsieur Guillet was his private secretary, who controlled his “financial office” in the Boulevard des Capucines.

A few minutes later he returned, saying: “Madame is to-day at the Midland Grand Hotel in Manchester. Presuming that you wish to meet her, I have told Guillet to telegraph, asking her, if possible, to meet you to-morrow night in London.”

“No,” I said at once. “That won’t do. We cannot begin to work in England yet. I must learn a lot more about this interesting person Cauvin, who has so mysteriously acquired a fortune. Then we will begin to probe matters across the Channel. Recall Madame Gabrielle here and we will set to work. But it will be extremely difficult. The investigation of the Hidden Hand in England has always met with failure, so far as the principals are concerned. We have caught one or two of the minor tools, but the master-mind has always eluded us, although the British Secret Service is most excellent.”

“Ah, mon cher Sant, there I agree most cordially with you. The world little dreams of the astuteness and resourcefulness of our colleagues at Whitehall. One day it will know — and it will be greatly surprised. Very well, I will order Madame Gabrielle to come direct to Paris.”

Again he rose, and during his absence I once more glanced at the formidable

dossier concerning the wealthy Jules Cauvin, who was so well-known in the gay night life of Paris, whose smart wife was one of the leaders in the social world, and who had recently established a hospital out at Neuilly, where his wife and daughter worked unceasingly on behalf of the wounded.

According to one report, the suspected man was in the habit of entertaining certain high officials of the State at his fine house close to the Etoile, and he had several bosom friends in the Admiralty. Such was the present position of a man who only five years ago was a struggling corn-merchant in rural Auvergne.

I lit a cigarette and reflected. By the time Hecq had returned I had hit upon the rough outlines of a plan.

“First of all,” I said, “you must call off the surveillance on Cauvin. I must have a free hand in the affair, and the Surete must not interfere in any way. If Cauvin gains the slightest suspicion we shall certainly fail. Secondly, I must have a good man to assist me. Aubert did extremely well in the case of Marguerite Zell, the dancing woman who came from The Hague; I will have him. I shall leave Paris this evening. Tell Madame Gabrielle to come home and wait till I return, and to hold herself in readiness with Aubert.”

Hecq nodded his assent, but did not ask me a single question. That was what I liked most about him; he never asked one how he intended to proceed. His trust, when it was given, was complete; he expected results, and did not bother about mere details. Yet, when his assistance was asked at a difficult point, he was always completely at the service of his employees. He knew I had no particular affection for the Surete, because in one important case they had bungled, and brought me to disaster which nearly cost me my life. So he merely shook hands and wished me good luck.

Twenty-four hours later I arrived at the Hotel de la Poste, in Issoire, a dull, remote little town in Auvergne, and next morning set about making inquiries regarding Jules Cauvin. First of all, I looked up the entry of his birth at the Prefecture, which showed that he was the son of the village postman of Champeix, seven miles from Issoire. I found out also that his father had been imprisoned for seven years for thefts of letters.

It was necessary to make many inquiries without arousing suspicion, therefore I was compelled to spend several days at my task. I made some interesting

discoveries, for naturally the entire neighbourhood was familiar with Cauvin's rise to wealth, and he had been put under that microscopic observation and discussion which is so marked a feature of provincial life everywhere, but especially in France.

I chanced upon a retired butcher named Demetz, in whose debt Cauvin had been to the extent of nearly two thousand francs. Demetz had been on the point of suing for the money when, to his intense surprise, Cauvin called one day with a bundle of thousand-franc notes in his hand, and threw out three, saying gleefully: "The extra thousand is for interest, my dear friend. I invented an improvement in automobile engines a year ago and patented it. A big firm in England has taken up my invention, and my fortune is made."

Naturally enough, the retired butcher had been keenly interested in Cauvin's sudden wealth, and had tried to question him about it. But the postman's son was too wily to be drawn. He declared that the invention was a secret, that it would revolutionise the motor trade, and that the English syndicate which had bought it meant to spring it upon the market as a complete surprise.

I soon found out that the man Cauvin was not popular. True, he flung his money about, and there were few local institutions which had not benefited by his largesse. But there is no population in the world so suspicious as the French provincial, and it was evident that the ex-postman's son had entirely failed in his prosperity to win either the affection or the confidence of those who had known him in his earlier and humbler days.

Demetz voiced the prevailing suspicion. "Where does his money come from, monsieur?" he asked me. "From a motor invention — bah! What does Jules Cauvin know about motors? He had hardly ever been in one before he grew so suddenly rich. There is something mysterious about it all." But it was evident that even Demetz had not the least inkling of the real truth, and, of course, I did not breathe a syllable of it to him.

The matter was of extreme urgency, and I did not allow the grass to grow under my feet. I had promised Doris to spend a week with her in Worcestershire, but this was impossible. I knew, however, that she had long wished for a trip to Mentone, so I sent her a wire, asking her to come with her mother and meet me there. A few hours after I got the reply I wished for, and the following afternoon I alighted upon the long platform at Mentone. Two days later I was joined at my

hotel by Doris and her mother.

In Mentone, of course, my objective was the Villa des Fleurs. I particularly wanted to have a good look round the interior of that interesting house. Cauvin, of course, was away, and the house was shut up, but I learned that it was being looked after by an old woman, the wife of the gardener, and accordingly I hired a fiacre and, with Doris as my companion, drove out to the Villa des Fleurs.

On the Cote d'Azur the weather was stifling. Driving up the white, winding road of Castellar, we found the olives and aloes dry and dusty, and the land parched and brown. The Riviera is not gay in the dog-days. At last we arrived at the Villa, a great, recently built house of the flamboyant, new art style, its green shutters closed, and the whole place silent and deserted in the burning sun. Roses and geraniums ran riot everywhere, but the gardens were kept spick and span, as became the winter pied-a-terre of a wealthy man.

I posed as an Englishman who wished to view the Villa, with the object of becoming its tenant next winter, having heard from a friend of Monsieur Cauvin that he might wish to let it. Doris, I assured the old gardener, a white-bearded man in a big straw hat and blue apron, was my sister. He took the bait readily enough, and handed me over to the care of his wife, by whom we were conducted over the house.

The house was most luxuriously furnished, and it was evident that popular rumours, for once, had not exaggerated Cauvin's wealth. Everything was in splendid taste and bore the unmistakable cachet of a famous Paris firm of experts. Cauvin, evidently, was no fool; he had committed none of the absurdities of the average nouveau riche, but had wisely given experienced men carte blanche. The result was a mingling of luxury and good taste which certainly could not have been expected from the son of a village postman.

V The Perfumed Card

We passed from room to room, chatting freely with the old Frenchwoman, who garrulously told me everything I wanted to know, and showed not the least reluctance to discuss her master and his affairs.

I had previously warned Doris to be on the look-out for anything of interest, and, pleased with the idea of helping me, she was keenly on the alert. I was soon to have good reason to bless the lucky inspiration which had led me to fetch her to Mentone at a time when most people prefer to give it a wide berth.

After visiting a number of rooms, we came at last to the front entrance, and the aged housekeeper seemed to think we were leaving. But I had not yet caught sight of Cauvin 's private room, and I knew that unless I saw that my journey would be fruitless.

"It is a very nice house," I said to our guide, "and the gardens are beautiful. But I have much writing to do, and there does not seem to be any room which would serve well as a study."

She hesitated obviously. "Well," she said slowly, "there is monsieur's private room, but it is locked. If monsieur desires it, I will fetch the key."

"I might as well see it," I said, as carelessly as I could. "I must have some private den of my own," I went on.

The old dame shuffled off for the key, and I gave Doris a special hint to keep her eyes wide open. When the old woman returned she led us directly to Cauvin's private room, a good-sized apartment, furnished something after the pattern of the library of the ordinary English house. I noticed immediately that it had double doors; evidently Cauvin had good reasons for making sure that there should be no eavesdropping when he was at home. Leading from it was a large salon, upholstered in pale blue silk, and the old woman passed into this in order to open the sun shutters and admit the light.

In the window of the library was a big American roll-top desk, which stood open and was rather dusty. The green blotting-pad remained just as the master of the house had left it, and near it lay a pile of miscellaneous and dusty-looking papers.

I was glancing round when I was startled by a faint, gasping sob, and, looking round, saw with alarm that Doris had dropped into a chair, apparently faint. The old woman had rushed to her assistance.

“It is nothing ♦ only the heat,” murmured Doris faintly. “Please get me a glass of water.”

The old woman hurried away, and, much concerned, I bent over Doris. I had no idea that her illness was anything but real, and I was surprised when she said crisply but quietly, “Now is your chance.”

Then I realised her purpose and began a hurried examination of the desk, keeping my ears open for any sound of the old woman’s return. But I could find nothing. Evidently Cauvin left little to chance. The drawers of the desk were not even locked, and I soon concluded that I had drawn a blank, and that the key to the mystery I was bent on solving must be sought elsewhere. Of course I was not surprised. It was not in the least likely that Cauvin would leave incriminating documents in his winter quarters, but in the work upon which I was engaged it would never do to miss the opportunity that might be afforded by the momentary carelessness which is the ever-besetting peril of even the cleverest of rogues. As events proved, we were to learn once again the truth of the old adage that no man can be wise at all times.

When the old lady returned with water Doris soon “recovered,” and assured the volubly sympathetic dame that she was quite herself again. As we stood for a moment saying farewell, her quick eye caught something which I had overlooked.

“Why,” she said, “here is an invitation to a wedding in England!” And she picked up from a small side table, where it lay in a china bowl, a card printed in silver ink — an invitation, as she said, to a wedding, and printed in English.

“Has Monsieur Cauvin many English friends?” I asked the old Frenchwoman, hoping that something useful might slip out.

“Non, monsieur,” she replied. “I do not think so; I have never seen English letters come, and you are the first Englishman who has ever been here.”

I glanced at the card with an interest I took care to conceal. It had been issued six months before by the brother of the bride, a certain Agnes Wheatley, and invited

“M. et *Mme.* Cauvin” to be present at her marriage to Captain James Easterbrook, of the Royal Fusiliers, at St. Mary’s Church, Chester. The address given for the reply was “118, Whitefriars, Chester” — an address which I took early opportunity of scribbling upon my shirt-cuff.

Suddenly Doris, who had taken the card from my hand, raised it to her nostrils and sniffed at it. “Why,” she said, “it is scented. I never saw an English wedding card scented before.” And she sniffed again and handed the card to me. I raised it to my nostrils and decided that the odour was either that of lemon-scented verbena or the old-fashioned stag-leaved geranium. The scent was fast disappearing, and it was evident, from the age of the card, that it must have been very pungent when fresh.

Small things mean much in our profession, and it struck me at once that Doris’s discovery might be decidedly important. Here we had a perfectly innocent-looking invitation to a wedding in England, printed in quite the ordinary English style, and, judging from the type employed, evidently the work of an English printer. Yet the card, found by chance in the house of a foreign suspect, showed a variation from English social customs which Doris, woman-like, had instantly detected. The fact of the card being scented, had I been alone, would certainly not have struck me as being of any peculiar significance; very few men, I am certain, would have given it a second thought. Yet the trivial circumstance was to be the means of leading us finally towards our goal.

“Are you sure they never perfume wedding cards in England?” I asked Doris.

“Absolutely,” she replied. “I have never heard of such a thing. The card is of excellent quality, and, judging from the fact that the bridegroom is a military man, the parties must be of fairly good social circles, in which any departure from the accepted custom in such things would be regarded as “bad form.”

“Well,” I thought, “it may be important.” At the same time I realised that the card might have lain in contact with a scented handkerchief, and thus absorbed part of the odour. As against this was the fact that the scent was not a common one. I decided in my own mind that the matter might be worth looking into, and, when the old custodian’s back was turned, took the liberty of slipping the card into my pocket.

Soon after, having learnt all I could about Cauvin and his abode, we left the Villa

des Fleurs, and, giving the old woman a handsome tip, returned to Mentone. The same evening I left for Marseilles, Doris and her mother remaining behind for a day or two before returning to England.

Somehow I could not dismiss the subject of the perfume from my mind; why, I cannot exactly tell, for I could not see precisely the bearing of the card on the problem I had to solve. Was the perfume verbena or scented geranium, and had the card any special significance?

Next day, in Marseilles, I entered the shop of one of the leading perfumers in the Cannebiere, and asked the young lady assistant whether she could identify the perfume for me.

“Certainly, monsieur,” she said without hesitation; “that is geranium.”

“Are you quite sure,” I asked, “that it is not verbena?”

“Monsieur shall decide for himself,” was the ready reply, and the girl at once fetched samples of both perfumes. A single test was enough to show that she was correct. And then, recognising the purpose of the card, though she could not speak English, she practically duplicated Doris’s remark. “Is it not unusual, monsieur, to scent a wedding card?”

That set me thinking furiously. It was quite possible that Doris might have made a mistake about a point of social etiquette. But here was a young Frenchwoman corroborating her in quite a dramatic fashion.

“It is unusual; I suppose they are peculiar people,” I replied as I left.

It is one of the penalties of contra-espionage work that one becomes almost morbidly interested in the seemingly trivial. One of the first lessons to be learnt is that nothing is so small that it can be safely neglected. There were, it was obvious, many ways by which the card might have become accidentally impregnated with the perfume. But my intuitive suspicions grew ever stronger, and at last I found myself convinced that there was “something in it.”

In one particular, at any rate, the card was of first-rate importance. Try as we would, we had failed entirely to connect Cauvin with anyone in England. We were morally certain that he must be receiving messages and money in some subterranean way, but it was certainly not through the post, and up to the present

we had failed to find, among his big list of acquaintances and friends, anyone whom we could reasonably suspect of being in touch with the Hidden Hand across the Straits of Dover. But there were many possible channels of communication through neutral countries, and obviously we could not stop them all.

Now, with the aid of the wedding card, it seemed possible, always assuming the card to be genuine, that I might be able to locate one person at least in England who was upon extremely friendly terms with our wealthy suspect. That chance, at any rate, whether the perfume meant anything or not, I was resolved not to miss.

Treachery was rife everywhere. In Russia, in Italy, in Roumania, in Greece, and in other countries, men of apparently impeccable reputation were one after another being unmasked in their true characters of agents of the enemy, and were paying the penalty of their perfidy. In France several first-class scandals of this kind had recently absorbed the attention of the public. That England had hitherto been comparatively free from any of these causes celebres was due, as I well knew, not to the absence of culprits, but to the lazy British good nature, which, coupled with the apathy of men in high places who had always laughed to scorn the very idea of the German spy in England, refused to look unpleasant facts in the face unless they became unduly obtrusive. And the picked men of the Hun spy bureau could be trusted not to make themselves conspicuous!

The great Hun octopus does not advertise its presence. It puts its faith in the powerful god Mammon, always sure of finding willing victims, and his chief disciple, Blackmail. Some day or other I may be able to tell the story in more detail; it will certainly be of absorbing interest. At present, however, it must give way to the exigencies of the war situation. The Germans would be only too glad to learn just how much we know; the British public would probably explode into a blaze of indignation if they once fully realised the supine attitude of their rulers to the ever-present and ever-growing menace of the German spy in their midst.

VI In The "Personal" Column

I had a good deal to do before I could leave for England.

From Marseilles I left for St. Etienne and Chartres, in both of which towns Jules Cauvin had been known in pre-war days. But little additional information which

was of value could I pick up, though I was specially struck by the fact that all who knew him laughed at the bare idea of his having blossomed out into a motor expert. They all seemed equally convinced on this point. One man even ventured the suggestion that, if Cauvin was indeed making huge sums of money from a motor invention, he must have stolen the idea from someone else.

“And, believe me, monsieur,” ejaculated the voluble Frenchman, “he would not be above doing so. Jules Cauvin an inventor! Phew! he is too lazy; he never did any work if he could help it.”

However, as I was tolerably sure in my own mind that Cauvin was being handsomely paid for services of quite another kind, this did not help me much.

At length, after a journey of a week, during which time I spent only one night in bed, I found myself late one afternoon back in Paris, chatting with my colleagues, Madame Gabrielle Soyez and Henri Aubert, in the former’s cosy little flat au troisieme, in the Boulevard Pereire. To both I gave certain very definite instructions. To the elegant little Frenchwoman I added:

“You will proceed to the Grosvenor Hotel in London, and from there will keep the surveillance I have indicated. Remain there until you hear from me. Report progress frequently — at least every other day — in the personal column of the *Times*.”

I could scarcely refrain from smiling as I turned from the vivacious Frenchwoman — a Parisian in every detail of her chic appearance — to Henri Aubert, who was to be our colleague in the undertaking we had in hand. Aubert was a sad-faced, rather melancholy looking middle-aged man, with a face from which every shred of intelligence seemed to have vanished. He looked, indeed, exactly like one of those middle-class nonentities, colourless and featureless, who, by the mysterious workings of the mind of the great god Democracy, manage to get themselves elected as municipal councillors, or by superhuman endeavour rise to the position of advocate and never do any good. But behind his unpromising exterior, which, in fact, was one of his chief assets, since it practically freed him from any possibility of suspicion, was a keen intelligence, trained in every detail of our craft, a patience that knew no wearying on the trail, and a judgment which closed like a steel trap on the essential factor in a complicated situation, and, once having secured a hold, never let go. I knew him well and esteemed him highly, and he possessed the entire trust of the astute

Armand Hecq, a trust difficult to win, but, once won, fully and freely given.

To Aubert I explained the situation as fully as I could, and, though I knew him to be a model of circumspection, I ventured on a hint of the extreme care and discretion necessary in the delicate affair if we were to succeed in tracing the source of Cauvin's mysterious rise to sudden wealth. He listened to me with a ghost of a smile on his thin lips, but he was evidently piqued.

"Perhaps, Monsieur Sant, someone has been telling you I am a confirmed babbler?" he said dryly; and I laughed; the idea of Aubert "babbling" had its humorous aspect.

"I think we understand each other, Monsieur Aubert," I said. "I don't mean to cast any reflections on your discretion. But you know the people we have to deal with."

"Quite well, monsieur," replied Aubert, with a real smile this time. "We have a difficult job before us. They have a dangerous gang over in England just now. Pierre Gartin was murdered there only last week shot in a street row unquestionably got up for the occasion. Of course the assassin escaped in the crowd. I think we had better take our revolvers." He spoke as coolly as though his revolver were his umbrella.

I was startled. Pierre Gartin was one of the most capable men we had, and I knew he had been engaged on a piece of work very similar to that which we had in hand. In my absence I had not heard of his death.

"No, I had not heard," I replied. "But I agree with you that our revolvers might be useful."

Aubert's news told me that our Hun antagonists must have some very big plan in hand. Even the most desperate of spies draws the line at murder, unless he finds himself in an impasse with no other way out. This is not, of course, from any special reluctance to taking the life of an enemy, but simply as a matter of self-preservation. For we are so peculiarly constituted that we tolerate calmly the work of pestiferous agents whose activities are a greater peril to the community than a dozen murders would be, while the killing of a single man brings a hornets' nest about the murderer's ears. I knew therefore, that since the Huns had gone so far as to "remove" Gartin, they must be engaged in work of supreme importance, and must have been quite aware that he was hot on their trail. Truly

we had an interesting prospect before us. But we were all tolerably well used to danger, and I do not think it affected any of us.

“Only last night,” said Aubert, “Cauvin entertained Bonnier, of the Admiralty, and no doubt he learned something from him. I have found out that he has been lending Bonnier a good deal of money. Bonnier has recently got mixed up with a fast set, and he has been spending a great deal more money than his income warrants. When people of that kind begin to consort with rogues of Cauvin’s stamp it usually means only one thing.”

“No doubt that is true enough,” I replied; “but for the present we must take even the risk of leaving Bonnier alone. I want absolute evidence that Cauvin’s money comes from Germany, even though he actually gets it from a secret source in England. It is not enough for me to prove either that Bonnier is selling secrets or that Cauvin is buying them. I want to prove that Cauvin’s money is German, and I am going to do it. Bonnier can wait; if we get Cauvin we are tolerably sure to obtain sufficient evidence to lay Bonnier by the heels at any time. In fact, we can remove him quietly as soon as Cauvin is out of the way. I shall leave for England to-morrow.”

This I did, and twenty-four hours later I was in London. I decided first to investigate Cauvin’s supposed motor invention, and made my way to the office of a well-known patent agent in Chancery Lane. He had done some business before for me and greeted me warmly. I knew him so thoroughly that I did not hesitate to tell him exactly what I was after.

“But, my dear Sant,” he said, “if this supposed invention is being kept as a secret to stagger the motoring world, it is not likely to have been patented yet by either Cauvin or anyone else. Depend upon it, if there is anything in it, it is being manufactured secretly, and will not be patented until it is absolutely ready for the market. To patent it now would simply be setting every motor expert in the country at work on similar lines. You know the patent lists are watched with the keenest scrutiny. My clerk is looking into the matter, and we shall soon know whether Cauvin has patented anything.”

This was a surprise for me. I could not, of course, however much I might suspect him, absolutely rule out of my calculations the possibility that even Cauvin might have hit upon some lucky idea, as so many inventors have done, without knowing much of the technicalities of the subject. I did not forget that the safety-

pin was the invention of a lazy workman. And I knew that if I took any active steps against Cauvin and made a mistake if by some miraculous chance his sudden wealth was honestly acquired the consequences would be serious.

“Well,” I said, when we had been assured that no patent of any kind had been taken out by Cauvin, “what am I to do? I can’t go to every big motor engineer in England and ask him if he is manufacturing a secret device invented by Jules Cauvin.”

My friend thought for a few moments. “I think you had better see L,” he said at last. “If there is anything big in hand some kind of whisper of it is sure to have got about, and he would be the first to hear. I will telephone him at once; we shall catch him in his office on the Viaduct.”

A few minutes later we were in Holborn in L’s office; he was one of the magnates of the motoring world. I explained the position.

“You can make your mind easy on that point,” he said emphatically. “There is nothing going in the trade to-day big enough to produce the amount of money your man is evidently receiving. If there were, I must have heard of it; it could not be kept secret. You remember the Marx carburettor? Well, we knew for six months that it was coming, though every effort was made to keep it secret. What we did not know was the exact secret; but you know how it took the market by storm.”

This, even though it were only negative evidence, seemed to establish conclusively the fact that Cauvin’s money, whatever might be its source, was not derived from the motor trade. I made up my mind that this much at least was certain.

Next day I travelled down to old-world Chester, where I very speedily discovered that there was in Whitefriars no house numbered 118, and no trace of any person named Wheatley, while the aged vicar of St. Mary’s knew nothing of the marriage of “Captain James Easterbrook.”

Everything was fictitious — everything, that is, except the silver-printed wedding card and the clinging perfume of stag-leaved geranium.

What did the bogus card indicate? Why had Jules Cauvin’s unknown correspondent gone to the trouble of having it printed? And why, in defiance of

all social custom, had it been scented with such a perfume as that of the stag-leaved geranium? I felt tolerably sure that here lay the key of the mystery, and that when I laid my hand on the sender of that mysterious card I should be very near indeed to the knowledge of the real source of the strange sequence of events which had raised the good-for-nothing son of an obscure French postman to a dazzling position in the world of society.

Such was the problem I had to solve. And the key to it was just one bogus wedding card impregnated with the slowly dying odour of geranium. I cursed my luck as I reflected on the magnitude of the issues at stake and the paucity of the tools with which I had to work. For if “Captain James Easterbrook” was unknown in Chester, the home of his supposed bride, what was my chance of penetrating his disguise? Yet, somehow or other, we must succeed. That Cauvin was receiving money from England I was absolutely convinced, and I was determined to take this chance — the best we had had — of locating the real men behind the Hidden Hand in England.

Next day I left Chester by a very early train for London. When we reached Rugby I bought a copy of the *Times*, and the first thing that caught my eye was a cryptically worded message at the head of the personal column. It conveyed to me the startling news that Madame Gabrielle had been recognised by some alien agent of whom she was highly suspicious, had left the Grosvenor Hotel in her alarm, and had returned to Paris!

VII The Elusive Van Rosen

Evidently something very serious had happened.

My first impulse was to hasten to the Grosvenor Hotel, engage a room there, and try to discover something of the cause which had brought about Madame Gabrielle's sudden flight. Perhaps my anxiety for her safety operated more powerfully than I ought to have allowed. In our business personalities are nothing; it is the end that counts.

A moment's reflection showed me that in taking this course I should simply be playing into the enemy's hands. I was too well known. I hoped that my presence in England was not suspected by the German agents, and if I ventured to stay at the Grosvenor they would certainly very soon have me under close observation.

By using the official telephone between London and Paris I managed to get into communication with Madame Gabrielle at her flat in the Boulevard Pereire, and soon learnt the reason for her flight. Van Rosen had discovered her, and was watching her closely.

Here, indeed, was an antagonist worthy of my steel! I had long known — and so far as his abilities went, had respected — van Rosen as one of the cleverest agents of the Koniggratzerstrasse. He was able to pose as an Englishman — a rare accomplishment in a German — for he had been educated at Haileybury, and had been in England off and on since his youth. He was now living in a north-western suburb, where he posed as Mr. George Huggon-Rose, a solicitor who had retired from practice. Only British apathy made this possible. A moment's investigation would have shown that the man could not have been what he pretended, for no such retired solicitor as Mr. George Huggon-Rose was known to the Law Society.

As a matter of fact, it was through this very slip on his part that I had "spotted" van Rosen. We had suddenly lost sight of him a year or two before, and try as we would — for we knew that where-ever he might be he would be dangerous — we could not locate him. The accident which led to his discovery was curious. I had been spending a few days in North London, and one morning stopped at the railway bookstall to buy a paper. As I approached the stall a tall, gentlemanly looking man, who had been chatting with the clerk, turned away and entered the train. Something about him struck me as strangely familiar.

“Who is that gentleman?” I asked the man at the stall.

“Oh,” he replied, “that’s Mr. Huggon-Rose. He used to be a solicitor in the City, but he retired and has been living here for a year or two.”

But I was not quite satisfied; some odd memory, in which I felt sure Mr. Huggon-Rose was concerned, haunted me all the way to town, and I could not shake it off. I had only seen van Rosen once, though I had had a good deal of experience, and it was not surprising that I failed to recognise him. When I got up to town I consulted the *Law List*, but could find no trace of Mr. Huggon-Rose.

Then I became more suspicious, and before many days were over I had succeeded in definitely identifying Mr. Huggon-Rose with one of the Kaiser’s cleverest spies. Thus the mystery of van Rosen’s disappearance was solved by his own slip. If, when I looked up the *Law List*, I had found Mr. Huggon-Rose’s name and address duly set out, I should probably have thought I had been deceived by some chance resemblance and wasted no more time on the matter. How true it is that trifles make the sum of life!

The position now was plainly serious: van Rosen’s presence in London boded no good. The man was as unscrupulous as he was clever. The British contra-espionage department knew him well and had been greatly chagrined at losing sight of him. Afterwards, in consequence of my report to Hecq, he had been kept under close observation; but we had never been able to secure sufficient proof to justify his arrest, strong though our suspicions were. He had evidently been walking very warily since the outbreak of war. Unfortunately he had adopted that easiest of all cloaks of the German spy, and had become a naturalised Englishman just before war broke out. But the adage “Once a German always a German” applied with special force to van Rosen.

After speaking with Madame Gabrielle I had a long chat with Hecq over the private wire, and together we mapped out a pretty comprehensive plan of campaign, in which both Aubert and Madame Gabrielle had very definite parts to play.

Then the mysterious scented wedding card claimed my full attention, for I was determined to sift its secret to the bottom. First, I paid a visit to Somerset House, where I very thoroughly searched the records of recent marriages. These showed me that no marriage had taken place between persons named Wheatley and

Easterbrook. A certain Agnes Wheatley had been born in June, 1894, at Mina Road, Old Kent Road, in the parish of St. George the Martyr, Southwark, and there were records of two James Easterbrooks. One was James Stanley Easterbrook, born in Lord Street, Southport, in 1881; the other, James Henry Charlton Easterbrook, had first seen the light of day in the village of Forteviot, Perthshire, in 1870. The Army List, of course, failed to show any Captain James Easterbrook, of the Royal Fusiliers.

All this did not carry me much farther. The father of the Southport Easterbrook was apparently a prosperous Blackburn tradesman; but that of the man born in Scotland was vaguely set down as of “no occupation,” a curious entry for a Scottish village, where practically everybody would be likely to live by the labour of his hands, and where one would hardly expect to find persons of leisured independence. The fact worried me. But an inquiry at Forteviot showed that there had been no Easterbrooks in the village for many years, and no one seemed to recollect anything about them.

In order to conceal myself from the astute van Rosen, I had taken rooms in a cheap boarding-house, full of old ladies, in Guilford Street, Bloomsbury, and, equipped with a silver discharge badge and a set of “faked” Army papers, posed as an invalided soldier recovering his health before taking up work. I was thus able to disarm the inquisitive prying of my fellow-boarders, and I am afraid I gave them some highly remarkable “information” about the war and my share in it! If one is engaged in spying or contra-espionage work one must be ever ready to combat silly suspicions that give rise to endless gossip and to evade unfriendly and malicious comment.

The enigma of the wedding card worried me incessantly. That the prosperous Jules Cauvin was one of the puppets of Potsdam, and also that he had betrayed France, I felt morally convinced. Hecq, indeed, held documentary evidence of Cauvin’s friendship with the Austrian millionaire spy, Herr Jellinck. I knew, almost with certainty, that the perfumed wedding card was intended to convey a message of some kind, since in every particular it was clearly shown to be a bogus document. Yet without more direct evidence Cauvin, had we ventured to arrest him, must have slipped out of the clutches of the law. For, after all, mere friendship or acquaintance with a spy, however suspicious, does not prove the guilt of espionage.

Inquiries made by the British Special Branch soon showed that none of the

Easterbrooks in the British Army could by any possibility be connected with the “Captain Easterbrook “of the wedding card.

Within a week I established the fact that Agnes Wheatley had died before she reached the age of ten years. Therefore, she could not have been the mysterious bride to whose “wedding” Jules Cauvin and his wife had been invited. I was thus thrown back on the two Easterbrooks, and for the next few days, if I may use the term, I breakfasted, lunched, and dined on Easterbrooks! And helping in my quest were some of the smartest men of the British Special Branch.

Six weeks went by — weeks of feverish activity and incessant patient investigation. That mysterious wedding card, with its pungent odour of stag-leaved geranium, hypnotised me, and I could think of nothing else. And everything began to seem so hopeless that even the Scotland Yard men, most unrelenting and unwearying searchers-out of hidden mysteries, began to get depressed and to fancy they were hopelessly beaten.

Van Rosen, of course, was under constant surveillance. Whether he suspected it or not I do not know, but for the time being he seemed to have entirely abandoned his usual business. He went about quite openly, and I often wondered whether he was tacitly defying us. Probably his work was so far advanced that he could afford to wait, and hoped to disarm suspicion by the very openness of everything he did. Had there been any real necessity we could, of course, have arrested him on some charge or another, but we still hoped that by giving him plenty of latitude we should sooner or later stumble on some valuable information.

VIII “One Of The Naturalised”

The weeks slipped by.

We seemed no nearer gaining our object, and I found myself wondering at times whether, indeed, I was not engaged on a wild-goose chase. Poring over everything that was known of Jules Cauvin, I sometimes found myself ridiculing my own suspicions. Still, that mysterious card forced itself on my attention. Cauvin’s friendship with Jellinck, his known association with Miassoyedeff, shot as a spy in Russia, his sudden and inexplicable wealth, all convinced me in the long run that there was a deep secret to be fathomed. I had the chain of evidence nearly complete, but one link was missing — the source of Cauvin’s wealth and

the identity of the mysterious individual from whom he drew unstinted funds.

Three weeks more passed. The Special Branch at Scotland Yard was becoming disheartened. I myself was losing hope, and Hecq was obviously growing restive. Then the tide turned. One of the Special Branch, apparently by the merest accident, discovered the printer of the bogus card.

This was a discovery indeed! I hastened to interview the printer — the proprietor of a small jobbing business named James in the Uxbridge Road.

“The cards,” he told me, “were ordered by Mr. Easterbrook for the wedding of his son, the Captain Easterbrook referred to. Mr. Easterbrook lives in Lancaster Gate,” and, referring to his order book, he gave me the address, for which I thanked him.

“Did you perfume the cards before you printed them?” I asked him carelessly. I had kept the most important question till the last.

“Perfume them!” he snorted, glaring at me through his spectacles. “Why, of course not — we don’t scent invitation cards to weddings!”

I knew that well, but I was glad to get the fact verified. And now for Mr. Easterbrook and the captain! I was in high spirits, for I felt that at length I was getting near the heart of the mystery.

Going direct to Lancaster Gate, I soon found the Easterbrooks’ house, a large, handsome building overlooking Hyde Park. A few local inquiries soon told me all I wanted to know, and shortly after I was conveying my news to Hecq over the Paris telephone. For once the phlegmatic little man was shaken out of his habitual reserve, and his voice, when he had heard my news, fairly trembled with excitement. At last we were at close grips with our mysterious foe.

Next day, Madame Gabrielle, whom I sent for again, and Aubert were installed in rooms in an obscure house in Bayswater. I spent the evening with them, and together we evolved a plan of operations which, I confess, required considerable “bounce” — I do not like the expression “daring” when it has to be applied to one’s self.

By this time I had cut myself adrift from our excellent colleagues of the Special Branch, fearing lest van Rosen and his friends might get on my track. So far,

apparently, he had not located me, for, though I kept the sharpest possible look-out, assisted by a clever detective who habitually assumed different disguises for the purpose, I could find no evidence whatever that I was being “shadowed.” Madame Gabrielle, Aubert, and myself were also working apart, though I was directing the general plan of operations.

Following up the trail I had struck in the Uxbridge Road, I soon secured some astounding facts regarding Mr. Essendine Easterbrook, of Lancaster Gate. He was actually a native of Frankfort, who, after a brief but amazingly successful career in the City as a promoter of rubber companies, had amassed a big fortune and retired from the game of finance. He had become naturalised in 1909, and, profiting by the Briton’s amazing indulgence to aliens of every kind, had changed his name from Essendine Wilhelm Estbruck to Essendine William Easterbrook. Very few people, I found out, had any idea of his real origin and of his German parentage and nationality.

Now Mr. “Easterbrook” had no son. He had, however, an English wife, and his wealth had won for them a position in London Society. They had frequently, before the war, entertained at their handsome house the wily director of propaganda, von Kuhlmann, who was then living in London, and also a certain Max Garlick. But, try as I would, I completely failed to establish any sort of connection between the Easterbrooks and Mr. Huggon-Rose.

The name of Garlick, however, told me a lot. Garlick had been the German Secret Police Councillor in France, for the Departments of the Nord, the Pas de Calais, the Somme, and the Ardennes. He was an ex-naval lieutenant, and two years before the war broke out was appointed to the arduous, but lucrative, office of Polizeirath for London, establishing his office nearly opposite the Army and Navy Stores in Victoria Street, Westminster. This mouchard, in order to disguise his true occupation, was in the habit of putting in a few hours’ work daily at a desk in the London offices of the Hamburg-Amerika line in Cockspur Street. That Essendine Easterbrook, the “father” of the non-existent “captain,” had been the friend of Max Garlick was quite sufficient to show his connection with the enemy, for Garlick had been the head of the “actives” in England.

We then set to work to obtain more inside evidence. Aubert, on my instructions, watched carefully, and soon made an opportunity of getting into the confidence of Mrs. Easterbrook’s English maid, a young woman named Dean. He found out without much trouble that she was not greatly attached to her mistress, who, in

spite of her gushing manners in Society, was harsh and domineering towards those in her employ, and was totally incapable of winning either respect or affection.

Dean had been engaged from a local registry office in the neighbourhood, a fact which materially facilitated our plans.

I had a long interview with the young woman. She had a sweetheart serving in the Army, who had seen a good deal of German methods and had told the girl enough of the sufferings of the conquered French and Belgian populations to fill her with an intense hatred of Germans and everything German. Directly I informed her that she had been working for a naturalised German her indignation knew no bounds, and she willingly gave me a lot of valuable information. She declared, moreover, that she would not remain in the place another day. This, too, was exactly what was wanted. I impressed upon her the necessity of keeping absolutely silent on the subject of her employers' real character, and set about the task of getting her place filled with a nominee of my own. This, of course, could be no other than the resourceful Madame Gabrielle, who, laying aside, as she often did, her wedding ring, registered her name at the registry office as a French maid. A handsome *douceur* to the excellent registry keeper and some highly satisfactory references, carefully prepared for the occasion, accomplished what we wanted, and in the course of a week I had the satisfaction of knowing that the Easterbrook household was under the close surveillance of one of my smartest assistants, who posed as Mademoiselle Darbour, and was quite certain to miss no opportunity that might present itself to her.

We soon obtained further information about Mr. Easterbrook. He was evidently a wealthy man in reality, as well as appearance, owning, in addition to the Lancaster Gate house, a big estate in Derbyshire, a shooting-box in the Highlands, and a Villa at Cabbe Roquebrune, above Cap Martin, not far from Cauvin's Villa des Fleurs at Mentone. Moreover, he dabbled in yachting after a fashion, more, I suspected, for purposes of social advertisement than from any love of a sport which makes but a slight appeal to Germans.

We were, of course, living on the edge of a powder magazine, and the position of Madame Gabrielle, alone in the very camp of the enemy, was especially perilous. At any moment one or all of us might be recognised by the alert agents of van Rosen, and I was beginning to know enough of the true position of Mr. Easterbrook to realise that the desperate men with whom we had to deal would

stick at nothing to rid themselves of danger if once they divined our identity and purpose. For Madame Gabrielle I was especially anxious, and more than once I debated seriously whether I was justified in allowing a woman to run so grave a risk. For Aubert and myself, of course, such a question naturally did not arise; risk was a part of our profession, and we accepted it just as we accepted a wet day. However, we were playing for a great stake, and I finally decided to play the game out to a finish.

A month passed. The reports I received from Madame Gabrielle, working inside the house, and from the painstaking Aubert, who let nothing outside escape him, were full of interest.

Mr. Easterbrook, formerly Herr Essendine Estbruck, native of Frankfort, remained entirely unsuspecting that he was under the eye of one of the keenest secret agents in Europe. It was important that he should remain in ignorance, and I prepared a little plan which I felt sure would be so completely reassuring to him that it would throw him completely off his guard, and yet put him in such a position that he would find it almost impossible to resist the temptation, carefully arranged by us, to betray the country of his adoption.

It so happened that an important post had become vacant in a certain Government department dealing with a large number of confidential plans. I found out from Madame Gabrielle that, as a matter of fact, Easterbrook had for a long time been working strenuously to secure a Government appointment honorary, of course, since money was no object to him, except as a means to an end. I have no doubt whatever that his motives were twofold. The first was, by securing official recognition, to remove any suspicion that might cling to him in consequence of his enemy origin; the second, I have just as little doubt, was to secure better opportunities of playing the spy. I made up my mind to oblige him in both particulars, but to arrange the denouement myself.

I went to the Minister concerned, and revealed my plan. When I had fully explained to him what we knew and how much we suspected he realised the gravity of the situation, and, though my request was entirely irregular, he consented to what I asked.

A week later a paragraph in the London papers announced that Mr. Essendine Easterbrook had been appointed a controller in a certain department of the Admiralty. There were a few cavillings in some quarters, on account of

Easterbrook's origin, but to the general public the position did not seem to be one of great importance, and little notice was taken of the appointment. As a matter of fact the position was a bogus one, created for the occasion, and everything connected with it had been arranged by the astute Special Branch with the sole design of entrapping Mr. Essendine Easterbrook and the intermediary, whoever it might be, between the German agents in England and Jules Cauvin. For the wedding card had proved beyond doubt that Easterbrook and Cauvin were in close communication.

IX The Secret Of The Perfume

Mr. Easterbrook soon found himself comfortably ensconced in a large room, and surrounded by a staff, every single member of which, though he little suspected it, was in the direct employ of the Special Branch. Few suspects have ever been subjected to such microscopic scrutiny. He literally could not make a single movement unobserved. He was constantly shadowed in and out of his office by agents who were relieved every few hours; inside his house Madame Gabrielle was incessantly on the watch. And in the meantime we prepared for him the trap which proved his undoing.

One day Mr. Easterbrook found awaiting his attention a number of copies of an "urgent" and "strictly confidential" memorandum which gave in elaborate detail the plan of a naval operation which for sheer dare-devilry was enough to take one's breath away. Needless to say, it was "spoof" from beginning to end. But it was spoof so thoroughly plausible in its conception, and so artistically worked out in its wealth of detail, that it might well have deceived someone far better versed than Herr Estbruck in naval matters. I had the privilege of going over it with the distinguished naval officers who drew it up, and I can hear to-day the roars of laughter with which it was received by the company of experts gathered to listen to the elaborate joke. Of course the men who really knew detected the imposture at once; to the novice the plan looked like the details of a gigantic attack on one of Germany's strongest naval bases.

Now we calculated deliberately that Easterbrook, getting hold of the bogus plan, would be unable to resist the temptation to communicate it to Germany. To him, we knew, it must appear of stupendous importance. It was too elaborate for him to attempt to memorise the details, and far too long to give him a chance of copying it unobserved. Moreover, we decided to convince him, if possible, that he could purloin a copy without risk.

Now with confidential documents of importance, every single copy must be accounted for. The printing is done under the closest supervision; the exact number of sheets of paper required is issued; every official who receives a copy signs for it and gets a receipt when he parts with it. Mr. Easterbrook had been well drilled in the routine. We had made him especially careful by inducing him on one occasion carelessly to sign for four copies of a document when he only received three, and the trouble we raised about the “missing” copy must have made him determined to count his copies in future. We relied on that to catch him and his associates.

Early one morning a messenger laid upon Mr. Easterbrook’s desk four copies of the naval plans.

“Please sign for three copies of No. 27162 A.B., Mr. Easterbrook,” said the lad, laying the book before him.

A keen-eyed watcher saw Mr. Easterbrook glance at the heading of the document which lay before him. Clever though he was, he was unable to repress a start of astonishment as the amazing title, carefully designed for the occasion, caught his eye. A moment later he had recovered himself, counted his copies of the paper, and, glancing at the book, signed for three. The bait was swallowed!

I must now hark back to Madame Gabrielle to make clear the chain of events which followed. The sprightly Frenchwoman soon found out that beneath an unprepossessing exterior her employer concealed an extremely amorous disposition. Exerting the full power of her fascinating personality, she soon began to exercise a considerable influence over the financier, and was able at length to solve the problem of the mysterious perfume.

A few hours after the secret “plans” had been laid before him, Easterbrook made a clandestine arrangement to dine with Madame Gabrielle at a restaurant in Soho the next evening.

“I have to go out of town tonight,” he said. “I don’t want to write, but if you get by to-morrow’s post a plain sheet of paper scented with geranium I shall be there. If it is scented with violet you will know I have been detained and cannot come.”

So the secret was out at last! The wedding card had been a signal to Cauvin that all was well. Had it been scented with violet it would have indicated danger. As

will be seen, we had little difficulty in guessing the purpose of Easterbrook's absence from his house that night!

We calculated that, finding he had been debited with three copies of the "plans," whereas he actually received four, Easterbrook would calmly pocket one of them and return to the proper department the three for which he had signed. Events proved that we were right. In the afternoon, at the usual time, he left the office. Three minutes later we ascertained that the fourth copy of the "plans" was not in his desk. He had taken it with him, and it was easy to guess his purpose.

From that moment his doom was sealed. We could have arrested him at once, of course, but we wanted to know by what means those plans were to be dispatched to Germany. If we could only find that out one finger of the Hidden Hand would assuredly be lopped off for good.

On leaving the office Easterbrook made for a public telephone office, where, as it happened, three boxes stood side by side. As he entered the one, an agent of the Special Branch entered the one farthest from him. The boxes were of the threepence-in-the-slot pattern, and the trifling delay caused by dropping in the three pennies gave the detective his opportunity. Ringing up the operator at the Exchange, he demanded, in the name of the police, that Easterbrook's conversation should be "tapped." The operator promptly "plugged" him on to the line Easterbrook was using, so that he was able to listen, quite unknown to Easterbrook, to the conversation which followed.

"Is that 7257 North?" Easterbrook began. "I want to speak to Mr. Huggon-Rose," he went on. "That you, Rose? This is Easterbrook. Will you come down to Piccadilly and have some dinner with me? I am just arranging a yachting trip, and perhaps you would like to make one of the party. All right. Be at Scott's at seven o'clock. Good-bye." And he rang off.

Seven o'clock found Easterbrook and Huggon-Rose dining comfortably at Scott's. Four men of the Special Branch, immaculately attired and apparently mere men-about-town, were seated at different tables near them. Easterbrook and his guest talked yachting ostentatiously, and many maps and papers were handed backward and forward. One of these, the lynx-eyed watchers noted, passed from Easterbrook to Huggon-Rose and was not returned. It was the confidential paper! Another link in our chain had been forged!

At half-past ten the two conspirators rose to leave. At the door of the restaurant they brushed past a man in seafaring dress, quite obviously a Dutch sailor, and, swiftly though it was done, one of our watchers saw a folded paper slip from Huggon-Rose's hand into that of the Dutchman. He made off at once, closely shadowed by two of our men, while Easterbrook and Huggon-Rose walked away together, evidently looking for a taxicab, none too numerous at that hour.

Just as a cab drew up to the kerb I arrived on the scene. I had been kept closely informed of what was going on and had been waiting in a neighbouring restaurant in order to be present at the arrest of the two plotters. Incautiously I approached too near, and in the light of a street-lamp van Rosen caught sight of me. He recognised me instantly. With a snarl of rage he turned on me, and his hand shot to his hip-pocket. Then he recovered his self-possession and entered the taxi with Easterbrook. No doubt he reflected that a shot at me would not help him, and, it should be noted, neither man had any incriminating document on him. The "plans" were in possession of the Dutch sailor, and until they were secured we had to hold our hands. But one quarry was safe now.

The taxi soon deposited the two men at Easterbrook's house, which was immediately closely surrounded. Half an hour later Madame Gabrielle, hatless and showing every sign of a struggle, slipped from a side door.

Breathlessly she explained that van Rosen, catching sight of her as he was going to his room on the first floor, had recognised her at once and had attacked her furiously. Why he did not shoot her I never could understand. Physically Madame Gabrielle was a match for him; she was a superb gymnast and in hard training, whereas van Rosen had been leading a dissipated life and was in thoroughly poor condition. A brief struggle had ended in Madame Gabrielle throwing him heavily by a simple wrestling trick, and, knowing that she must get away at all cost, she had rushed down the back stairway and got into the street.

A moment or two later a servant left the house and posted some letters in the pillar-box a few yards away. The letters were recovered later, and one of them, a postcard, was found to be addressed to Jules Cauvin. It was in a feminine handwriting, and bore neither the date nor the address of the writer. It read:

"My dear Jules, Henri will return home to-morrow. He has immensely enjoyed his visit, and his health has greatly improved."

“Yours,

“Marie.”

Innocent enough, but the card was perfumed with violets! Clearly enough its purpose was to let Cauvin know that danger was in the air.

We were expecting every moment the news that the Dutch sailor had been arrested with the incriminating documents in his possession. That would have been the signal for the arrest of Easterbrook and van Rosen. But the arrest was not to be made.

Far away to the east we heard the low boom of a gun. Another and another followed; then came the crash of high explosives, and we realised that an air raid was in progress. Nearer and nearer came the sounds of guns and bombs.

Suddenly I picked up the drone of an aerial motor directly overhead, and a few seconds later came an appalling crash that seemed to shake the very earth. I saw a red blaze flash out over Easterbrook’s house, and after that everything was a blank.

I came to my senses to find myself in Charing Cross Hospital. And when I feebly opened my eyes the first object to catch my sight was Armand Hecq, seated at my bedside placidly reading a book.

Hearing my gasp of astonishment, he turned to me.

“Ah, mon cher Gerald, so you are awake at last,” he said cheerily. “How are you feeling?”

“Very shaky,” I whispered. “What has happened? Ah, yes, I remember now,” I said, as a flood of recollections swept over me. “Is it all right? Have you got van Rosen and Easterbrook?”

“Everything is quite satisfactory, my dear Gerald,” replied Hecq. “I will tell you all about it when you are stronger.”

But, weak though I was, I could not bear the suspense. “Tell me at once, Monsieur Hecq, I beg of you, or I shall never rest.” And Hecq, choosing the lesser of two evils, decided to unburden himself.

“Van Rosen and Easterbrook are both dead,” he said. “The bomb which rendered you unconscious struck Easterbrook’s house and killed them both. Mrs. Easterbrook is terribly injured, but is alive, and will probably recover. Madame Gabrielle is quite safe, and Aubert, who was watching near you, was sheltered from the explosion by a projecting wall and was only badly shaken. He telephoned me at once, and I fortunately caught a train which was just leaving, and here I am. You have been unconscious for a day and a half.”

“What about the Dutch sailor?” I managed to gasp out in my astonishment.

“Oh,” replied Hecq, “we got him all right, with the plan in his possession. He has made a clean breast of everything. The plans were to have been photographed down to microscopic size and the films taken over to Cauvin sewn into his clothing. Two of my men are on their way to arrest Cauvin at once.”

But Cauvin proved too quick for us. As the agents of the Surete approached his house he must have recognised them and realised that the game was up. Directly they intimated to him that he was under arrest he snatched a revolver from his pocket and shot himself before their eyes. I have no doubt the result would have been the same if he had received the violet-scented card, which now, with the bogus invitation to the Easterbrook wedding, remains one of my cherished mementoes of one of the most fascinating of the many mysteries I have helped to unravel.

Thus by the hands of the Huns themselves the public were spared an astounding scandal, and the Allies were rid of three ingenious scoundrels engaged in a clever and insidious campaign. After Easterbrook’s death we were able to unravel the whole conspiracy. Easterbrook and van Rosen were two of the ringers of the Hidden Hand in England. They operated by means of banking accounts in various names, handling large sums placed freely at their disposal by other wealthy naturalised “Britons,” who proved in their own persons the truth of the adage coined in 1914 by a naturalised Hun “Once a German, always a German.” Most of them were laid by the heels, and now, behind barricades of barbed wire in remote parts of the country, have leisure to repent the day when they matched their cunning against the skill of the International Secret Service Bureau of the Allies.

X The Mystery Of Blind Heinrich

“Blind Heinrich!”

Without any conscious effort of memory on my part, these words flashed suddenly into my mind, as, six weeks or so after the events just related, I sat lazily in Armand Hecq’s private room in the Boulevard des Capucines, turning over our latest problem in my mind, while I waited for the astute chief, who was busy investigating a report which had just been brought in by one of his numerous financial clients — in other words, by one of the numerous expert agents whom he kept constantly busy up and down Europe, at the task of countering the villainous work of the spy-bureau in Berlin.

“I wonder whether he is mixed up in the affair,” I mused; rapidly working out a new train of thought to which the old scoundrel’s name had given rise. So intent was I that I did not notice Hecq’s entrance. His quick eye noticed my absorption.

“A penny for your thoughts, mon cher Gerald,” he laughed.

“Well,” I said with a smile, “I was pretty far away, I admit. The fact is, I was wondering whether Blind Heinrich is taking any part in the game?”

The director of the International Secret Service of the Allies raised his brows and stared at me across the big, littered writing-table. Behind him a tape machine was clicking out its message, just as it should in a well-ordered financier’s office. He was evidently surprised.

“By Jove!” he exclaimed in English, which he spoke to perfection. “I never thought of him! My dear Gerald, old Heinrich is an extremely wily bird; and if he is mixed up in this business we shall have all our work cut out. Remember how he wriggled out of our hands in the Gould affair, when we thought we had him safely netted?”

The Gould affair! I should think I did remember it! I took a part in tracing and arresting the spy, Frederick Adolphus Gould, who lived near Chatham, and who, a few months before the war, was sent to prison for five years for attempted espionage. The case was a bad one. For years “Gould” had posed, like so many of his unscrupulous countrymen, as a good, patriotic John Bull Englishman, unable to speak German, expressing hatred of Germany and the Kaiser, and warning us that war would come. Yet, after his arrest, I had gone to Germany very much incognito to make inquiries, and found that exceedingly patriotic “Englishman” was the son of a certain Baron von S—, that he had been born in

Berlin in 1851, had fought in the Franco-German War, and had been awarded the customary Iron Cross!

Now one of "Gould's closest friends in England had been a certain Norwegian named Heinrich Kristensten, a half-blind violinist who lived at Hampstead. Some strange facts came to light in the course of our inquiries, but the afflicted musician forestalled us by very cleverly coming forward and denouncing his whilom friend — not, however, before he saw that Gould was quite hopelessly entangled in the net which had been spread for him by the British Secret Service. His action, of course, was quite in accord with German practice. Seeing that the game was up, so far as Gould was concerned, he saved himself on the principle that one loss was better than two. His name had leaped spontaneously into my mind in connection with the latest problem upon which we were engaged the mysterious manner in which, despite the rigid British censorship, details of the damage done in London by the raiding Gothas were so quickly and so accurately transmitted to Berlin. That they were so transmitted we knew, for the German papers promptly published them. And obviously, if severely censored matters of this kind were leaking out, there was some channel of information open of which we were unaware. We had to find and close it.

Now, as is well known, every wireless message which passes from the outer world to Berlin, or from Berlin to the outer world, is picked up and decoded at our wireless stations. The news was, we knew, not sent by wireless. Yet it was clear the Wilhelmstrasse got early information, not only as to where the bombs were dropped, but the extent of the damage done, both points on which they could not obtain the slightest information from the English papers. These details were published by the German and Swiss papers, and, allowing for Berlin's invariable exaggeration of its own prowess, they were remarkably full and accurate. The task before me was to find out how the news was transmitted, and it was one, I confess, which fairly bristled with difficulties.

"Heinrich, being a neutral, has lately been showing a great interest in the welfare of blinded British soldiers," I remarked to Hecq. "If he were a friend of Gould's, why should he do this?"

"For some reason of his own," said Hecq, "possibly to avert suspicion. We know pretty well that he was very deep in it with Gould and had received money from him. Perhaps you will recollect that he admitted it, explaining that it was a loan, and indeed we found his I.O.U. in Gould's desk, made out, no doubt, 'to lend

artistic verisimilitude to a bald and otherwise unconvincing narrative,' as your Gilbert has it. You know he said his daughter had been ill, and that in consequence he was short of money. That was too weak; we knew well enough that Heinrich made a good deal out of his fiddle, as his bank balance showed. He was not short of money at all, and I have not the least doubt that the 'loan' was for value received in the shape of information or assistance, perhaps both."

"Yes, I remember now," I said, reflecting deeply.

Three weeks went by. I was tired and run down, and decided to snatch a fortnight with Doris in Worcestershire before embarking upon a task which was likely to be arduous, if not actually dangerous. Greatly strengthened by my sojourn in delightful Worcestershire, I was back in town, keenly interested in the work I had in hand.

One evening I had been down to Hertford, and was returning by the Great Eastern Railway to Liverpool Street, when, just before ten o'clock, the train pulled up abruptly at Stratford, all lights were instantly extinguished, and I was swept into an excited throng of several hundreds of refugees in the subway beneath the line. There, amid a motley gathering, largely composed of panic-stricken foreign Jews, I was compelled to remain for over three hours, listening to the venomous barking of the anti-aircraft guns and the occasional rending, ear-splitting crash of a high explosive bomb.

It was the first time I had seen the alien under air-raid conditions, though I had heard a good deal about him; and as I watched the cowardly wretches my whole mind was revolted at the thought that a large proportion of these quivering masses of jelly, for in their fright they were little else, had been welcomed to British citizenship under the imbecile naturalisation system. No one blamed them for being frightened: the Englishwomen and children of the working classes, huddled in the shelters, were quite obviously frightened, and small wonder. But if they were frightened, they were brave, and they kept their self-control even when the infernal racket overhead was at its worst. I had seldom seen a better proof of the essential superiority of the Briton over the harpies who prey upon him, and as I watched I felt proud that, cosmopolitan as I am, I had good English blood in my veins.

At ten o'clock next morning I went to Whitehall, where exact details of all the damage done by the Gothas was placed freely at my disposal. From the secret

reports I made certain extracts for future use.

Five days later.

As I sat in my flat in Curzon Street, my man, Burton, brought in copies of the *General Anzeiger fur Elberfeld Barmen*, the *Berlin Borsen Courier*, and the *Tageblatt*, all of which had been sent me by special messenger from Whitehall.

I opened them, and in both the *General Anzeiger* and the *Tageblatt* were exultant articles on the success of the air raid upon the metropolitan area a few nights before. They were, of course, luridly “written up,” but they contained a great deal of perfectly accurate information, as I knew by the secret reports shown to me directly after the raid.

How could the enemy know? Of course, the blazing accounts of the terror and panic supposed to have been created in London could have been written up anywhere. But how was it that not only were the localities in which the bombs had fallen accurately specified, but in several instances details were given of the exact damage to certain buildings? By no possibility could the latter information have been the result of an effort of Teutonic imagination. The enemy knew; proof of it was there in cold print. How did the news reach the Wilhelmstrasse so quickly?

It was certainly not by wireless, for every message was picked up and decoded by our own stations. That the news had not passed through the great German wireless stations of Norddeich, at the north of the Elbe, or Nauen, near Berlin, was certain. Here was a pretty problem set for solution.

As I sat alone in my room that evening, having dined at my club and returned to the enjoyment of slippers, a novel, and a good cigar, I reflected on the task I had in hand. I realised, of course, that my suspicions of Blind Heinrich might be entirely unfounded, but I had at the moment nothing better to go upon, and I decided that, in view of his known association with Gould, whether he was mixed up with the matter we now had in hand or not, a close watch upon him might provide some facts of interest.

Upon my arrival in London from Paris, I had sought out Blind Heinrich, who was now living in a boarding-house in Hereford Road, Bayswater, close to Westbourne Grove. In the same house was now living a dainty little woman, a Belgian refugee, who was in very straitened circumstances. According to her

own story, she had become separated from her husband, a rich merchant of Brussels, before going on board a boat at Ostend, during the terrible flight from Belgium in 1914. Since then she had been unable to obtain the slightest information about him, and did not know even whether he was alive or dead.

For nearly three years, she related, she had remained in terrible anxiety, which was rapidly wrecking her nerves and her life. As a refugee, a pitiful victim of the catastrophe which had befallen her beloved country, she was existing upon English charity. She called herself Madame Taymans, and her old address in happier days was in the Rue de Namur in Brussels. But her real name was — Gabrielle Soyez!

Few women in the world could so perfectly adapt themselves to the ever-changing demands of the Secret Service as Madame Soyez. In her present circumstances she was absolutely at home, for she had been educated in part at a convent near Gembloux, and could assume the Belgian accent to perfection. It was an easy matter, therefore, for her to pass for what she pretended to be.

In Hereford Road the Frenchwoman had established herself on my instruction for the purpose of keeping a watchful eye upon the quiet, long-haired, half-blind violinist, who, to all appearances, was eking out only a meagre existence, and whose clothes were of that shabby-genteel brand which usually betrays respectable poverty. But we knew enough of Heinrich's affairs to be convinced that the shabby-genteel role was deliberately assumed for purposes of deception. A splendid musician and a born teacher, Heinrich could command his own terms, and, as a matter of fact, he made a good deal of money. More than this, he was well known in high circles of Society, where his teaching abilities gave him the entree to a large number of the best houses. And, of course, no one ever suspected that the half-blind old fiddler, crawling from house to house in the aristocratic quarters in which he found most of his pupils, was in reality the alert and dangerous agent of the enemy which subsequent events revealed him to be.

XI An Air Raid On London

One night of brilliant moonlight, I had just come in from a visit to a theatre and was glancing through the evening papers before turning in, when my telephone bell rang. On replying, I found the caller was Madame Gabrielle, and in consequence of the cryptic message she gave me I abandoned the idea of going to bed and remained keenly on the alert. For a full hour nothing occurred. Then I

heard the air raid warnings for which I had been waiting and soon after the guns, distant at first, but gradually drawing nearer, began to boom out their defiance of the aerial invaders.

For nearly two hours the raid continued at brief intervals, as squadron after squadron of Gothas came hurtling through the night sky on their mission of hate. As soon as the "All clear" signal was given, I hurried out and made my way rapidly to Harrington Street, a quiet thoroughfare at the back of Cadogan Square, with dark, old-fashioned houses, each with the deep basement and flight of steps to the front door so characteristic of a period of architecture which we may hope has passed away for ever.

One of these houses was my objective, and I soon found it, for its door was painted in a light shade, quite different from the hue of sombre respectability which characterised all its neighbours in the gloomy street. It was noticeable that while nearly every house in the street showed lights — the inmates had not yet got over their scare and could be heard volubly discussing the alarms and excursions of the night — this particular house was in total darkness and was as silent as the grave.

I soon located a deep doorway from which I, myself unseen, could keep a close watch on the dark and silent house, and commenced my vigil.

Presently a man wearing a long light overcoat turned from the square into Harrington Street, and, sauntering leisurely along, ascended the steps of the house I was watching, and let himself in with a latchkey. Five minutes later a second man passed close to where I was standing — luckily my doorway was in deep shadow and he did not notice me — and also entered the house. Two others followed in quick succession. One of them I instantly recognised by his gait. It was Blind Heinrich!

For four hours I kept surveillance, and during that time no fewer than seven men arrived, each letting himself in with his latchkey. It was evident we had found out the meeting-place of some highly doubtful individuals, whose obvious familiarity with the locality, coupled with the strange hours at which they arrived, indicated quite clearly that some nefarious scheme was afoot. It was evident, too, that the old Norwegian belonged to the gang. And I began to feel assured that our suspicions as to his real character were well founded.

It would have been difficult to find a better place for the meeting, for Harrington Street, though readily accessible, led to nowhere in particular, and was as quiet a thoroughfare as any in London. No one would notice the arrival at intervals of the men, policemen rarely visited the street, and after midnight it was entirely deserted save for the occasional arrival home of some belated resident.

It was not until five o'clock in the morning that the last man arrived in a taxi, which, however, did not come along the street, but deposited him at the corner of the Square. A quarter of an hour later they began to come out singly, at intervals of about five minutes, dispersing in different directions. There was no sign, however, of Heinrich Kristensten.

"Well, mon cher Gerald," said Madame Gabrielle, as she sat with me in my flat in Curzon Street, soon after breakfast the same morning. "You see they receive warning of coming air raids and meet directly after. Who are they?"

"Enemy spies, beyond any possibility of doubt," I replied. "Our course is clear now. When the next raid is made we must follow them individually and learn each man's identity. I will make all the arrangements. Meanwhile, do you continue as you are and keep an eye on the blind fiddler."

Madame Gabrielle returned to Hereford Road to continue her watch. For my own part, I set to work, and very soon discovered that the mysterious house in Harrington Street was unoccupied and was to let furnished. In the guise of a possible tenant I went over it thoroughly, but could see nothing suspicious, except that I ascertained that the caretaker was an old compatriot of Heinrich's. The owner, who had left London and was now residing on the South Coast, was well known and his loyalty was beyond dispute. It then became evident that the caretaker was cognisant of the secret meeting, if, indeed, he was not closely concerned in the business, whatever it might be, that brought these men together in an empty house at dead of night so soon after a raid, when most honest people would be only too anxious to get to bed as promptly as possible.

It was obviously necessary that we should learn all we could about the identity of the men who met in the empty house in Harrington Street, and I was soon in touch with the Special Branch, and made all the necessary arrangements for shadowing our suspects.

Four nights later another raid took place. As soon as the Gothas were gone we

were all swiftly at our posts. So thoroughly was the house surrounded that a mouse could hardly have gone in or out undetected. Yet there was no sign of a watcher, and anyone going to the house would certainly be in blissful ignorance of the fact that he was under the close scrutiny of the keen eyes of the Secret Service.

There is very little clumsy “shadowing” about the Special Branch!

But we watched in vain. No meeting was held, or if it was it was held elsewhere. The blind musician, it is true, left his room in Bayswater, but he never reached Harrington Street. The house remained all night silent and apparently deserted.

I wondered whether the gang had by any chance discovered our activities and taken alarm. I was not very deeply concerned about it, apart from the chagrin which the delay caused me. Blind Heinrich, at any rate, could hardly escape us, and, if the gang had for any reason changed its place of meeting, I had little doubt that we should soon discover it. But who had blundered? I felt certain that it was not Madame Gabrielle, and I did not think it could be myself.

One morning I received a note from the clever little Frenchwoman, asking me to take tea with her at Hereford Road that afternoon, and adding: “I have something to show you.”

Of course I went, and we had tea together in the big drawing-room which she used in common with the other guests in the boarding-house. Several of the old ladies who lived in the house were present.

Just as we had finished our tea, Madame exclaimed: “Do excuse me, m’sieur! I have forgotten my handkerchief.”

Rising, she left me. When she returned she was carrying a work-bag of blue brocaded silk, which she placed upon her lap as she reseated herself. In her hand also she had an evening paper which she handed to me with a casual remark that I might like to look at it while she got her work ready.

I knew well enough that this was for the benefit of the other people in the room, who, as usual, were keenly interested in any friends of a pretty woman, and were scrutinising me pretty carefully. I knew, too, that Gabrielle had some further motive in her mind. Accordingly, I leaned back in my chair and read the paper diligently.

A moment later I noticed Madame Gabrielle telegraphing me in our “finger Morse.”

“Look carefully at the book showing in the mouth of my work-bag,” she signalled, “and get a copy at once. It belongs to Heinrich, and I have just borrowed it from his room. He may be back at any moment he has only just gone out and I must replace it at once.”

She had casually left the mouth of her work-bag open. It revealed the title-page of an open book, published, as I saw, about seven years before. The title was *Royal Love Letters*. I had never heard of the volume, but I made a note of its title.

Madame Gabrielle, with an excuse, quitted the room for a few moments, taking the book with her in her bag. On her return she began talking pleasantly about general subjects, but she was listening keenly, I could see. Soon we heard the front door slam, and a heavy shuffling tread crossed the hall and went up the stairs.

“Blind Heinrich,” she telegraphed; “I was only just in time. He is terribly watchful, and would certainly have noticed if the book had not been on the table where he left it. I often wonder whether he is as blind as he pretends to be. You had better go; if he comes in here for tea, it is quite possible he may recognise you.”

A quarter of an hour later we were walking along Westbourne Grove together, and Gabrielle told me the history of the mysterious book. For several days, she said, she had been following Heinrich, who had suddenly developed an amazing interest in second-hand bookstalls. He had gone into shop after shop in various parts of London, asked a single question apparently, and come out again. At length she had managed to overhear him ask at one shop for a copy of *Royal Love Letters*. The shopkeeper had not the volume in stock, and, as the request was such a peculiar one for a man of Heinrich’s temperament, Madame Gabrielle determined to run risks and follow him daily. He entered six more shops, making the same request at each, and at length, in a dingy little by-lane in Soho, managed, to his evident glee, to get what he wanted, and carried it back to Hereford Road with obvious satisfaction.

“Why that particular book, and why so much trouble to get it?” said Madame

Gabrielle. "What do you make of it, Mr. Sant?"

I made nothing of it, except that there seemed to be good reasons why I should get a copy at once. If *Royal Love Letters* interested Heinrich Kristensten so deeply, it might well be that it would not be wholly without interest for me.

My first care was to ring up Hecq on the official telephone and give him full particulars respecting Heinrich's sudden interest in an obscure and practically unknown volume published and forgotten seven years ago. It was quite clear that this was a hint we could not ignore, but I confess I failed to see how it helped us. But I was soon to learn more; Hecq's quick brain had seen a possibility which I had overlooked.

At seven next morning, before I was out of bed, my telephone rang, and Hecq once more spoke to me.

"I have been searching the papers, Sant," he said, "and I have found out something that will interest you. Listen carefully. In the *Petit Parisien* five days ago there was an advertisement for the recovery of a lady's gold trinket. I have it here. I'll read it to you," and he read:

PERDU S OU TROUVES.

PERDU MET. OPERA BRELOQUE OR.

VIALET 28 MARIGNY R. 100.

"Yes," I said, "I hear you. But what has that to do with me?"

"Listen," said Hecq. "There is nobody named Violet at that address; we found that out at once. I have had nearly fifty of my people examining every advertisement in the Paris papers issued just before Heinrich began to display an interest in *Royal Love Letters*. Now we have found out that the advertisement I have just read to you conveys in cryptogrammic form the message, 'Buy *Royal Love Letters*.' It would take too long to explain it, but the paper containing that advertisement would be on sale in London the very day on which, according to Madame Gabrielle, Heinrich began to haunt the second-hand bookstalls on his peculiar quest. Rather curious, is it not?"

Curious it certainly was, and once more I found myself confronted with a further

enigma. Why on earth should the book be advertised in cryptogrammic form in a French newspaper? How did Heinrich come to see the advertisement, and how did he know the key to the code? No doubt the paper had accepted the innocent-looking advertisement without the slightest suspicion that it was anything but the genuine announcement it purported to be. It was impossible to overlook the coincidence between the appearance of the advertisement and Blind Heinrich's sudden deep interest in a forgotten book.

Next day I started out in search of a copy of *Royal Love Letters*. Of course I failed to get one: it had been out of print for years, as it had been published privately and comparatively few copies had been printed. However, I sent wires to some twenty provincial dealers in second-hand books, and at noon next day had a reply from a dealer in Birmingham, offering me a copy for four and sixpence. I wired the money, and next morning received the shabby little volume. Little did I realise what a dividend my investment of four shillings and sixpence was going to pay me!

On reading the book through, I found it was merely a monograph on the published love-letters of various royal personages. It was as dull as the proverbial ditch-water, and I was not surprised at the difficulty both Heinrich and myself had experienced in securing copies: the wonder was that any had escaped the fire or the wastepaper basket. But the very fact made Heinrich's interest in the book the more suspicious. It conveyed nothing to me, it is true, about Gotha raids on London, but did it convey anything to Heinrich, or was it the means of conveying anything from him to someone else?

I called up Madame Gabrielle on the 'phone, and after she had arrived and examined the volume, we went out to lunch at the Ritz. Across the table I told her of the curious advertisement in the *Petit Parisien*, whereupon she exclaimed:

"Why, Kristensten reads that paper regularly. I often see him with it. He goes down practically every column of it with his big reading-glass!"

"That settles two points, anyhow," I said. "The first is that he uses that paper for receiving, and perhaps for sending messages. The second is that he knows the spy-cipher used in drawing up the advertisement. I am beginning to feel that this out-of-print and forgotten book will, if we watch carefully, supply us with a very interesting line to follow."

And, ringing up Hecq, I told him about the latest development. He was keenly alive to the possibilities of the new situation.

XII The Secret Of The Ribbon

Our new discovery seemed to me so remarkable that I lost no time in impressing upon Madame Gabrielle the imperative necessity of the closest possible scrutiny of Blind Heinrich's actions. I was more than anxious that we should not lose sight of him for an instant, and that I should be kept fully informed of his every action. For by this time I was firmly convinced that, through some medium which we had yet to discover, he was in some way keeping up communication with the more active agents of the enemy. And if we could but discover the channel through which the stream of communications flowed, it would not be long, I felt sure, before we had the key to the mystery in our hands.

Suddenly, and without any obvious reason, Heinrich completely changed his habits. Hitherto always on the move, he took to remaining indoors all day, hardly ever going out except for a short stroll in the evening. He met no one and apparently spoke scarcely a word to anybody. What his numerous pupils thought of his sudden neglect of them I cannot say. But it was clear enough that something important must have occurred to induce him thus suddenly to abandon what was, professedly at any rate, his sole means of livelihood.

I was discussing him — he was almost invariably our sole topic of conversation nowadays — with Madame Gabrielle as she sat in my room one morning.

“I cannot conceive of any reason,” I said, “why Heinrich should have so suddenly changed the entire routine of his existence. It looks to me as though either something very important has happened or that he is expecting important news. Yet he receives no messages; he never gets even a letter or a telegram.”

“There is only one fact that is peculiar,” said the smart Frenchwoman. “You know I have been looking after him pretty closely lately. Well, whenever he goes out, though he appears to wander about quite aimlessly, he invariably contrives his walk so that it takes him through Lembridge Square. He never misses.”

“Does he always go the same side of the Square?” I asked. She replied in the affirmative, and I decided to have a look round the Square for myself at once.

That same afternoon found me on the scene of Blind Heinrich's daily walk. The

Square itself varied little from hundreds of others in London: it showed every evidence of dreary respectability common to half the squares in London. Two things, however, attracted my notice.

In the ground-floor window of one house was a big brass cage containing a grey parrot, which was insistently emitting the hideous noises common to the parrot tribe. In a similar window about a dozen houses away was a case containing some old-fashioned wax flowers beneath a glass dome, evidently a survival from the ornamental style peculiar to the early Victorian epoch to which, indeed, the whole dreary Square seemed to belong.

There was nothing to offer a lucid explanation of why Blind Heinrich should choose such a path for his daily ramble. There were dozens of other far more attractive promenades within easy walking distance. Yet here, unless my instinct entirely misled me, was the solution to our riddle.

Day after day I followed the old fellow's route. I even went so far as to shadow Heinrich himself more than once and verified Madame Gabrielle's observation. No matter which way he started out, he never failed, on either the outward or homeward journey, to pass along that particular side of the Square. Yet he never spoke to anyone, and I was morally certain that no signal was ever made to him from any of the houses.

On the fourth day I noticed a slight fact. The ring on the top of the parrot's cage was tied with a big bow of yellow ribbon. Three days later it was altered to dark blue. On the eighth day it had returned to yellow again.

Why these changes? Were they signals?

That night enemy aircraft crossed the south-east coast, but their attempts to reach London were defeated by the terrific fire of the anti-aircraft guns and by a swift concentration of our fighting aeroplanes, which broke up several successive squadrons, and sent the raiders hurrying home again.

Several of my capable assistants then took over the task of finding out all that was known regarding the house in Lembridge Square. Forty-eight hours later I had a full report. I learned that the man in whose room the parrot lived was one of the mysterious band who foregathered to meet Kristensten in the empty house in Harrington Street. He was then dressed as a special constable, a part which, by the way, he had no right whatever to play. He bore the thoroughly English name

of Mostyn Brown, and was in business in the City as the agent of a Manchester firm of cotton merchants. Apart from the fact of his presence that night in Harrington Street, nothing that the most exhaustive inquiries revealed suggested in the smallest degree any association with agents of the enemy. To all appearances he was a perfectly respectable City man, in no way different from thousands of others. But there was a very big but: what was his business in the dead of night in an empty house in the West End in company of a suspected German spy?

A few days later the men who were keeping the houses in Lembridge Square and Hereford Road under surveillance sent me a strange report, which set me thinking deeply. By some means whether he suspected he was being watched or whether a lucky chance favoured him, we never knew Blind Heinrich managed to elude the unwearying vigilance of Madame Gabrielle and arrived alone, evidently in a hurry, at Westbourne Grove. Here he hailed a taxi and was driven to Waterloo Station. There at the booking-office on the loop-line side he had met a short, fat man, to whom, after a brief conversation, he handed a bottle wrapped in white paper. They remained in conversation a few minutes longer and then parted. The fat man was followed to the tube railway and thence to King's Cross, where he had bought a ticket for Peterborough, and left by the five-thirty express.

Why Peterborough, I wondered? There were certainly no facilities there for anyone engaged in Germany's nefarious work. But attached to the report was a snapshot taken secretly, of course which showed me at once that the little fat man was apparently a sailor, "camouflaged" hastily in a badly fitting overcoat and a cloth cap. That gave me a further clue. I took down a Bradshaw, and, glancing at the train by which the little fat man had travelled, made an interesting discovery. It was the Newcastle express. I began to see why the mysterious little man had booked to Peterborough. That afternoon I ascertained that the parrot's cage in the house in Lembridge Square sported a broad ribbon of yellow satin. At midnight I rang up Hecq at his house at St. Germain, and asked him to send Aubert the detective over at once.

An hour after midnight came another air-raid alarm the second to coincide with the appearance of the yellow ribbon.

Now one coincidence of this kind may mean nothing. Two begin to be suspicious. A third is convincing. I found my suspicions deepening into

certainty.

Directly the air-raid warning was given, our watchers in Harrington Street were keenly on the alert, but, though they watched all night, there was no meeting of the mysterious men in the empty house. I guessed the reason. The raiders were again driven back before they could reach the Metropolis, and, therefore, there was no news to be gathered for transmission to the authorities in Berlin. Everything now pointed with increasing certainty to the house in Lembridge Square as a focus of enemy activity.

Directly the "All clear" had been sounded over the London area, Heinrich left Hereford Road, and, according to Madame Gabrielle's report to me, hurried round to the house of the grey parrot. He remained there about half an hour, and then retraced his steps home in the waning moonlight.

Thus mystery followed mystery. What was the meaning of the various coloured bows on the parrot's cage? For that they had a very definite meaning I no longer doubted. It seemed, indeed, tolerably clear that the yellow ribbon betokened a coming raid. And evidently the half-blind old musician was a close friend of the manufacturers' agent. But who, in reality, was the mysterious Mostyn Brown, and, if he were indeed an enemy agent, how had he managed to elude the close watch that had been set upon him?

It had struck me that the house which sheltered the grey parrot might conceivably conceal a wireless plant of sufficient power to convey a message to a submarine lurking off the coast. Such a plant need not be a conspicuous affair. But one of my agents, posing as an official of the Metropolitan Water Board, had been able to negative the suggestion, and I confess I found myself still hopelessly puzzled as to the means by which information of the damage done by the raiding aircraft was so speedily and so accurately conveyed to the enemy.

By this time Aubert had arrived from Paris, and had taken an obscure lodging in Chessington Street, a dingy thoroughfare off the Euston Road. By appointment I met him late one night at the corner of Gray's Inn Road and Holborn, and, having explained to him briefly what had occurred, told him to hold himself in readiness for instant action.

The apparent abandonment of the secret meetings in Harrington Street was a source of considerable anxiety and chagrin. I was particularly anxious about

them. We had several of those who had taken part in the first meeting under close observation, but had learned nothing about them sufficient to justify our taking strong action. Most of them, indeed, seemed to be of the same apparently blameless type as Mr. Mostyn Brown, and it was evident that if they were indeed enemy agents they had been selected or appointed by a master-hand at the game of espionage. And I wanted badly to gain some more information about them.

Madame Gabrielle was ever on the alert, and soon it appeared from her report that the blind fiddler was expecting another raid. The ribbon bow on the parrot's cage changed to dark blue, and remained so for six days. On the seventh it was replaced by yellow. That night the old man remained in his room reading for hours after all the other inmates had retired. But that night no raid was made.

I now began to think that it would be well if I took the mysterious Mostyn Brown under my own special observation. For a week during the moonless nights I shadowed him closely. I found out that he was a member of a certain third-class City club, frequented by a large number of "pure-blooded Englishmen" who happened to bear German names of course they had been naturalised and very soon my name appeared on the club books.

It was not long before I managed to scrape acquaintance with Mostyn Brown over a game of billiards. I cultivated his friendship eagerly, and very soon we were on excellent terms. As a matter of fact, I wanted an invitation to his house, and at last I got it.

I spent there one of the dulllest evenings of my life, an evening, as it happened, entirely wasted. Beyond noting that the ribbon on the parrot's cage had again turned to blue, I saw nothing of the slightest interest.

The next night, however, I made a discovery. Dropping in at the club, I found Mostyn Brown engaged in a game of billiards with a man whom I knew in the club as Harry Smith. A bullet-headed, bespectacled person, with hair standing erect as the bristles of a blacking brush, Smith looked the typical Hun, and I very soon decided in my own mind that Heinrich Schmidt was probably the name by which he was first known to the world.

Suddenly a dispute arose about some point in the game, and in a moment words were running high. Half a dozen spectators noisily joined in the altercation, and the room was a Babel of dispute. I saw my chance.

Taking Mostyn Brown's side, I suddenly interjected a sentence in German. Apparently hardly noticing the change in his excitement Mostyn Brown replied in the same language, and his accent told me at once that he was not of British birth. There was no possibility of mistake, for, however well the Hun may speak our tongue, he will inevitably betray himself when in a moment of excitement he lapses into his own language.

My suspicions of Mostyn Brown were naturally intensified a hundredfold by this discovery. Of course, I redoubled my efforts, and was in daily conference with certain highly placed people in Whitehall, whose curiosity was now fully roused, as well as with my own agents, the vivacious Madame Gabrielle and the slow, but painstaking and relentless, Aubert. The watch on the suspects became closer than ever, and I was convinced that, try how he might, none of them could move, practically speaking, without full details of what he was doing reaching me in the course of an hour or two at most. And I was ready to strike hard at the earliest moment when decisive action might seem justified.

For the moment, however, there was nothing to be done but watch and wait, tense and expectant, while night by night the moon drew nearer and nearer to the full. Thanks to the information I was able to place before the authorities in Whitehall, there was little chance of the anti-aircraft defences of London being caught napping, while the secret signal I had discovered the changing of the coloured ribbon on the parrot's cage at Mostyn Brown's house in Lembridge Square would be almost certain to give us warning of any long-arranged raid in force. Apart from the sequel, the worst we had to expect was a sudden dash by a few machines in the event of an unexpected improvement in the weather rendering such a course possible. But with regard to the big raids, involving days of patient preparation, settled weather, and most careful and thorough organisation, we felt tolerably sure that the tell-tale ribbon would give us the warning we wanted. So it proved in the event, and once again the Hun's trickiness brought his carefully planned scheme to failure.

XIII How Berlin Obtains Information

At last the day or rather the night which we had been expecting came. The sun had risen in a cloudless sky, and all day long had poured down a fierce flood of heat and light. London was stifling. Everyone seemed to be the victim of heat lassitude; tempers were decidedly short, and even the most amiable of people seemed suddenly to have developed raw-edged nerves. Added to all this was an uneasy presentiment of danger; "There will be a big raid tonight," was the thought in the back of everyone's mind.

In order to avoid arousing Mostyn Brown's suspicions that his house was being watched, we had given up, apparently, all observation on the place during daylight. But not in reality. In a house on the other side of the Square, directly facing that occupied by Mostyn Brown, I had hired a room on the third floor, and from the window, with the help of powerful field-glasses, we could keep the house under the strictest watch. We had not even to enter the Square to reach our tower of vantage, for there was a back entrance from an adjoining street.

Towards this eyrie I had bent my steps, and on arriving I found Aubert in a state of suppressed excitement.

"Look!" he said, handing me the glasses, and, taking them from him, I levelled them at Mostyn Brown's room.

The ribbon on the parrot's cage had been changed to yellow!

But this was not all. The sun shone full on the window of Mostyn Brown's house and his room was strongly illuminated. The field-glasses showed us that Mostyn Brown was at home, a most unusual thing in the day-time, and that with him was Blind Heinrich. How Heinrich had got there we could not imagine. Aubert had not seen him enter. They were seated on chairs drawn up to the table, and were poring intently over a book, apparently making memoranda on sheets of paper. As we watched, Madame Gabrielle, habited as a coster girl and carrying a huge basket of flowers, came slowly along the Square, past Mostyn Brown's house and round past the house in we were seated.

I saw her flutter a signal, and, with her arm resting naturally on the side of the basket, she rapidly tapped out a message with her nimble fingers.

“Heinrich has been with Mostyn Brown for the past two hours,” she spelt out. “He came straight from Hereford Road and went into the next house from the back.” Evidently there was some way of communication at the rear of the two houses.

I had now no time to waste, and, leaving Aubert and Madame Gabrielle to keep the necessary watch, I hurried off to Whitehall, where I was soon in deep talk with the astute and enterprising chief of the London defences, a keen officer who by sheer merit had forced himself to the very front rank in aircraft service.

“Good!” he said, when I had told him my news. “I think we shall give them a surprise tonight. Perhaps you would like to see how we work. Sit down for a bit.” And he turned to his big table, on which stood a telephone.

For the next half-hour I watched him, fascinated with his sure grasp of London’s intricate defences, and amazed, though I had thought I knew his capability, at the swiftness and decision with which he issued what to me seemed a veritable jumble of orders. To centre after centre of the aircraft defences he spoke a series of numbers, so bewildering in their speed and complexity that an enemy agent seated in the very room could not have gained a scrap of information. Even to me, familiar as I am with almost every branch of code work, it was a veritable revelation.

“I think we are ready for them now,” he said finally, wiping the perspiration from his face, and I could see that even to him the strain had been severe. How well he had done his work all England was to know the next day, though the public never even suspected the magnitude of his task.

There was now nothing to do but wait; our traps were set, and it remained to be seen whether the enemy would walk into them. I made my way to my chambers for a few hours’ rest and was soon deeply asleep.

At half-past nine Burton, my man, roused me. “The first warning has just come in,” he said.

I dressed swiftly and sat down to snatch a hasty supper, knowing well that it might be many hours before I tasted another meal.

It was exactly ten o’clock when the report of the first maroon broke the stillness, and London, with one accord, hastened to cover. Ten minutes later the streets

were deserted, and a midnight hush reigned supreme. The great city seemed a city of the dead.

As we listened a faint, distant boom struck softly on our ears. The strafe had begun!

Suddenly, far away to the eastward, a searchlight flickered up into the sky; another and another followed in rapid succession, and soon the entire sky was covered and chequered by dozens of wavering pillars of flame, moving to and fro, methodically searching the heavens as though moved by a single hand. Far above us I caught the soft purr of an aeroplane, evidently one of our own, for the sound was quite different from the deeper and rougher note of the Gothas.

Suddenly, with a deafening crash, half a dozen guns barked simultaneously, and, looking out, I saw far away, seemingly caught on a pencil of living light, the ethereal butterfly shape of an enemy aircraft. A second later, in quick succession, came the unmistakable sound of bursting bombs.

In the midst of the tumult a single tiny light showed for a moment far up in the sky, just outside the ring of shrapnel that was bursting all round the enemy craft, now hopelessly entangled in the beams of a dozen converging searchlights, and, dive and drop as it would, utterly unable to escape from the zone of effulgent radiance in which it seemed to float.

Instantly every gun was silent! We caught the crackle of a machine-gun far up in the air, and a moment later the enemy machine burst into a lurid sheet of flame, and the blazing mass pitched headlong to earth amid a roar of cheering from watchers, who in thousands had braved all possible danger to see the aerial fight heralded by the outburst of machine-gun fire. It was obvious that one of our sentinel aeroplanes, perched far above the raider, had caught sight of him in the searchlights, and, swooping swift as a hawk on his quarry, had sent the Gotha a fiery run to the earth twelve thousand feet below. I learned later that the Gotha had fallen in Essex, the three occupants calcined to cinders in the flood of blazing petrol.

That was the extent of London's excitement for the night. It was not until some hours later that I learnt that no fewer than eight squadrons of Gothas, each consisting of four machines, had started out on their errand of murder for London. Only a single machine got through, and that now lay a heap of ruins.

The rest had been split up by gun-fire, caught in the beams of endless searchlights, harried to and fro by a vast concentration of British fighting planes swiftly assembled when the warning of the yellow ribbon had become known, and had been relentlessly chased homeward in utter disorder. Their repulse was a triumph brought about by Colonel's masterly effort at organisation, when I conveyed to him in Whitehall the news which had reached me through a simple yellow ribbon tied to a grey parrot's cage!

Reports soon began to reach me in swift succession from my subordinates in many quarters. Hereford Road, Harrington Street, and Lembridge Square were being carefully watched. Madame Gabrielle and Aubert, the latter dressed in the guise of a seafarer, were on the alert, with dozens of other reliable agents, ready for anything at a moment's notice.

Suddenly Aubert rang me up on the 'phone. I took up the receiver and spoke to him for a few moments.

"Meet me at the corner of Harrington Street at five o'clock," I said.

We met in the grey light of dawn, and I soon learned that, with anything like reasonable good fortune, we had in our hands the opportunity for a great coup. Blind Heinrich had gone to the house soon after the "All clear" had been sounded. He had been followed by Mostyn Brown, again in the uniform of a special constable, and by five other men, one of whom was the little fat man who had previously met Kristensten at Waterloo.

Now I had made up my mind that the little fat man was the intermediary by whom the news collected by the other conspirators was conveyed abroad, and it was essential that he should be caught red-handed. Fortune had favoured us. He had been the first to leave the house, had walked to the Queen's Road Underground Station, and, as we learnt by telephone, had travelled to King's Cross. Here he was at present, seated in one of the waiting-rooms, evidently intending to travel by an early train.

Leaving the necessary instructions with regard to the conspirators still in the house in Harrington Street, I accompanied Aubert to King's Cross. The little fat man was still there, but just after seven he walked to the booking-office and took a ticket for Peterborough. Just behind him in the queue of passengers were Aubert and myself.

When the express pulled out on its fast run to Peterborough — the first stopping-place — Aubert sat in the same carriage as the little fat man, apparently profoundly asleep. I was in the next compartment, ready for anything that might happen.

We were not much surprised when at Peterborough the little fat man remained in the train, and so we continued our journey. When tickets were examined, the little man paid excess fare to Newcastle, and my hopes of an important capture rose momentarily higher.

Hour after hour the express raced northward, and in the afternoon we came to smoky Newcastle, where we were to be the witnesses of a strange denouement.

The little fat man, closely followed by Aubert and myself, made straight for the docks. Here, in haste, he boarded a steamer, one of a service which sailed regularly between Newcastle and Bergen. He was evidently known, for he was greeted without question by the men about the decks and promptly disappeared below. We followed, with several other passengers, and very soon I sat in the captain's cabin, swiftly explaining to "the owner" what had happened, and my suspicion of the man who had just come on board with a freedom of movement which suggested that he was one of the crew.

Captain Jackson was one of the men who have done so much to make the North Sea service a model of everything that is implied in unswerving courage and loyal devotion to duty. A fine, bluff, grey-bearded skipper of the very best type, he cared not a rap for the peril of mines and submarines which dogged him at every yard of his journeys. All he cared for or respected was the Admiralty orders which gave him his chart through the ever-shifting mine-fields; with those and his crew he was ready to take his ship across to Norway and to defy the Huns to do their worst.

His face grew grave and iron-stern as he heard my story, and, loyal Englishman as he was, he instantly fell in with my suggestion for trapping the scoundrel who was bringing disgrace on the good name of all sailors by his infamous traffic with the agents of the enemy.

"George Humber is the name he goes by," said Captain Jackson, referring to the man we had followed from Lembridge Square. "He says he is a Swede and has Swedish papers. Let your French friend go below and help. I'll see to it."

He called up the chief engineer, Andrew Phail, a dour, hard, bitter Scotchman, who had followed the sea for forty years and cared for nothing on earth but it and his beloved engines. If ever a man loved his machines it was Phail, and if ever a man was loved and trusted by his subordinates it was he. Hard though he was, his crew, with the sure instinct of the sailor, recognised his sterling qualities, and would have followed his lead through the worst storm that ever blew. Indeed, the — was emphatically what is known among sailormen as “a happy ship,” thanks to the captain and chief engineer, and I was not altogether surprised to learn that Humber was the only discordant note among the crew; for some reason the men disliked him, though he did his work well enough.

An hour later, having taken our mails on board, we dropped down the Tyne bound for Norway.

I learned from Captain Jackson that Humber had signed on some months before, and had made a number of trips across the North Sea. He had been in the habit of travelling to London each time the vessel reached Newcastle, and at length this fact had aroused Captain Jackson’s suspicions, and he had made up his mind that this trip should be Humber’s last. It was, indeed, but the end came in a manner which not even Captain Jackson’s keen wits had anticipated.

In the meantime I knew that Aubert, a splendid linguist, who could play many parts, from that of an idler in Paris to a worker in a munition factory, was somewhere below in the engine-room, certainly not very far from Humber, and assuredly very much on the alert.

An hour after we left the Tyne mouth I was standing with some of the passengers on deck, watching some winking signals as our convoy appeared out of the misty twilight. Of what the convoy consisted I could not quite discern, but the Captain, before he ascended to his bridge, had said: “Our friends will pick us up presently, and they will see us safely across and look out for submarines.”

The night passed without incident, and the next day proved grey and windy. Ever and anon one of our patrolling airships paid us a visit, while three other ships, forming our convoy, stood by, with their deadly guns ever ready to talk in deadly earnest with any submarine that might venture to show her periscope.

At ten o’clock that night I was on deck watching a series of strange flashes of light showing in the eastern sky, when a sailor approached, and informed me that

the Captain wanted to see me in his cabin. I went at once.

“Look here, Mr. Sant!” the bluff old seaman exclaimed as soon as I had closed the door, which he locked. “I’ve been rummaging the ship. Does this interest you?” And he brought out from the drawer in his table a bottle of medicine. It had apparently been recently bought from a chemist, for it was wrapped up in the usual paper, which was still quite clean and fresh, and sealed in the usual way. “This was found by your French friend concealed in Humber’s trunk. Your man would be up here, only he is watching the fellow below, and as he is supposed to be on duty his absence might rouse suspicions.”

As Captain Jackson ended he handed me the bottle.

“It does interest me, indeed,” I said. “If Humber were ill enough to need medicine and he certainly does not look it he would hardly have brought this all the way from London without opening it.” And I thought of the bottle wrapped in white paper which, on an earlier visit to London, Humber had received from Blind Heinrich at Waterloo.

“I’ll have a look at it, anyhow,” I said.

My first precaution was to soften the sealing wax with a match, so that I could unwrap the bottle without tearing the paper, and, if necessary, so replace it that no suspicion that it had been tampered with should be aroused. The bottle might prove useless as a clue. In that case we should have to seek further, and to replace the bottle in Humber’s trunk in such a condition that he must inevitably see that it had been opened would certainly arouse his suspicions and defeat our object.

I soon had the paper opened out. The bottle of medicine seemed genuine enough. It bore the label of a well-known West End firm and the name of Mr. Humber. I tasted the contents.

“Cough mixture,” was my comment, and Captain Jackson at once confirmed me. “Humber never had a cough,” he remarked reflectively.

“Now for the paper,” I said, and began examining it. It was perfectly blank, and I was experiencing a pang of disappointment when, catching on the paper the reflection of the swinging lamp, I detected in one corner a faint, glistening line. Lemon juice, I was confident.

Under appropriate “treatment” a number of neat figures arranged in groups of three sprang into vivid prominence on the inside of the paper wrapping. They ran:

12358; 27326; 462311;

294123; 1818;

and so on.

I swiftly copied out the figures for safety, and handed the original paper to Captain Jackson, who, on board his own ship, was, of course, the supreme and unquestioned authority, and I wanted his full approval and support to any action that might be necessary. The figures were meaningless as they stood, but I had not forgotten old Heinrich’s systematic search for that odd volume of *Royal Love Letters*. I had my copy in my bag and fetched it at once.

With such an obscure book as the key to the cipher there was no need for any further elaborate precautions, and we hit upon the solution of the difficulty at once. On page 123 the eighth letter on the fifth line was “B”; on page 27 the sixth letter in the thirty-second line was “r”; and in a few minutes I had decoded the word “Brixton.” Going on, I found that the message conveyed the news that No. 24, Road, Brixton, had been wrecked by one of the bombs dropped in the recent raid; that a man, a woman, and two children had been killed. The spots where the other bombs had fallen were accurately described, and it was stated that they had done no damage beyond blowing holes in the roads and bursting gas and water mains. Every word was accurate.

And the key to the whole problem was the mysterious advertisement for a lost trinket in the *Petit Parisien*. That simple advertisement, so apparently innocent, had announced to Blind Heinrich the enemy’s change of code! And without the book to which it referred no intelligence on earth could have deciphered the disorderly mass of figures which lay before our eyes!

“Well, I think we have got them now, Captain,” I said, “and I am sure the Government will be deeply obliged to you for your assistance. But how am I going to get this fellow? If he lands in Norway he will be out of our power.”

“Come on deck,” said Captain Jackson, with a laugh. “Don’t make your mind uneasy about that.”

I followed him up the companion-way ladder to the deck, now deserted by all save the steersman and the officer on watch.

“Come up to the bridge with me,” said the Captain.

Although it was so near the period of full moon the night was dark, the sky being covered by a dense mass of heavy clouds. Try as we would, our eyes could not pierce the gloom, and we could see nothing a few yards from the ship. Though we had parted company from the destroyers long before, we were, of course, travelling without lights in view of possible danger, and only the binnacle lamp shed a soft radiance on the ship’s compass. I was soon to learn, however, how closely we were watched.

Captain Jackson entered the wheel-house and touched a key. From the masthead above a signal lamp flashed intermittently for a few seconds. Instantly from the southward winked an answering gleam, and Captain Jackson turned to me. “That’s a destroyer,” he said, “and she is coming up full speed.”

For the next few minutes signals were exchanged with the racing destroyer which was on our track, and soon I caught sight of the faint glow from her funnels, and then the outline of her low, rakish hull as she came abreast with us. At a signal from Captain Jackson our engines stopped, and soon we were lying motionless while a boat from the destroyer pulled rapidly across the gap which separated the two vessels.

A few minutes later a smart naval officer came on board with four men. We were soon seated in the Captain’s cabin, and I rapidly gave him an outline of what had happened. His quick intelligence took in the situation at a glance.

“I’ll take your Mr. Humber back with me,” he said, “and you and your man can come along.”

But we were nearly to lose our man. As the officer and his men entered the engine-room Humber caught sight of them. He started, but instantly recovered himself. As the lieutenant spoke to Phail, Humber watched him closely. I saw Aubert move noiselessly but swiftly behind Humber, evidently ready for a tussle. A moment later Phail beckoned Humber to come to him.

Instantly the spy’s hand shot to his jacket pocket, and, as it came out, bringing with it a revolver, Aubert sprang. The next instant the revolver was on the floor

and Aubert had Humber in a grip of iron. Ten minutes later, with Humber securely handcuffed, we were on our way to the destroyer, and were soon thrashing our way at top speed for home.

There is little more to tell. Humber proved to be a Swede named Holmboe, and we clearly established the fact that he had been for a long time acting as the travelling agent of the Berlin espionage bureau, carrying information to Norway for transmission through the German Legation in Christiania. The conspirators in the house in Harrington Street were all taken into custody, and we soon had all the threads of their activities in our possession, including the key to the mystery of Mr. Mostyn Brown, whose connection with various little affairs of espionage was clearly established. Blind Heinrich, too, was at length effectively unmasked, and, with the rest of the group, is now safely under lock and key, with ample leisure to repent of the nefarious business upon which they were engaged.

On this occasion, at any rate, the secret message failed to reach Berlin, and I often laugh when I think of the amazement and anxiety that must have been caused in the enemy's camp at the sudden silence of their emissaries. To-day we can afford to make them a present of the truth!

XIV The Great Submarine Plot

To be a success as a secret agent a wide knowledge of European hotels is an absolute necessity.

You must, indeed, be familiar with the best hotel in every city of any importance, and scarcely less important is the personal acquaintance of the manager; for without his help you will inevitably find in your path a thousand difficulties, small and great, which, with his friendly assistance, melt almost insensibly away. Duty and inclination alike have led me to make a special study of hotel life, and I think I may say, without undue egotism, that there are few maitres d' hotel in Europe with whom I am not on terms of acquaintance, and even in many cases warm friendship.

I was especially fortunate in this respect in the situation in which I found myself one sunny morning in June, 1917. As the clock struck ten I strolled out of a big hotel, which I will call the Waldesruhe, in Lucerne, and wandered along the shady avenue beside the lake in the direction of the Schwanen-Platz.

Luigi Battini, the manager of the Waldesruhe, was one of my closest personal friends, and I should have stayed at the Waldesruhe at any time I was in Lucerne quite apart from the particular business which had brought me there on this occasion. Luigi was one of those marvellously efficient human machines which appear almost to reach omniscience in everything connected, even remotely, with his profession. He would give his guests, off hand and without the slightest hesitation, minutely detailed directions for the most complicated of journeys without opening a time-table, and invariably his information was correct to the smallest particular. He knew at what stations every dining-car was put on every train within a radius of hundreds of miles, and he impressed upon you, in the far-off pre-war days, to remember that the train left Wels for Passau twenty minutes earlier this month than the hour mentioned in the time-table.

His memory, especially for faces, was prodigious. Indeed, it was to this that I owed the beginnings of our friendship. Years before Luigi had been a waiter at the great buffet at Liverpool where passengers from the incoming American boats were in the habit of snatching a hasty meal before joining the train for London. I had arrived in England from New York cold and hungry, and, owing to some delay about my baggage, was unable to get to the restaurant until just

before the London express was due to start.

I had not realised how long I had been delayed, and had just taken my first mouthful of the soup which Luigi had brought me when the bell heralding the immediate departure of the train rang loudly. With a muttered ejaculation of annoyance I hastily threw down on the table the price of my abandoned meal and rushed out, jumped into the train, and a moment later was speeding Londonwards, still cold and hungry and in the very worst of tempers.

Of course I promptly forgot the incident, and it was not until a year later that I was forcibly reminded of it. I had again arrived in Liverpool from New York and hurried to the same restaurant for a meal. By some queer chance I made for a table at which Luigi was still the waiter. I should not have known him, but he recollected me and our previous meeting.

With a profound bow and a smiling flash of his exquisite teeth, Luigi said quizzically: "Good evening, monsieur. Has monsieur returned for his dinner?"

I looked at him in blank astonishment for a moment, then burst into a roar of laughter, as I remembered both him and the long-forgotten incident of a year before. The ice was effectually broken between us, and when I left for London I felt I had made a friend of the smiling Italian. But it was years before I discovered how deep and loyal a mutual regard had sprung out of a trifling incident. But the best friendships not infrequently owe their origin to some such triviality.

Time had slipped by since then, and Luigi had climbed the ladder until the humble waiter was a power in the great cosmopolitan world of the hotel. But to me, at any rate, he was the Luigi of old; to others he might be merely the official head of a perfectly appointed hotel, where arrangements seemed to go by clockwork and no one ever heard of such a thing as failure. Always in a frock-coat, whatever the season, whatever the hour of the day; always wearing the diamond pin given him by a travelling monarch; always alert though never obtrusive; known to all his guests, but familiar with hardly any — such was Luigi Battini. And he was one of Hecq's "friends."

I had gone to Lucerne on purpose to learn something from his lips which he would not risk in the post, and what he had told me half an hour earlier had set me thinking deeply. It entirely confirmed certain information I had been able to

gain in London and Lisbon.

After a long and meditative walk, I seated myself on the terrasse of a cafe overlooking the lovely Lake of Lucerne, and, with a bock before me, wrote out a telegram as follows:

“Arthon, Paris. — Returning London fourteenth. — CASENTINO.”

Having finished my bock, I strolled along to the chief telegraph office near the station and dispatched the message. To the uninitiated it conveyed no other meaning than appeared on the surface, but its receipt at the address for which it was destined set various elements of machinery in motion.

On the evening of the fourteenth there stepped from the hotel omnibus a smartly dressed young Frenchwoman, carrying a little sable Pomeranian dog and followed by a porter with her luggage.

Luigi met her in the hall, and, with his heels clicked together in his usual attitude of welcome, received her with an exquisite bow. She engaged a room, signed the visitors' book in the usual way, and then allowed Battini to conduct her up by the lift. As she passed me our eyes met, but without the slightest sign of recognition. Even though the newly arrived guest was none other than my smartest assistant, Madame Gabrielle Soyez.

Next day, in consequence of a note I sent her, we met in one of the sitting-rooms in the further, and at the present moment unoccupied — wing of the hotel. She then told me that her own sitting-room was next to one occupied by a Swedish engineer named Oscar Engstrom, whom I had watched in Lisbon a month before and who was now in Switzerland engaged on some mysterious business which we had not been able to fathom. We strongly suspected, however, from various bits of evidence that had reached us, that the man was in the pay of Germany at the moment, even if he were not one of the regular German agents.

When I entered, Madame Gabrielle, smartly attired in a tailor-made gown of navy-blue cloth and a very bewitching hat, was standing at the window, with her pet dog beneath her arm, chatting to the immaculate Luigi, gazing the while on the blue waters of the lake. I found myself reflecting how typically French she was in every detail — dainty in face and figure, immaculately dressed, and possessing that indefinably vivacious great charm which seems to be the monopoly of the cultured Frenchwoman. She could throw it aside when she

chose, such was her wonderful versatility, and assume a mask of dullness and stupidity sufficient to ensure that no one meeting her would give her a second glance. It was a valuable accomplishment, and more than once had carried her safely through a difficult and dangerous situation.

To-day, among friends, she was her own sunny self. “Ah, Monsieur Gerald,” she cried, springing forward to greet me, “our friend Luigi has been telling me some very strange things — eh?”

“I have told Madame pretty well all I know,” said the suave Italian, in excellent English; “but it is not much. Engstrom has engaged a room for a lady friend — a Madame Bohman.”

“Swedish also?” I queried, with a smile. “When does our friend expect Mr. Thornton, as he calls himself?”

“He is expected any moment,” replied Luigi; “he has retained his room ever since he left for London.”

“Good!” I said. And we all three sat down and plunged into an intricate discussion of every detail concerning the suspects and our plan of campaign.

My instructions to Luigi were to keep a constant watch upon the comings and goings of the Swedish engineer and his lady friend, while to Madame Gabrielle fell the task of endeavouring to scrape acquaintance with the latter on her arrival, in order to try to gain from some casual remark — for we could expect nothing more — a hint of what was in progress.

Engstrom’s lady friend, Madame Bohman, arrived in due course, and, though she was quite unaware of it, we scrutinised her closely before we gave her a chance of seeing us. I saw at once that she was a complete stranger to me. Madame Gabrielle did not know her, and Luigi, with his faultless memory for faces, declared positively that she had never entered any hotel at which he had been engaged.

“A new hand, in all probability,” I thought, “but none the less dangerous on that ground if she knows her business.” Madame Bohman was a tall, handsome, fair-haired woman of decidedly distinguished appearance, and, from the scraps of her conversation which we overheard, evidently well educated and well connected. She had the blue eyes and fair hair of the typical Swede, but blue eyes and fair

hair are not exactly unknown in Germany, and, though there was no ostensible reason for it, I found myself wondering whether she was exactly what she professed to be. But the German spy bureau works with any tools that come handy, and, even though Madame Bohman were the pure-blooded Swede she professed to be, there was still no reason why she should not be an enemy agent as well. More than one Swedish “neutral” has been detected in that category and paid the penalty!

XV The Real Mr. Engstrom

Three days after Madame Bohman’s arrival, a special messenger brought me from Hecq in Paris three reports which, when I had read them, reduced me to a condition of blank despair.

The first was from the French Consul-General at Stockholm, who had been instructed to make the closest possible inquiry into the bona fides of the shipbuilding and engineering firm of Engstrom and Linner, of Malmo. His report stated that he had paid a visit to Malmo, and as the result of his investigations there and elsewhere he had not the least doubt that they were a first-class firm, and it was a fact of considerable interest that they were employed by the Swedish Government upon several important contracts. No reason whatever could be suggested for doubting their sterling integrity, and the partners had never shown the slightest trace of pro-German bias, either as a firm or individually. This seemed a complete check to our suspicions.

The second report was from Aubert, whom I had left in Lisbon. Dated from the Palace Hotel, it read:

“I have kept constant observation upon the individual, Mr. Thornton, but, with the exception of the fact that he is acquainted with Halbmayr, of the Koniggratzerstrasse — which, after all, may be quite innocent — I see no reason to suspect him of hostile intent. He has telegraphed several times to Lucerne, addressing his messages to the name of Syberg at the poste restante. You could probably secure sight of one of these; I cannot at this end. He was visited a fortnight ago by a Swedish lady named Bohman. The latter may be a travelling agent of the enemy, but somehow, after a close vigilance, I feel doubtful. When Thornton leaves I shall advise you. It will be best for Garcia to follow, as they have not met, and he is here for that purpose.”

The third report was from a certain very alert English business man named Charles Johnson-Meads, who had offices in Fenchurch Street, London. It was Johnson-Meads who, by a curious statement he made to me one evening, in my rooms in Curzon Street, London, had first aroused my suspicions that a deep plot, in which Engstrom and Thornton were somehow implicated, was on foot.

Johnson-Meads' report read:

"I have strained every effort to learn more of these people and their mysterious movements in London. Contrary to my belief, I have now established the fact that Engstrom is, after all, the well-known Swedish engineer, and not the fraud I believed him to be."

This, of course, appeared to be tolerably conclusive, and I was inclined to throw up the whole business at once and return to Paris, where other work urgently awaited my attention. It was clear enough from the report of the French Consul-General at Stockholm that Engstrom and Linner would not lend their name to any shady proceedings, while Johnson-Meads' apparent certainty that Engstrom was really what he professed to be seemed to cut away the principal basis of suspicion.

Half an hour later I met Madame Gabrielle and Luigi in the same private room and showed them the three reports, which were as disappointing to them as they were to me. Of Madame Bohman, Gabrielle had failed to discover anything which could give reasonable grounds for suspicion. According to her own statement for the resourceful Madame Gabrielle had speedily scraped up an hotel acquaintance with her — Madame Bohman and Engstrom were old friends, having known each other for years in Stockholm. Moreover, it was evident that Madame Bohman at least knew Stockholm well, for Madame Gabrielle was intimately acquainted with that city, and had no difficulty, by means of apparently artless conversation, in testing the accuracy of Madame Bohman's knowledge. To all intents and purposes we seemed to be on a wild-goose chase, and I expressed this view.

"There is nothing in it," was my verdict. "I think the best thing we can do is to give up wasting our time and get back to Paris at once. You know there is the Morny affair waiting for me, and Hecq is anxious I should take it in hand without delay."

“The Morny affair” was one of those queer financial scandals which have been so rife in Paris during the war. A Frenchman, hitherto of unblemished reputation as a patriot, had suddenly come under suspicion of trafficking with the enemy. Questions and rumours had been flying thickly in the Paris Press, as well as in the Chamber, and it was urgently important that the unfortunate Mr. Morny — for I, at least, believed he was being slandered by a group of business rivals and political enemies — should be cleared once and for all of suspicions which were rapidly reducing him to a state of complete prostration. How, later, I succeeded in completely vindicating his character, I hope to tell at some future time — at present a full disclosure of the facts might do untold harm.

But Madame Gabrielle, her feminine intuition busily at work, was not to be easily put off. She strongly dissented from my view.

“Yesterday,” she said, “during Madame Bohman’s absence with Engstrom at Brunner, I took Luigi’s master-key, and, entering her room, opened her dressing-case and thoroughly searched her papers. It is true I found nothing of interest, save that there were letters from certain friends in London, the addresses of which I have copied. And I found this!”

“This” was a blank sheet of notepaper, which she produced, bearing the heading of the Palace Hotel at Lisbon.

“You see,” she said, “it has been very carefully preserved, for it was enclosed in these two envelopes. I wonder why?”

I took the blank paper from her and examined it carefully. I found it to be the ordinary hotel notepaper, exactly similar to that which I myself had used in the hotel writing-room, during my recent visit to the Portuguese capital.

“Well,” I said, “I don’t see how that proves, or even suggests, anything. We know perfectly well that Madame Bohman has been to Lisbon — she herself makes no secret whatever of the fact, and she may very well have brought away by accident a sheet of the hotel notepaper and a couple of envelopes. It is true she seems friendly with both men, and there is undoubtedly some suspicion. But is it sufficient to justify action on our part, or even to give us good reason for staying here and devoting to a very trivial matter valuable time which at the moment we might be spending to much greater advantage in Paris?”

Luigi raised his dark eyebrows and shrugged his shoulders. It was obvious that

he was entirely of my way of thinking, and, though he was willing to do anything to help me and to put a spoke in the wheel of the Hun plotters — for, like all patriotic Italians, he cherished the liveliest hatred for the Austro-Germans — he was no fonder than I am myself of the profitless task of chasing a will-o'-the-wisp. But the merry, go-ahead little Frenchwoman had her suspicions very thoroughly aroused, and I knew well that when this was the case it was not an easy task to allay them.

“I do not care, mon cher Gerald! There is evil work in progress, somewhere; I am confident. Why should Thornton be acquainted or have anything to do with our arch-enemy, Ernst Halbmayr? Remember how cleverly he escaped you six months ago in Rotterdam!”

“But we trapped the woman,” I rejoined grimly. “And there was a firing party at Versailles.”

“And there is somebody to be trapped here also,” persisted Madame Gabrielle. “You will surely not give up yet?”

While we were still discussing the matter a page-boy brought a telegram. Luigi took it from the lad and, dismissing him, handed the message to me. It was from Aubert in Lisbon, and it conveyed the significant news that this man Thornton had left for Lucerne, and that Garcia was travelling by the same train. “He has just sent a telegram to Syberg at the poste restante,” the message concluded.

After this, of course, there could be no question of our abandoning our task. There was evidently something afoot, and just as evidently Lucerne was likely to be the scene of some lively incidents.

Luigi did not lose a second. He rang the bell, and immediately another page-boy appeared.

“Go at once to the poste restante,” he said, “and ask for a telegram for Syberg. They know you come from me, so there will be no need of a letter. Don’t forget the name — S-y-b-e-r-g. And make haste.”

The boy disappeared instantly, and for a quarter of an hour we waited in feverish impatience for his return. When he came back he brought with him the message we wanted. Opening it, I read in French, as follows:

“To Syberg, Poste Restante, Lucerne.

“Received good news from London. Meads” (the man in London whose suspicions had been aroused) “is now with us, so business can proceed. Leaving for Lucerne tonight. Shall see T. in Paris to arrange further details and transit of machinery. Thyra” (the Christian name of Madame Bohman) “will meet E. H.” (was this Ernst Halbmayer?) “at Geneva on the 15th.”

This message was unsigned, but it confirmed the impression given us by Aubert’s wire that events were on foot, and at once the three of us plunged with renewed energy into our plan of campaign.

“There can be no doubt,” I said, “that ‘E. H.’ refers to Halbmayer, and probably he is directing the whole of the intricate affair.”

“Very likely,” said Luigi dryly, “but I do not see that we have much more light on what direction against the British the conspirators, if they really are German agents, intend to work.”

“True, but that is just what we have to find out,” I replied. “From what Johnson-Meads states, the plot in some way relates to the British submarines. At present I am just as much in the dark as you are. If Halbmayer is directing operations you may depend upon it that some really serious coup is intended, for Halbmayer never troubles his head about the small affairs. Don’t forget that next to Steinhauer he is the man the Koniggratzerstrasse puts most implicit faith in.”

Events were now moving rapidly. I waited with anxiety for the arrival of the man Thornton, whom I had never seen, for I was particularly anxious to have a look at him. I suspected very strongly that he was one of the German Secret Service men masquerading under an assumed name, and I was therefore particularly anxious for an opportunity of identifying him. I argued with myself that if he was mixed up with anything big enough to call for the co-operation of Halbmayer he must be one of the “big” men himself, and it was quite possible I might be able to identify him, for personally or through photographs I was well acquainted with most of the leaders of German espionage work.

Thornton at length reached the Waldesruhe, where he was greeted by the urbane Luigi with all the evidence of distinguished consideration which made the suave Italian so popular with his many patrons. Thornton would have passed for an Englishman anywhere, both in looks and language. He was perfectly dressed in

clothes unmistakably British in cut, and spoke the language to perfection. This, however, was hardly surprising, for, as we learned afterwards, he had lived in London ever since he was fourteen. He had, however, been brought up in circles which were virulently anti-British, and had absorbed to the fullest extent that poisonous hatred of everything English which so frequently displays itself in the Hun who has made England his home of convenience.

He little suspected that the smiling Luigi, who so assiduously attended to his comforts, was one of the secret agents of the Allies; that another, in the person of myself, saw his arrival, or that in the turret of the great hotel there was a small secret room containing a powerful wireless set, which I sometimes operated myself.

I had to be very careful not to be seen by Thornton, for it was quite possible, if my suspicions were well founded, that he might know me. And it was well that I did, for I recognised him instantly as Emil Brahe, a German agent of whom we had lost sight for some time. He had formerly been engaged on the Continent and was well known to our men, though of late years he seemed to have dropped out of active work, and we had lost sight of him altogether. I realised now that we had been cleverly tricked: we had believed him to belong to the Berlin branch, while all the time he was living quietly in England, where he did no “business” whatever, and was thus never suspected even by the astute men of the Special Branch.

We had relied much on Madame Gabrielle’s powers to extract information from Madame Bohman, with whom she was already on excellent terms. The pair often sat chatting in the lounge, smoking each other’s cigarettes, and I knew the fair Gabrielle was keenly on the alert for any slip by which Madame Bohman might “give herself away.” The Swedish woman, however, was far too clever and would betray nothing.

Shadowing Thornton, or Brahe, to give him his right name, was Manuel Garcia, a capable ex-detective of the Lisbon police, who was now an agent of the Central Bureau of Counter-Espionage in Paris.

That telegrams were constantly passing between the Swedish engineer and some people in Lyons and Marseilles I knew, and, indeed, I was able to secure copies of some of them. In this way I discovered that these Swedes were on very friendly terms with a banker named Heurteau, who had carried on business in

Paris before the war, had afterwards escaped to Zurich, and had long been suspected of being one of the paymasters of the spy bureau in Berlin.

On the morning of the thirteenth, in consequence of what Madame Gabrielle had told me, I took train to Geneva, where I put up at the National. Manuel Garcia followed by the next train, and early next morning I received a telephone message from Madame Gabrielle telling me that Madame Bohman had left the Waldesruhe and was due at Geneva at four o'clock that afternoon.

As a result of this message Garcia and I watched the incoming train, and my assistant followed Madame Bohman in a taxi to a small hotel in the Quai de Mont Blanc. An hour later Garcia himself took a cab to the hotel so as to watch for the arrival of Halbmayer, the real antagonist with whom our duel was being fought out.

Halbmayer, a short, stout, bald-headed man, with perfect manners and the air of a bon viveur, kept his appointment punctually, arriving from Bale the next day about noon. As he knew me well, I was compelled to remain in hiding, but from my window I was able, with a pair of good field-glasses, to watch Madame Bohman and the German walking together on the Promenade du Lac, evidently engaged in the closest conversation. Garcia, of course, was not far away.

The pair remained together for an hour and a half, and I noticed with amusement that the wily Halbmayer took particular care to select a seat which stood quite in the open, with no shelter of any kind at hand behind which an eavesdropper might lurk. Garcia was thus, of course, effectually kept at a distance, and had no opportunity of gleaning anything from our enemies' conversation.

Apparently the two, in the course of their earnest conversation, arrived at some definite agreement, for when they at length rose and parted, Halbmayer returned direct to the station, where he had left his luggage in the cloak-room, while the Swedish woman went back to her hotel, leaving for Lucerne an hour later.

By the next train I also travelled with Garcia to Lucerne. Immediately on our arrival we all had a consultation, and we were deep in talk when I received a startling message from Hecq in Paris. It had been sent to him by Johnson-Meads, who had promised to communicate with me through Hecq if any further suspicious matter came under his notice. The message read:

"Cancel my last message; most urgent I should see you immediately."

Now Johnson-Meads' last message had reported him as being assured of the bona fides of Engstrom. The "cancellation" of that could only mean one thing — that the Engstrom we knew was a fraud, and that for some sinister purpose he was trading on the good name of a perfectly reputable firm of engineers in Sweden.

An hour later I was on my way to London.

I arrived there without incident, and for an hour sat with Mr. Johnson-Meads in his office in Fenchurch Street.

"I am afraid you will think me criminally careless, Mr. Sant," he said, "in the matter of my assurance that the man you know as Engstrom was what he professed to be. But I was deceived by a curious coincidence, and can only offer as an excuse that I have not had your training in solving problems of this kind.

"You will remember what I told you when I met you in Curzon Street? Well, that remains true. Where I went wrong was in identifying Engstrom with the head of the Swedish firm.

"It so happened that I have business friends in Malmo, and, after our conversation, being still very suspicious, I wrote to them asking for information about Engstrom and Linner. I soon received a reply, which was in every way satisfactory, and my correspondent mentioned, quite casually, that Mr. Engstrom was actually in London and was staying at the Hotel Cecil. As I had that very day seen the man we now know as Engstrom, that seemed to me to clinch the matter, and perhaps foolishly, I dropped all suspicion.

"Now for the curious coincidence. A few days ago I was going home by train about six o'clock. The trains, of course, were packed, and I was 'strap-hanging.' We had just left King's Cross when, owing to steam in the tunnel, our train ran with considerable violence into a train which was standing in the tunnel.

"The smash was not serious, but the shock was severe, and I was thrown right on top of a gentleman sitting on a seat close by me. A metal dispatch case he was carrying caught my face and, as you will see, cut it very badly. I was stunned for a moment, and when I came round I found the stranger holding me up. He tied a handkerchief round my face, and very kindly helped me out of the train to a hotel, where he got me some brandy, and I soon recovered.

“He had to go on, and as we were about to part he handed me his card. I slipped it into my pocket without looking at it, and went home, very much shaken. It was not until two days later that I looked at it. It read:

Engstrom and Linner,

Stockholm.

Oscar Engstrom.

“Now, Mr. Sant,” he went on, “the Mr. Engstrom who helped me was not the man we both know as Engstrom! He did not resemble him in the slightest degree. I immediately tried to find Mr. Engstrom, but found to my dismay that he had left the Hotel Cecil and no one knew where he had gone. He was on a holiday tour, and when he tears a few days from business he frequently disappears altogether for a week, in order to get a complete rest from business cares. I have wired Malmo, and all they can tell me is that he will not be back for ten days. Now what can we do?”

I thought deeply for a few moments. Obviously I must see the real Mr. Engstrom as soon as possible. But there was no chance of finding him immediately, and in the meantime much might happen. I soon made up my mind.

“I shall return to Lucerne at once,” I said, “and go from there to Stockholm in time to meet Mr. Engstrom on his arrival. There is nothing else to be done.”

Two days later I was back in Lucerne. “Engstrom,” his friend Thornton, and Madame Bohman were still there, busy on their plot, whatever it was, and entirely unsuspecting either of the urbane hotel manager or the pretty little Frenchwoman who had apparently developed a lively affection for the handsome Swedish woman.

One day I learned from Luigi that, in the course of a couple of hours, Engstrom had received three telegrams, and had sent a reply to each of them. Of their purport Luigi could gain no knowledge.

Now, I was particularly anxious to get a sight of those telegrams, for obviously they might throw a good deal of light on the business on which Engstrom was engaged. I laid my plans accordingly.

That same afternoon, with Luigi's assistance, I managed to transform myself into a passable imitation of a very unkempt and dirty mechanic, and as soon as the Swedish engineer left the hotel, about half-past five — it was his usual habit to go out to take an aperitif — I took Luigi's master-key, which unlocked all the doors in the hotel, and crept noiselessly to Engstrom's room. I was soon inside, and a few minutes later, with the aid of my own skeleton keys, had opened the big leather travelling trunk, and was hastily examining its contents.

A number of telegrams had been hastily thrust into the trunk. I had grasped my prize and was just about to shut and relock the trunk, when I heard a sound behind me, and, turning, found myself face to face with Oscar Engstrom himself.

And not only that, but I was looking straight into the barrel of a very serviceable-looking automatic pistol, held without a tremor in Engstrom's very capable hands!

XVI In A Tight Corner

I was caught red-handed — caught as neatly as any bona-fide burglar who ever picked a lock!

I had opened the trunk of a fellow visitor with a skeleton key; I had been caught in the very act of pilfering the contents. Indeed, at that very moment I held in my left hand a tiny leather box containing Engstrom's diamond tie-pin and studs, while with my right hand I had been delving into his big trunk. Never was a capture neater or more complete. And, with the menace of the big revolver in Engstrom's hand, and knowing something of my captor, I knew better than to attempt a rush for escape. I should never have reached the door alive!

"Well, and what does this mean?" harshly demanded the Swedish engineer, in bad French, still covering me with his pistol. "And who are you?"

Had Engstrom suspected who I really was, I knew he would have shot me out of hand and chanced all consequences: indeed, he would have had little to fear, for there would have been nothing more than a casual inquiry into the shooting of a thief caught red-handed. Moreover, dead men tell no tales, and Engstrom would have had no difficulty whatever in excusing himself by some hastily concocted story that I had attacked him as soon as he found me plundering his trunk. My disguise saved me, and it was evident he had no suspicion that I was anything but a common thief.

I broke instantly into a torrent of excuses, putting down the little jewel box and the papers with as guilty an air as I could assume. The situation obviously required both tact and cunning, for I realised that I was in a tight corner and that a slip would cost me my life. I pleaded desperate poverty; I was an honest workman driven to evil courses by want; I am afraid I even invented a story of a wholly mythical wife and family in the last stage of starvation. Finally, I roundly promised amendment of my ways if he would but let me go. "Forgive me this time," I implored. "Do forgive me — this will ruin me."

"You dog of a thief, I have caught you stealing from my room," was his only reply. "I shall call the manager," and he slammed the door and pressed the electric bell. "Send the manager here at once," he commanded the messenger who answered the bell.

Luigi came immediately, and there was a great scene in which my friend very cleverly worked himself into a state of virtuous indignation at the slur I had cast upon his hotel's high reputation. He assured Engstrom that justice should be done forthwith, and actually handed me over to a police officer, and I was at once marched off as a common hotel thief.

Guess my surprise when, as soon as we had turned the first corner, the officer whispered: "Monsieur Battini has told me all the circumstances. He did not telephone to the Bureau, but called me in out of the street. Dash away from me in a few moments when we come to a lonely place, and I will merely pretend to follow you. But, monsieur, get away from Lucerne as quickly as possible."

I smiled: Luigi had shown that he possessed a quick and ready resourcefulness. It was most fortunate that Engstrom, finding me with my skeleton keys on the floor, and his jewellery in my hand, had failed to suspect the truth.

I slipped away at the first convenient corner, and an hour later was well on my way by the St. Gothard route to Milan, the excellent police officer undertaking to let Luigi know whither I had gone.

I learned later that, when my "escape" was reported to him, Engstrom took the matter very quietly, and, beyond roundly abusing the officer for letting me slip through his fingers, did not propose any further action. As a matter of fact, having lost nothing, he was probably well content that the affair should end thus. I have no doubt that, masquerading in the name of another man, publicity was the last thing he would desire.

Our problem now was how to deal with Engstrom and his associates. Obviously to arrest them, even if we had good ground for doing so, would have been to defeat our own object, for we wanted to find out all the details of the plot upon which they were engaged. But, as a matter of fact, they had done nothing up to this moment to bring themselves within the clutches of the law. Engstrom, it is true, was posing as someone else, but, so long as he did not attempt to profit by it, this was not a criminal offence. I decided to continue our investigations.

Reaching Milan, I put up at the Cavour, where, of course, I was well known. A few hours later I received a long dispatch in cipher from Madame Gabrielle, and two days later an explicit letter from Luigi. I was also able to secure some further information regarding the mysterious engineer and his friends, and this

decided me to go to Sweden myself and see the real Mr. Engstrom.

My journey to Malmo was uneventful, and, arriving there, I lost no time in repairing to the yard of Messrs. Engstrom and Linner, the engineers. There, in the private office of the head of the firm, I soon found myself face to face with the principal, Mr. Oscar Engstrom. He was a short, dark, alert little man, with charming manners, and I took a liking to him at once. I had not previously decided on my course of action, but after a few minutes' conversation I decided on a policy of complete frankness. As rapidly as possible, I told him the full story of the man who had been using his name in London and on the Continent.

At first he expressed himself as completely puzzled. He could not, he said, imagine what the object of the gang could be. They could hardly commit the firm to anything which would profit themselves, for no one abroad would act without inquiries. At length I happened to mention that Johnson-Meads had told me that the man had for disposal something connected with submarines.

"With submarines!" he exclaimed in obvious surprise. "Why, we have in hand at this moment several submarine inventions, of which we own the patents. Two of them are completely secret, they are in use only by France and Britain!"

This put a new aspect on the affair. "I begin to see now," I said, "why your name has been assumed. Have you heard of any attempt to secure the submarine secrets?"

"None whatever," replied Mr. Engstrom. "Moreover, it would be extremely difficult, if not impossible. One of the appliances with which we are concerned is of such importance that, while we make the greater part of it, a vital portion is manufactured in England, and the apparatus is not put together until the whole is actually on the submarine for which it is intended. Consequently, unless a thief or spy secured copies of the plans both here and in England he would be powerless to profit by either. I may mention that this arrangement was arrived at with the British Admiralty at our express wish and suggestion. I am quite frank with you, Mr. Sant."

"One more question, Mr. Engstrom," I added. "You are in a position to know of any important inventions in connection with submarine work. Have you heard of any recent invention which would bring it within the bounds of possibility that your double is acting honestly and has really something to sell?"

“That is out of the question,” returned the engineer decidedly. “Unless the invention were German, in which case it would not come out of that country, I think I should certainly have heard something of it. Of course, we have rivals in our business, but there is a certain amount of freemasonry even among business rivals. I know all the people who are making submarine parts there are very few who could or would tackle a big invention. Besides, if the man has an honest bargain to drive, why should he assume my name?”

This argument was unanswerable. But I confess I was still a long way from guessing just what the bogus Engstrom and his friends were plotting.

My next visit was to the Swedish police in search of information about Madame Bohman. Here, however, I was quite at fault. It was evident she was passing under an assumed name, and I could not succeed in identifying her among the long array of photographs of known German agents laid before me by the chief of the Swedish Secret Police.

Arriving at Bergen, I received, before I sailed for England, a long telegram from Madame Gabrielle, telling me that Engstrom, Madame Bohman, and Thornton had left for Paris. Fearing that they would immediately recognise her if she followed them, she had telephoned the news to Hecq, and that astute official had promised to take the suspects under his own wing for the immediate future, pending my arrival.

I proceeded to London, where, to my dismay, I learned that, although Madame Bohman had arrived in Paris with Thornton, Engstrom was missing.

Twenty minutes later I was speaking with Hecq at St. Germain over the official telephone. Three days later I heard that Hecq's men had succeeded in running the elusive Engstrom to earth at Marseilles, where he was staying at the Hotel Louvre et Paix under the name of Jansen, and was constantly meeting a compatriot named Tegelmund.

The situation at this moment remained a complete puzzle so far as the real objective of the gang was concerned. On the one hand, we had at Marseilles the mysterious individual who posed as the Swedish engineer, Engstrom. On the other, we had his known associates, Thornton and Madame Bohman, in Paris. Engstrom was living quite openly, with no appearance of concealment, at a good hotel, but he was quite obviously doing nothing and meeting nobody. The other

two, however, were just as obviously lying low. They had taken apartments at a very small and not very reputable hotel in the Rue Royale, and both had changed their names, entering France with new and apparently perfectly genuine Swedish passports, issued only a few weeks previously.

Our next discovery was a staggering surprise. One of our agents, who had been watching Madame Bohman, came in and reported that, late the previous night, she had left her hotel and walked swiftly to an obscure cafe in the Quartier Latin. She had entered the place, taken a seat at a table by herself, and called for a glass of wine. While she was drinking it, a man, very untidy and apparently half intoxicated, lurched up to the table and sat down facing her. She took no notice of him whatever, or he of her. Calling a waiter, the man ordered a double glass of Chianti. Our agent, seated at an adjoining table, saw her then glance quickly at the stranger, and a moment later she ordered an absinthe.

Now, an order for a double glass of Chianti is unusual, especially in a disreputable cafe in a low part of Paris, and it is hardly customary for women to follow wine with absinthe. Our agent was struck by the oddity of the two orders and listened closely.

Directly the waiter had placed the drinks on the table and left, the man, without even glancing at the woman, muttered something in an undertone which our agent could not catch. It was, however, evidently sufficient, for the woman drank up her absinthe, and, rising, left the cafe. She took no notice whatever of the man, and he paid, to all appearances, as little regard to her. Apparently half overcome by drink, he remained at the table, nodding drowsily, for a quarter of an hour. It was a clever bit of acting, but he forgot his eyes! Our agent caught a sight of them, and realised at once that the drunkenness was feigned.

At length the man got up and lurched towards the door. The police agent at the same moment left by another exit into an adjoining street, and, casually turning the corner in the direction the supposed drunken man had taken, saw him a few yards ahead, walking steadily enough.

Five minutes later he had overtaken Madame Bohman, and, walking side by side for a few hundred yards, they had a brief conversation and parted.

Our agent was in a quandary. He had the strictest instructions not to lose sight of Madame Bohman, but he was a man of intelligence, and realised that a new

factor had appeared on the scene. Accordingly, he decided to follow the man, and soon saw him enter a cheap boarding-house, letting himself in with a latchkey. Five minutes later we had the news, and a couple of men were at once detailed to take up the watch. Madame Bohman, we soon ascertained, had gone straight to her hotel.

The boarding-house which the mysterious stranger had entered was closely watched all night. The next morning the man came out, and was immediately recognised as none other than Halbmayer himself! How he had got into France and Paris was a mystery, for the police had no register of his arrival. I may say here that this point was never completely cleared up, but it was very generally believed that he was put ashore by a submarine, and intended leaving in the same way.

We now had him safely enough; he could not possibly escape. He was a known spy, and there was ample ground for arresting him. But this would have made mincemeat of our plans, as Hecq saw plainly enough.

“Halbmayer is very dangerous,” he declared to me as I sat in his office the same day. “Evil work is on foot somewhere, and our friend the German is director of operations. He would not dare to show his face in France after meeting Brahe in Lisbon unless he were playing for a big coup. But, my dear Sant, what is his motive? What is he after? To that question so far we have got no reply whatever. And we must find the answer.”

I agreed with my chief most cordially. “Give him rope,” I said, “and see if he does not hang himself. At any rate, he won’t escape us this time; we shall get him even if we don’t learn his secret. What worries me is that he may have done his nefarious work, and inflicted untold injury on the Allies before we nab him. But we must take some chances.”

“The telegram sent by Brahe, or Thornton, to Engstrom just before the former left Lisbon mentioned two things,” said my chief. “The first was that Johnson-Meads was with them in other words, that his suspicions had been allayed (which we know to be a fact) and that ‘T.’ was here in Paris ‘to arrange further details and transit of machinery.’ What machinery? And who is ‘T’? ‘T’ must be Tegelmund, the man in Marseilles. We must look out for him.”

XVII “The Plot Revealed”

Within a week the man Tegelmund, accompanied by Engstrom, arrived in Paris and took up his abode in an obscure hotel near the Gare du Nord. But, though we kept a careful watch upon the pair, Engstrom, ever elusive and resourceful, suddenly disappeared! For six days he was absent. Then, as suddenly and mysteriously, he appeared again at the hotel.

Aubert, who had been detailed to watch Tegelmund, now reported that the latter had been across to the Orleans goods station, inquiring about some heavy cases of goods which had arrived from Lisbon.

“I have contrived to open one of the cases,” he said. “It contains some complicated and apparently delicate machinery, with a small dynamo. Apparently it is some sort of wireless plant, but, beyond that, I cannot make head or tail of it.”

At Aubert’s suggestion I went late one night to the Orleans goods yard. Aubert, by methods of persuasion not wholly original, had contrived to make friends with one of the officials, and we had no difficulty in securing access to the great goods shed, now silent and deserted, in which the mysterious cases lay. Prising open one end of the topmost case, I inspected the contents as closely as I could with the aid of my pocket flash-lamp. Within was what certainly appeared to be a wireless plant of some kind, but it was of a description entirely new to me, and I could not see enough of it to gain any idea of its purpose. Of course we dared not risk unpacking it. But we had made a great advance. The big cases could not be secretly moved, and our friend, the goods official, undertook to let us know promptly when he received orders to release them.

We waited in patience for a week, but still the cases remained untouched and uncalled for. Then came an incident which threw a flood of light on the proceedings of our enemies, though it told us nothing of their real motive; we were to learn that later.

One day I was strolling aimlessly along the Boulevard des Capucines, when I heard my name pronounced in accents of delighted surprise. Turning round, I instantly recognised an old friend in the person of Captain A—, who was one of the experts attached to the submarine branch of the British Admiralty.

“My dear Sant,” he exclaimed joyfully. “Who would have thought of meeting you here? I am alone in Paris. I know no one and am bored to death. What have

you got on hand now? I thought you were in New York.”

“I certainly didn’t expect to meet you here,” I replied. “What has brought you over?”

“Come and have some lunch, and I’ll tell you all about it,” he replied, and we repaired to an adjoining cafe, where Captain A— promptly ordered lunch in a private room.

“We’ve got a new thing on hand in the submarine line,” he told me as soon as the waiter had left the room. “You know we have been trying some experiments in German waters lately, and the Hun destroyers have been so confoundedly active that our fellows have had to pass a lot of their time sitting on the bottom. As a consequence, some of the crew have suffered terribly for want of fresh air. We have a very good system of purifying the atmosphere, but it is not sufficient owing to the long periods the boats have to stay under water, and a number of men have collapsed and died from suffocation. Indeed, one boat only escaped with more than half her crew totally incapacitated.”

I was keenly on the alert. Was I, I wondered, coming to grips at last with our problem?

“Well,” Captain A— went on, “we have been offered a new apparatus, which, if half of what the inventor tells us is true, will enable us to give the Hun a very bad time. We are assured that by its help a boat can stay under water for five days without the slightest risk.”

“Five days!” I repeated incredulously. “Why, it’s impossible!”

“So I thought,” he rejoined, “but when Engstrom and Linner vouch for anything, you’ve got to listen.”

“Engstrom and Linner!” I gasped. Things were getting ‘warm’ indeed.

“Yes,” he replied. “Mr. Engstrom is in Paris now with his invention, and we are going to test it off Havre.”

Then I sprang my mine. “Would you be surprised to learn,” I asked, as coolly as I could, “that your Mr. Engstrom is not Mr. Engstrom at all, but a German agent passing under his name?”

I have seen a good many badly surprised men in my life, but I never witnessed before or since such a spectacle of hopeless astonishment as Captain A— presented when he grasped the full significance of this announcement. He sat staring at me, his mouth wide open, and with dismay written legibly on every line of his countenance.

“But, Sant,” he gasped. “Are you sure? Mr. Engstrom came to us in London and told us all about it. He explained that the inventor was a Spaniard who would not trust the ‘neutrality’ of the Spanish Government in the matter, and that he had brought his invention to Engstrom’s with the idea of getting the best terms from one of the Allies.”

“I have no doubt that the man posing as Engstrom came to you,” I replied. “But, none the less, he is not Engstrom at all.”

“Then what is his game?” countered A—. “He has offered us the fullest test before we adopt his machine, and has not asked for a cent.”

“That remains to be seen,” I answered, “but it bodes no good to the Allies. What does he propose?”

“He has offered to install the apparatus on one of our newest types,” replied A , “and she is on her way to Havre for the purpose. We are to make any test we like, and, in fact, I am here to see the test carried out. The only condition he makes is that his machinery shall be sealed, and not opened until after the test has proved it to be satisfactory.”

I began to see light. “Did he propose to go with you?” I asked.

“No,” replied A— , rather ruefully, I fancied. “He said the machinery was so perfect that it would practically run itself from our electric accumulators, and that he would give us an absolutely free hand with it.”

“I wonder how many of you would have come back?” I said meaningly.

A— swore fervently, and I saw by the gleam in his eyes that he was fully awake to the possibilities of the trap into which he had been so nearly led.

Our task now, barring some unforeseeable contingency, was fairly easy; there was a good prospect of ensnaring our foes in the pit they had so skilfully dug for

us.

“The matter is up to you now,” I told A—. “I’m going to drop out till the very last minute. But I shall be with you then. It is of the utmost importance that we shall do nothing to scare these very wary birds. What is your plan?”

“Well,” said A—, “it seems to me I had better go ahead as if nothing had happened. The arrangement is that Engstrom shall take his apparatus to Havre and install it on E77. We are then to put to sea for the tests, and are to meet him later and inform him of our decision.”

“That will do all right,” I said. “I shall come on board the submarine before Engstrom arrives, and then I think we shall surprise him.”

A— departed at once to make the final arrangements and I busied myself in sending off some telegrams arranging for the final downfall of the Hun plotters.

A week later I found myself on board E77 at Havre. The mysterious cases had been sent on, and with them came Engstrom, with Thornton and Tegelmund, who professed to be interested in the venture the former financially, the latter as the inventor. Tegelmund was in high glee at being thus afforded an opportunity of putting his device to a thoroughly satisfactory test. We also had a big surprise in the arrival of Halbmayr, who arrived in Havre under the name of Mennier. That he should have ventured on the scene at all showed how intensely interested he was.

Engstrom declared that the fitting of the machinery would occupy fully three days, and we, of course, humoured him in every way possible. A— made himself particularly agreeable, playing the part of host to perfection, and it was evident that the conspirators never even dreamed that their nefarious designs were suspected by the genial naval officer who showed such an enthusiastic interest in the wonderful stories with which they plied him on the merits of their great discovery.

The three days went by. Four great cases of machinery had been duly shipped on board, and Engstrom, Thornton, and Tegelmund spent many hours daily at their work in the interior of the submarine. Of course I could not appear I should have been recognised at once but among the crew of the submarine were a couple of the smartest men of the Surete, who kept the bogus engineer and his associates under the closest scrutiny. They reported to me that Engstrom appeared to be the

only one of the three with any great amount of mechanical knowledge, and that, while Tegelmund worked assiduously at his machine, the others spent most of their time carefully examining the details of the British vessel, in which they showed the greatest interest. I began to get at last an inkling of the plot!

The fourth day dawned — the day of the denouement. Early in the morning I slipped on board the submarine, and when the two conspirators arrived we made our coup.

Engstrom, when he came on board with Tegelmund, found himself suddenly confronted by the Commander, with a stalwart bluejacket standing on either side of him. He was curtly informed that he could not go below.

“But you promised!” he shrieked, livid with vexation.

“True!” said the Commander. “But you call yourself Oscar Engstrom, of Malmo, and I happen to have the real Mr. Engstrom here.”

The engineer went white to the very lips as Mr. Engstrom, who had come post-haste from Stockholm in response to my urgent cable, emerged from behind the conning-tower, closely followed by myself. The false Engstrom began a vehement protest, but ceased suddenly, for, glancing round, he saw Tegelmund also under guard. The game was up!

A few minutes later, with Engstrom and Tegelmund safely in irons, the Admiralty experts who had come over from London began a minute examination of the wonderful “invention.” They soon discovered that the cases contained a jumble of wires and odds and ends of mechanical scraps simply thrown together to look complicated, and of no value whatever for the renewal of vitiated air.

The real object was only revealed when we had got to the very heart of the amazing collection of rubbish. There, cunningly hidden among much that was superfluous, was a highly efficient electric motor, wonderfully made and controlling a powerful bomb by machinery, set to detonate the explosive after six hours’ running.

The machinery was to have been operated by the electric batteries of the submarine, and had the E77 gone to sea and begun the “tests” of the bogus apparatus, not a vestige of the vessel or the crew would have been seen again, and the secret of her loss would have been locked for ever in the depths of the

Atlantic.

But this, we found, was only a part of the plot perhaps even the least important part. Tegelmund, finding himself trapped, turned craven and revealed the whole story. The real object of the spies was to get the fullest possible details of the internal arrangements of a British submarine of the latest type, and how well they had succeeded was shown when we cast our net a little wider.

Directly Engstrom and Tegelmund were in custody, an innocent-looking signal flag flew from the masthead of the submarine, and the officials of the Surete ashore made their pounce. Thornton and Halbmayr were seized at once at their hotel, and in their possession we found a wonderful series of drawings in which many of the secrets of the submarine were fully explained. A telegram to Paris brought about also the arrest of Madame Bohman, and a few days later the German agents were safely immured in the convict prison at Tours, where they were sent by the sentence of a court-martial summoned immediately to deal with their case. Their guilt in this particular case was too clear for any possibility of denial, but I am glad to say that their arrest opened up a way to us to deal the Hun Secret Service a blow from which it has never fully recovered. Enormous piles of documents were seized and carefully examined, with the result that numerous associates of Thornton in England found themselves in durance vile "for the duration," and so many fingers of the Hidden Hand were lopped off that the hand itself was badly crippled for many months to come. How the fingers grew and were again cut off I hope to tell at some later date.

XVIII The Mysterious Cylinders

After over two years of strenuous work without a holiday I found myself at length free, and I found myself one morning busy in my rooms in Curzon Street making final arrangements for a trip to Worcestershire to spend a fortnight with Doris and her mother in their lovely country home. I was jaded and fagged, for I do not mind confessing that my work recently had considerably affected me, and I was looking forward with eager anticipation to the delights of a stay in the country. I had not seen Doris for some months, though of course we were in constant communication, and I was naturally longing for a sight of her.

But I was destined to another disappointment. Just as I was finishing my packing the telephone rang. I found the call was from Morgan, one of the ablest of the Government Experts on Explosives, and he had a curious story to tell me. When I had listened to what he had to say I realised with a heavy heart that my long-promised holiday must be again postponed. I rang up Doris on the telephone and, having broken the news to her, hurried off to Morgan's office.

I found the expert in a state of utter bewilderment. He was an acknowledged authority on explosives, but a problem had been set before him which had baffled him completely.

A few days previously a mysterious explosion had occurred in some public gardens at Mile End. While a keeper was clearing away a pile of rubbish he found a curious-looking metal cylinder lying in a flower-bed, and while he was examining it it exploded with a tremendous report, injuring the man so severely that he had to be taken, in a very critical condition, to the East End Hospital.

A search by the police had a curious result. In other flower-beds a number of similar cylinders were found. They were very tiny, being only about an inch and a half in length and about a quarter of an inch in diameter. They contained a substance which was evidently the explosive. At one end a piece of wire was attached, evidently as a means of exploding them, and at the other end was a strip of soft lead.

Morgan showed me some of the cylinders, and frankly confessed his ignorance of what they contained.

"I thought I knew every explosive in existence," he told me, "but this is

something entirely new. It must be tremendously powerful, judging by the size of the cylinders and the effect of the explosion on the unfortunate gardener who found the first one.”

As I held one of the small cylinders, studying it with great care, an idea came to me.

“May I borrow this for a few days?” I asked. “I think I may be able to help you.”

“Certainly,” replied Morgan; “but be careful. We don’t even know how it is exploded.”

Next day I was in Paris, and took train to Verneuil l’Etang, some thirty miles from the capital, where I called on the manager of a certain well-known factory.

When I showed him the little cylinder he examined it with minute attention and carefully withdrew some of the mysterious explosive. This he placed under a microscope and a moment later said:

“Monsieur is undoubtedly correct! It is some of our product, herbethite, the invention of our chief director, Mr. Herbeth, and the most powerful explosive known to modern science. None has been used in actual work yet, and the only sample that has left our factory is that which was stolen. It is a great secret.”

“Has some been stolen, then?” I asked quickly.

“Yes. Fortunately we discovered the thief a workman named Pasquet and we thought we had recovered all that had been taken. Evidently we were wrong and some of the stuff has got into bad hands. Pasquet is awaiting trial by the Assize Court of the Seine.”

I returned to Paris and saw the Minister of Justice, to whom I made a certain proposal. Not without demur, he finally agreed, and I went to the prison armed with authority for a private interview with Pasquet.

I met the thief in a small room in the governor’s quarters of the prison. I found him to be a man of about thirty, quite obviously of the hooligan type, and I soon guessed from his conversation that he had been in the first place the tool of others, who, when they had made use of him, had abandoned him to his fate.

He was naturally resentful and vindictive. I told him I had authority to offer him a free pardon, and a reward which would give him a decent start in life if he would give us the fullest information in his power. He was suspicious, however, and it was not until my promise had been confirmed by the governor of the prison himself that he consented to speak.

His promise once given, he made a clean breast of everything, and his information was so startling that I could hardly credit it. Possibly he saw my incredulity, for he said quietly: "Monsieur will find that I am telling the truth. Why should I lie? My whole life and liberty are in pawn for my veracity."

I admitted that this was reasonable, and promised to push things forward as quickly as possible. Something about the man had appealed to me, and I wondered whether, after all, he might not contain the makings of a decent citizen.

My first concern was to send a wire to Madame Gabrielle, who was in Edinburgh, and the following evening she met me in my rooms in Curzon Street, where I unfolded the whole story to her.

"Of course, we are not yet on firm ground," I pointed out to her. "Pasquet alleges that the real name of his friend Shackleton is Von Schack and that he is a Prussian engineer officer.

"Pasquet first met Shackleton in London, and later on Shackleton approached him at Verneuil with another man, whom he introduced as Norman, and they offered to buy some herbethite from him for three thousand francs. Pasquet told me that he was very hard up owing to his wife's long illness — I have ascertained that this is quite true — and the temptation proved too much for him. It is only fair to him to remember that, though he looks an abandoned ruffian, he bears a good character as a husband and father, and it seems to be the fact that the only money he spent out of that which he received from Shackleton and Norman went to purchase necessities and delicacies for his wife. The money really seems to have saved her life. Anyhow, he stole a quantity of the herbethite, which Shackleton and Norman packed in golden syrup tins and took to England. When Pasquet stole a second lot he was discovered, and the dangerous stuff was found at his lodgings and recovered before he could hand it over to the two men, who pretended to be English.

“One fact of importance at least is established,” I added, “namely, that Schack formerly carried on business as a watchmaker at Newcastle, and sold his business to an Englishman a month before war broke out.”

For weeks we hunted in vain for Shackleton. I visited Newcastle, and found that the man to whom he sold the business had later joined the Army. This meant a journey to France for me, and I had an interview with the man at a certain brigade headquarters in the Somme battle area.

“Shackleton was undoubtedly a foreigner and I should say probably a German,” the watchmaker, now a corporal, told me. “When he left he asked me to forward any letters that might come for him, and gave me the address ‘Care of Soulsby, High Street, Bristol.’”

With that information I went straight from the British front to the great Severn port. Here I found that Soulsby kept a news-agent’s shop near Bristol Bridge, to which letters could be addressed. He did a big business in this way, for the address was very handy for sea-going men.

Soulsby at first refused to give me the smallest information about his clients, but a sight of my authority opened his mouth, and as soon as he realised that something serious was on foot he was only too willing to help me.

“Of course, Mr. Sant,” he said, “you will understand I have no knowledge whatever of the man. But I know that the Bristol Channel ports are full of spies, and it is very generally believed that few vessels leave here unknown to the German submarines lurking about the mouth of the Channel. If I can help you at all, I shall be delighted.”

I then learned that Shackleton had called about a week before, taking away several letters addressed to him, and that he usually called at intervals of a week or ten days. Soulsby promised to let me know at once as soon as he came again, and I wired to the wily Aubert to come to Bristol and keep observation.

Within three days, as I walked with my assistant along Victoria Street towards Temple Meads, he pointed out a middle-aged, keen-eyed, dark-haired man, who had little of the appearance of a Teuton. He looked like a well-dressed, prosperous business man. Yet it was he who had induced the unfortunate Pasquet to steal the herbethite, and he was certainly engaged in some nefarious and deadly plot. For although the actual volume of the stolen explosive was not

great, so tremendous was its power that the quantity in the hands of our foes was sufficient to wreak almost unimaginable havoc in half a dozen cities in England. Mr. Herbeth had looked very grave when he learned from Pasquet through me that the amount stolen was enough to fill two of the small cans used to hold golden syrup about a pint and a half altogether.

“I hope monsieur will trace it in time,” he said earnestly. “There is enough of it in their possession to destroy half London.”

We soon found out that Shackleton was living in furnished rooms at Clifton and had one close friend, who, after some difficulty, we proved to be his accomplice Norman.

One morning Aubert arrived at my hotel and reported that the pair had gone to the station and taken tickets for London. At once I advised Madame Gabrielle by telephone to be on the platform at Paddington and watch them wherever they went. I myself took the next train to London, and, driving to Curzon Street, awaited her report.

But although I sat up until after two o'clock the next morning, she did not arrive and I received no word from her! What contretemps had occurred? I was seriously uneasy, for I had impressed upon her the vitally important nature of our task, and if she failed or met with any mishap we should be in a serious predicament, for we had no trace whatever of any of Shackleton's associations in London, and anything might happen before we could run him to earth again among the teeming millions of the metropolis, the safest hiding-place on earth.

It was not until six o'clock the next evening that I received, by express messenger, a hastily scrawled note in which Madame Gabrielle said:

“Be extremely careful! They have discovered me, and I am being watched, so cannot come near you. Great things are in progress. Get someone to watch Shackleton, who is at the address below. Some great plot is in progress — that is certain. — G.”

Without a moment's delay, I slipped round to Whitehall, and very soon an expert watcher was at the address given by Madame.

Twelve hours later, I was filled with dismay by a telephone message which told me that neither Shackleton nor Norman had been to the address given. They had

both disappeared!

XIX Spy's Letter Deciphered

Back in Curzon Street, completely at a loss, I flung myself into a big arm-chair, and over a succession of pipes tried to piece our disconnected facts into a consecutive whole. Shackleton, or Schack, had moved from Newcastle to Bristol before the war, and I had little doubt that he had done so by express orders from the Koniggratzerstrasse. From this I argued mentally that Bristol would almost certainly be the seat of his main activities, and that his early return thither might be looked for with some degree of confidence. Added to this, we knew from the frank declaration of a high port official that the Bristol Channel towns were swarming with spies, and I felt little doubt that they were acting under Schack's direction. On the whole, now that we had apparently lost the two men in London, Bristol seemed the most promising base for our operations.

I decided therefore to return, and, leaving Madame at the Grosvenor in London, I took Aubert with me, together with an English secret agent whom I will call Moore.

Moore took lodgings opposite Shackleton's house in Bristol and at once opened an unwinking vigilance over the place. For a fortnight, however, there was no sign. In the meantime two letters arrived, addressed to Shackleton, at Soulsby's. These were opened by the authorities, photographed, and, after being resealed, were delivered in the ordinary way.

In one of the letters, which had been posted in London and purported to be an ordinary business transaction, was the statement:

"We are having great difficulty with our clients Johnson and Phillips, so we have placed the matter in the hands of our solicitors for advice."

This letter ostensibly came from a firm of estate agents in the Harrow Road. I made an immediate inquiry, and was not altogether surprised to learn that no such a firm existed. In the meantime I studied the letter on the assumption that it contained a spy cipher, and after some hours' work succeeded in extracting from its apparently innocent contents the following startling message:

"Angorania will convey troops from Montreal on 30th proximo."

This set me at work with furious speed. An inquiry at the port offices showed me that the great liner was at the moment lying at Avonmouth, and that she would sail for Montreal a week later in order to bring over several thousand Canadian troops.

Shackleton now made what was to me, I confess, a very welcome return to the scene. I had been seriously perturbed by the fear that we had lost him. While he was under my own immediate observation I felt capable of checkmating his designs, but the knowledge that an able enemy agent was at large and uncontrolled, with enough herbethite in his possession to create an appalling disaster, worried me more than I can tell.

Shackleton appeared on the scene the day after the delivery of the letter we had intercepted and photographed. Where he had been in the interval we never learned, but he did not arrive in Bristol from London; that was certain, for every train, day and night, was closely watched. Evidently the letter meant a good deal to him. He went at once to Avonmouth, closely followed by Moore. To our intense surprise, he seemed very well known at the docks and was freely admitted everywhere. He walked along the quays for some time, and we noted his obvious interest in the *Angorania*, now busily getting ready for her coming trip. We learned later that Shackleton had very cleverly wound himself into the confidence of a local shipping agent, and by this means had secured such frequent admission to the docks that his presence there was accepted almost as a matter of course.

I now began to feel practically certain that the *Angorania* was the object of the conspirators, and that the herbethite was the means to be adopted to bring about her destruction. But how?

Madame Gabrielle was to solve the question for us. The great liner was timed to leave at six o'clock, and an hour earlier the boat-train had arrived from London, bringing an unusually large assembly of passengers. These included several Government officials on their way to Canada, a number of highly placed military officers, and the members of two or three important war commissions.

Some time after the arrival of the train, a shabbily dressed woman in a battered old hat pushed rudely against me. I turned, and to my amazement recognised Madame Gabrielle. She was obviously almost at the end of her strength, pallid with fatigue, and with deep circles round her eyes which spoke eloquently of

exhaustion.

She made me a sign to follow her and slipped away from the crowd, which was hastening to the gangway. Directly we reached a quiet space, she gasped out:

“Norman has booked cabin No. 189 on the *Angorania*, in the name of Nash. I followed him to the shipping office and overheard.” A moment later she fainted and fell heavily into my arms.

I carried her at once to a waiting-room, and, handing her over without ceremony to the woman in charge, dashed at top speed for the quay where the *Angorania* was lying, now almost ready for departure. Not even for the sake of Madame Gabrielle would I venture a moment’s delay.

The “last bells” were ringing for the steamer’s departure as I rushed on to the quay. As I neared the gangway I saw, to my utter amazement, the man Norman stroll leisurely from the ship with the very last of the people who had been on board for the customary farewells. Evidently he was not going by the vessel at all. A moment later the gangways were withdrawn and the big liner moved away. Norman remained on the quay with the crowd, idly waving a real or pretended farewell to some supposed friend on the crowded decks.

I have cursed myself for my stupidity many times since, and even now I shudder at the thought of how nearly the dastardly plot against the liner came to success. The vessel was well under way when the idea flashed into my mind: “He has left the explosive on board!” How I failed to divine this earlier I cannot imagine. I suppose Norman’s return from the ship threw me temporarily off my guard.

But, in any case, there was not a second to be lost. The *Angorania*, heading down Channel, was gathering speed every moment, bearing somewhere on board enough explosives to sink her in ten seconds with the loss of hundreds of precious lives.

Boldness was the only course possible. I called a couple of dock police, and, showing them my authority, instructed them to arrest Norman at once. Before the spy could recover from his surprise, he was safely in custody and relieved of an extremely efficient automatic pistol.

And now for the *Angorania*. I rushed to the “competent military authority,” and briefly laid the facts before a veteran Colonel, in whom a life of splendid service

to the Empire had bred a capacity for swift decision and prompt action.

“She won’t go far, Mr. Sant,” he said cheerily, as he picked up the telephone.

A moment later I caught the crackle of wireless, and to my relief read the message: “To Q. Q.” (the *Angorania*’s code letters). “Heave to immediately and await instructions. PORT COMMANDANT.” A few minutes later a clerk brought in the *Angorania*’s acknowledgment .

A quarter of an hour after I was aboard a British destroyer, which tore out into the Channel, and at thirty-five knots was flying along in the wake of the *Angorania*. We soon overhauled the big liner, and as we neared her could see the crowded passengers, evidently puzzled at the unexpected stoppage.

As soon as I got on board, I accompanied the Captain to his private cabin and told him the facts. Sending for the purser, he ordered him to bring on deck at once all the luggage which had come on board in the name of Nash. “And carry it carefully,” he added, as he told the purser what it contained.

By great good fortune, there was only one big trunk in the hold, and it was readily accessible. The rest of Nash’s luggage was in his cabin. We soon had the lot on board the destroyer, where the torpedo officer rapidly overhauled it.

In the big trunk, resting quite unconcealed on the top of a pile of clothes, were two tin canisters labelled “Golden Syrup.” I could not repress a shudder.

“I think this is what we want,” said the torpedo officer grimly, as he carefully picked up the dangerous canisters. And then he did a brave thing.

“If you don’t mind, sir,” he said to the Captain, “I will take them out in a boat and examine them myself.”

The Captain nodded silently, and a few minutes later the ship’s dinghy dropped over the side. The torpedo officer took his seat and rowed away alone, the canisters on the after-thwart winking in the blazing sunshine. He was literally taking his life in his hands. We could not let the liner go until we were sure we had got what we wanted, and no one could be sure that the mere lifting of the canister lids would not explode the terrible compound they contained.

Half a mile away from the ship the rowing-boat came to a stop. Through our

glasses we saw the torpedo officer deliberately pick up the canisters and without hesitation prise up the patent lids. A moment later he waved to us, and at once commenced to row back to the ship.

“All right, let her go; I’ve got the stuff,” he shouted, as soon as he was within earshot, and a tremendous cheer went up from the crew, who in the mysterious “wireless” of the sea had learned what was afoot. A signal fluttered from the bridge of the destroyer. The *Angorania* dipped her pennant in acknowledgment, and soon the great liner was hurling herself through the sea on her interrupted journey.

The rest of the story is soon told. The herbethite, we found, was covered with a thin layer of sweets, and at the customs examination of luggage Nash had boldly lifted the lids and coolly showed the sweets to the officer. It was done so naturally as to defy any possible suspicion. But in the bottoms of the tins we found two exquisitely made detonators, fashioned in the shape of watches, and timed so as to explode the herbethite some twelve hours after the time fixed for the departure of the ship. These removed, the tins could be handled with comparative safety.

We made a clean sweep of the conspirators. No details were ever given to the public, and the stoppage of the big liner was easily explained away to the passengers. We found out that the small cylinder picked up at Mile End had been intended for the purpose of blowing up a munitions train in an important tunnel outside London, but the conspirators found the approaches too closely guarded and gave up the project. They were all sent to Paris for trial on a charge of stealing herbethite, and were eventually sentenced by court-martial to fifteen years’ imprisonment.

Madame Gabrielle, I am glad to say, received a handsome reward from the British Government, for our success was entirely due to her. She had followed Norman without food or rest or sleep for nearly three days, and was in the last extremity of fatigue when she gave me her final and all-important message. Pasquet, I am glad to say, justified the impression I had formed of him, and I had the satisfaction of seeing him develop into a respectable member of society, happy in the society of his wife, now fully restored to health, and again enjoying the confidence of his employers. We were able, through him, to account for all the stolen herbethite, and it was a relief to know that none of the terrible compound remained in the hands of our enemies.

XX A Message From The Herrengasse

I have here put into narrative form a number of astonishing facts taken from information read and testimony given at the court-martial subsequently held upon the guilty parties. The facts which I assisted in establishing will, I believe, be found of considerable interest to readers as further revealing the subtle methods of the enemy.

For obvious reasons I have been compelled to disguise certain names so as not to bring eternal dishonour upon a great and noble family.

“And if I revealed the truth to your dear affectionate husband?” whispered the soft-voiced, well-dressed Italian. “What then — eh, Elena?”

“Madonna mia! No,” cried the dark-haired, handsome young woman, who sat at her tea-table in a great, elegantly furnished salon in one of those old fourteenth-century palazzi close to the port of Sarzana, the Italian naval station on the Adriatic.

It was a bright afternoon in the summer of 1916; Sarzana, the old city in Ferrara, to which I had gone with Madame Gabrielle, a lazy, sun-blached place, with its white houses and green sun-shutters, had of late been electrified into naval activity against those hated Tedeschi, those Austrians which every Italian had been taught to hate at his mother’s knee.

Things were going well with Italy. On that day the *Corriere* had published a long dispatch from General Cadorna, reporting a smashing defeat of the Austrians in the Alps, and an advance in the direction of Trieste. The whole kingdom of Italy, from Ravenna to Reggio, was in a state of highest enthusiasm, and in Sarzana the excited populace were agog in the cafes and in the narrow, old-world streets.

That most elegant fourteenth-century salon, with its faded tapestries and fine old portraits, in which the woman was seated with her visitor, was the same great room in which the Doge Francesco Bissolo, of Venice, assembled the famous Council of Ten, when they consulted with Malatesta after the Battle of Padua in 1405. The Bissolo Palace, the dark, almost prison-like walls of which rose sheer from the canal within a stone’s throw of the great naval dockyard, had little changed through five centuries. Its exterior was grim and forbidding, with windows barred with iron, its massive doors, which opened upon the narrow mediaeval street, heavily studded with nails and strengthened with iron.

Within, however, while most of its antique charm had been preserved, it was the acme of luxury and taste, containing many priceless works of art, magnificent tapestries, and the famous collection of ancient arms belonging to its present owner, the Marchese Giulio Michelozzo-Alfani, whose pretty young wife was that afternoon giving tea to a visitor.

“No!” the woman exclaimed, in a low, intense whisper. “No, Carlo, you would never do that. I know that once I treated you badly, and I was your enemy then. But that is long ago. To-day I am your friend. Giulio must never know the truth. In his position as Admiral of the Port it would mean ruin for him if the truth were revealed that I am an Austrian, and hence an enemy.”

“Yes. I agree that it would be very awkward for you, my dear Elena, if the truth ever leaked out,” remarked the thin, sallow-faced, middle-aged man, as he sipped the cup of tea, in English fashion, which she had handed him. About his lips was a strange hardness, even though his friendship was so apparent.

“But you alone know, my dear Carlo, and you will never give me away. We were old friends in Budapest — ah! I wish to forget those days — before I married Giulio,” she remarked softly, with a bitter smile.

“My dear Elena, don’t think that I’ve called to threaten you,” exclaimed Carlo Corradini, the well-dressed Italian, who lived such a gay existence in Rome, and who was so well known in the cosmopolitan life of the Corso and the Pincio. “Why should I? I am here, in Sarzana, upon a secret mission — in order to speak with you.”

“Why?”

“Well” — as he paused he looked the young wife of the Italian Admiral full in the face — “well, because, though your country is at war with Italy to-day, Austria has still friends in Italy, just as Germany has.”

“Ah! This war is all so horrible,” declared the Marchesa, with a slight shudder. “You Italians hate every Austrian with a fierce and deadly hatred.”

“Pardon me, my dear Elena, but you Austrians hate us just as fiercely,” he laughed. “Where is Giulio?”

“At his office. He will not be back until seven. He always goes to the Club to

take his vermouth there.”

Corradini glanced at the door to make certain it was closed; then, bending across the little table with its splendid silver service, he whispered:

“I have a secret message for you from somebody you know.”

“A secret message — what?” asked the young Marchesa, opening her fine eyes widely.

“From the Herrengasse, number seven.”

“From Vienna?” she asked, in surprise, for the address he had given her was the bureau of the Austro-Hungarian Council of Ministers.

He nodded mysteriously, and with a grin said:

“From your old friend Schreyer.”

She drew a long breath and went pale for a second. Mention of that name recalled to her a remembrance of the past — of the days when she was a dancer at the Raimund Theatre in Vienna, and when Count Schreyer had, after a brief acquaintance, offered her his hand. But she had disliked him because he was such a cold, harsh bureaucrat, who had at that time occupied a high position at the Ministry of the Interior, and who possessed, as she once told a friend, “a heart of granite.”

Elena’s life-story had been a rather curious one, but, after all, not much out of the commonplace. The daughter of a poor Austrian musician in the orchestra at the Weiner Burger Theatre, in Vienna, and of an Italian mother, she had learned Italian from her birth, and on going to Italy to fulfil an engagement at the Politeama, at Livorno, she had posed as an Italian, though hitherto she had lived all her life in Austria, and had been taught to hate her dead mother’s race.

As an Italian, she had met, and afterwards married, the middle-aged Marchese Michelozzo-Alfani, at that time a Vice-Admiral of the Fleet. For three years prior to the war her life had been quiet and uneventful. The summer she spent out at Antignano, on the seashore, three miles from Livorno — or Leghorn, as the English call it — where they rented a big white villa amid the vines and olives; in spring, on the Lake of Garda; in autumn, in Florence; and winter, in

Rome.

From his early days the Marchese had been a most popular naval officer, who had fought in Abyssinia and in Tripoli, and, being a favourite at the Court of the Quirinale, promotion had come to him rapidly. Before his marriage he had endeavoured to practise economy, in order to redeem the fortunes of his ancient family; but now that his wife Elena proved so extravagant, he found himself getting deeper into debt each day.

His appointment to Sarzana at the outbreak of the war had enabled him to return to the ancestral palace, which had passed from the Bissolo family to that of the Michelozzo in the sixteenth century, but which had for a good number of years been closed and in the hands of caretakers. His was one of the most important naval commands in Italy, and the Austrians were viewing that naval base with increased anxiety, it being so very close to both Trieste and Fiume. Admiral Michelozzo-Alfani was one of the youngest of the officers of his grade in the Italian Navy.

Many raids he had made upon Austrian ports on the Adriatic, and Ragusa, Zara, Sebenico and other places had suffered severe bombardment by his “mosquito” fleet; therefore, at the Admiralty in Vienna his great activity was being frequently discussed.

“I see, my dear Elena, you have not forgotten your friend the Count,” laughed the sallow-faced Italian across the table presently. “Neither has he forgotten you.”

“How do you know?”

“Well, because he spoke to me about you only three weeks ago.”

“Three weeks ago!” echoed the Marchesa. “How could you have met?”

Carlo Corradini grinned very mysteriously.

“Well I was in Vienna three weeks ago — that is all.”

“You in Vienna!” she gasped. “Are you, then, a friend of my country?” she asked, in a low, hoarse whisper.

“Why, of course,” he replied. “You are Austrian in all but name. I am a born Italian, but — well, I am a friend of Austria.”

“A well-paid friend — eh?”

“Yes, just as you may be — if you will. The Count is still your friend, and he greatly admires you. It is his one regret that you preferred the Marchese Guilio. He is a good fellow is the Count. He is now prime favourite with the Emperor, and he still remains unmarried. Elena, he thinks always of you, and only you.”

The handsome Elena shrugged her shoulders. The man who had called upon her quite unexpectedly she had first met five years ago in Budapest. He was then a poor Italian composer of music. Yet now, in mysterious circumstances, he was, she knew, in possession of ample funds, and lived in an elegant flat close to the Piazza Colonna in Rome. They exchanged glances, whereupon he settled himself to speak more openly to her, and to give her a verbal message from her old admirer at the Herrengasse.

Carlo Corradini began by laughing at her patriotic devotion to her husband’s country.

“Of course Guilio is a most excellent fellow,” he said. “But, alas! he is merely fighting a lost cause. The Central Powers are bound to win, and it is now for you to assist your own country. Schreyer appeals to you. He knows of your difficulty in meeting that last loan which old Levitski, the Jew, in Milan, made to you a year ago, and ♦”

“How does he know that?” she inquired, in quick surprise.

“My dear Elena, how does Austria know so many secrets of her enemies?” he laughed. “Schreyer is now head of that department of the Secret Service which deals with affairs here in Italy, and ♦”

“And you, an Italian, are one of his agents,” she interrupted, in a low, meaning voice.

He bowed in the affirmative in silence. Then, after a few moments, he remarked, in a strange, meaning tone, his black, penetrating eyes fixed upon her: “I know the secret of your nationality, and your friendship with Count Schreyer — and you know mine. So, my dear Elena, we have nothing to fear from each other. Do

you understand?”

“I don’t understand. You surely are not hinting that I should betray my husband’s secrets — the naval secrets of Italy?”

The dark, smooth-tongued man from Rome smiled quietly, as he answered:

“That, my dear Elena, is exactly the message I bear to you from Schreyer. It is known that your husband tells you a good deal. You have whispered secrets to your friends, the Comtesse L’andrini, and also the Renata Pozzi. If to them, then why not to me — eh?”

“Never!” she cried. “I have married an Italian, and I am now Italian.”

“But the money. It will be useful. Levitski must be paid in full in eight weeks’ time. Seventy-two thousand lire. That is the sum, I think? If you fail him this time, he will take his revenge and tell the truth.”

“He does not know.”

“But Schreyer will tell him.”

“What?” she gasped, starting from her chair. “Has the Count told you that?”

“Well, he has not exactly said so in words,” was her visitor’s reply. “He only hinted at it, and sent me straight to see you. I had to travel by way of Holland and London — quite a long journey.”

“Then you shall tell him that I refuse,” she answered. “I will never betray Italy, and more especially through Guilio, who believes in my patriotism, and never dreams that I am anything but an Italian born and bred.”

“That makes it all the easier. He will never suspect you,” remarked the sallow-faced man, with a sinister smile upon his lips.

“I tell you,” she cried angrily, “I decline to enter into it at all. I ❖”

The door suddenly opened as she spoke, and there entered the Admiral, a smart, good-looking, middle-aged man in uniform with decorations, whose appearance was so unexpected that they both started.

“Decline what, my dear?” he asked sharply. “What is the matter?”

“Oh, nothing, Guilio,” she laughed lightly. “You recollect Signor Corradini, who used to come to see us in Livorno?”

“Why, of course,” said the Admiral, as the two men bowed to each other.

A lie rose readily to her lips, and she said:

“Well, Signor Corradini has called in order to try and induce me to take part in the Princess di Paliano’s tableaux vivants at Bologna, in aid of the Croce-Rosso. But I am far too busy with hospital work here in Sarzana, so I have declined.”

“Yes, dearest, you are far too busy. I am always afraid Elena will overwork herself, my dear Corradini. I am nervous lest she should have a breakdown.”

The woman and her tempter exchanged meaning glances.

“Everyone knows how intensely patriotic is the Marchesa, and we all admire her for her hard work in the cause of charity. My friend the Princess, however, asked me to call here and solicit her help, and in consequence I have done so.”

The Admiral thanked him warmly, for the Princess di Paliano’s exertions in war work were well known throughout Italy.

Elena’s husband sipped the tea she handed him, and, after chatting with their visitor for a further half-hour, the Admiral suddenly asked:

What are you doing down in Rome nowadays?”

“Oh, of course, we are all working hard. I am secretary in a department in the Ministry of War, the department which is in touch with France and England concerning munitions.”

He spoke the truth. Carlo Corradini held a very important position in the Ministry, even though, as we afterwards discovered, he had in secret long been an enemy agent. This latter fact, Guilio Michelozzo-Alfani never dreamed. Like all others, he never imagined that Carlo, hating the Tedeschi so fiercely as he did, could be in secret their ingenious and unscrupulous friend.

The Marchese himself was a true-born Italian, one of the ancient aristocracy of the north. Those who know Italy, know quite well the stern and honest patriotism of her sons from count to contadino, and of the fierce, relentless hatred of every Austrian.

Presently the well-dressed civilian functionary rose, clicked his heels, and in the elegant Italian manner raised his hostess's hand, and, kissing it, wished her addio.

The dark eyes of the Admiral's young wife met his in that second, and they understood.

Five minutes later Carlo Corradini was hurrying along the Via Vittorio Emanuele, the principal street in Sarzana, in the grey evening light; then, turning to the left, he gained the Passeggio, which faced the Adriatic, that long promenade lined with its dusty, wind-swept tamarisks, where by day the cicale, harbinger of heat, chirped their monotonous chant.

Corradini's visit to Sarzana proved to be a protracted one. His excuse was that he had been sent from the Ministry upon a special mission, and, in consequence, he had preferred to rent a little flat on the Passeggio than to live in the Albergo Stella d'Italia. One day, at six o'clock, he met, at a very obscure restaurant called The Vapore, a certain Countess Malipiero, a middle-aged, ugly, but quite wealthy woman, who lived near the Santa Maria della Salute, and who was a great personal friend of the Marchesa.

The pair dined together at the popular little establishment, eating a simple dish of paste al pomodoro, for which the trattoria was noted, a costoletta and a piece of stracchino to follow. But over that simple meal the pair remained in serious consultation, while not far from them sat the good-looking but unobtrusive Madame Gabrielle Soyez, for the pair were already under suspicion, though we had as yet no reliable evidence to justify interference. Afterwards the pair walked together as far as the Piazza Grande, and there parted, the spy of Austria smiling as he went along the noisy street towards the sea.

XXI The Admiral's Secret

Three weeks passed.

Old Sarzana has ever been a city of black conspiracy and clever intrigue. In

those glorious days of the Venetian Republic persons of both sexes who were antagonistic, or in any way obstacles to the carrying-out of the secret plans of the Council of Ten, were “by accident” secretly poisoned or openly “assassinated,” as is shown in the many reports which even to-day repose in the secret archives of the Palace of the Doges at Venice. As mediaeval Sarzana was a veritable hot-bed of intrigue in those days when Venice ruled the Adriatic, so were desperate plots afoot in the yesterday of Cadorna’s triumphant advance into Austria. Enemy plots and counter-plots were hatched in those darkened houses upon the silent waterways, by the open sea. One of them I now reveal for the first time.

Truth to tell, the Marchesa Elena had been forced, by the elegant, insidious Corradini, to accept traitorous service in the pay of Austria. Their usual meeting-place was in the old church of St. Antonio, which at vespers was always crowded by the devout, who, in the days of war, prayed for Italy’s victory. Sarzana had always been one of the most pious cities in Italy, and each evening the splendid old Cathedral was crowded. And in that crowd the pair met — kneeling side by side to whisper, and again near them knelt Madame Gabrielle.

In all Sarzana no woman worked harder at the great war-hospital established in the Communal Palace than the popular wife of the Admiral of the Port.

The Marchese, the most influential and delightful man in Sarzana, was, as everyone knew, the author of the many raids upon the enemy which had from time to time been carried out. Well known, too, it was, how the “mosquito” fleet of destroyers, piloted by him, had only a month ago entered the great harbour of Cattaro, opposite Rimini, and had sunk four big Austrian battleships at anchor there — four of the biggest ships of Austria’s navy.

About this time the wealthy Countess Malipiero — who was nowadays Elena’s most intimate friend, and who was constantly at the Admiral’s table — purchased a big sea-going motor-launch, a quiet, harmless old fisherman called Beppo, well known in Sarzana, being placed as skipper. Before the war, the Countess had, in secret, been in very poor circumstances, but owing to the death of a relative — so she explained — she had been left a substantial legacy.

One evening, as the Admiral and his wife were about to finish dinner *tete-a-tete*, the manservant announced that Captain Vivarini, the second in command, had called and desired to speak with his chief very urgently.

“Show the Captain to the study,” said the Marchese, as he rose at once and passed along to his cosy little den which overlooked the port.

Elena, instantly upon the alert, and suspecting that something unusual had happened, waited until the Captain had been conducted to her husband’s room, and then she crept silently along to the door, where she knew she could overhear the conversation, having listened there several times before.

On tiptoe she approached noiselessly over the soft Turkey carpet and, placing her ear to the door, was enabled to hear news.

In brief, it was to the effect that one of the newest Austrian submarines had been captured intact, with officers and crew, off the Point of Cortellazo.

“The submarine Number 117 left Fiume only yesterday, according to its commander, whom I have interrogated,” the Captain reported.

“Benissimo!” exclaimed the Admiral, much gratified. “Then the enemy will not yet know of its capture. In the meantime we must act. The submarine belongs to Fiume, therefore, my dear Vivarini, she must return to Fiume.”

“Go back?” echoed the Captain.

“Yes. She must sail again tonight with an Italian crew,” said the Admiral. “She will enter Fiume harbour flying her own flag, but at the same time she will discharge torpedoes at as many of the vessels of war lying there as she can. You understand?”

“Santa Vergine! What a plan,” exclaimed the Captain enthusiastically. “Most excellent, Signor Marchese.”

“All must be done in strictest secrecy,” said the other, lowering his voice. “Not a single word must leak out, for there can be no doubt that there are spies here in Sarzana. News of our intentions gets across the Adriatic in an astounding manner sometimes. Not a syllable must be known, either regarding our capture or our intentions. Number 117 must return tonight.”

“Not a whisper,” the Captain agreed, whereupon the Marchesa, a tall, slim figure in a dinner-gown of carnation pink, and wearing a velvet bow of the same shade in her hair, slipped back again to the salon, where she awaited her husband,

pretending to read.

“Well, Captain Vivarini,” she exclaimed, greeting their visitor merrily as the two men entered. “Some new development, I suppose, eh?”

“Yes, Marchesa,” replied the handsome naval captain, bowing low over her hand with that peculiar Italian courtesy. “A little confidential matter,” and he laughed. Then, after a cigarette and a tiny glass of green certosa, the Admiral and the chief of his staff left.

As soon as they had gone, Elena rushed to her room, slipped off her dining-gown, and, putting on a tweed skirt and blouse, hurried from the house.

She slipped along the dark, narrow side street, until suddenly she emerged on to the moonlit promenade, and ascended the dimly lit stone stairs which led to the room occupied by Carlo Corradini. In response to her ring, the spy of Austria at once admitted her.

“Why, Elena! This is a surprise. What has happened?” he asked eagerly.

The Admiral’s wife passed into the little sitting-room, and, without seating herself, revealed hastily what was intended, adding:

I must return home at once or Guilio may wonder where I am.”

“What a plot!” exclaimed the dark-haired traitor. “It does the greatest credit to your husband’s ingenuity.” Then, suddenly reflecting, he said in a strange, hard voice: “If I act successfully your husband himself may be charged with giving away secrets to the enemy. If so, because you love him, you might denounce me, Elena.” After a second’s pause, he added: “I trust no one. Not even you. My life is at stake in this affair. Therefore, you will swear that, whatever happens, and even if suspicion be cast upon our husband, you will never betray me?”

“Of course, Carlo. Am I not Austrian? I swear it.”

The spy took from a table a book covered with shiny black leather, and pressed it very firmly into her hand. It was a copy of the New Testament.

“Kiss it — and swear,” he said.

In obedience, she acted as he wished, repeating a solemn oath after him.

“I trust you, Elena,” he said fervently, at the same time gallantly kissing the back of the white, slim hand which had held the book.

“And I trust you, Carlo,” she whispered. “Trust in me. No suspicion must rest upon anybody. I leave that to your own clever ingenuity.”

A few moments later she descended the steep stone stairs to hurry home as quickly as she could. Arriving at the great palazzo, she at once resumed her smart dinner-gown, and, entering the salon half an hour afterwards, sat down to await her husband’s return.

Ere she had done this, however, the motor-launch of the Countess Malipiero, driven by old Beppo, sped out from the harbour on pretence of taking an invitation to one of the lieutenants on board the battleship *Italia*, which was lying just within the Mole.

He slowed up alongside one of the guardships by the boom, and as he did so the great eye of a searchlight was turned full upon him.

Then, at once recognised by the watchman on duty, he was allowed to pass out to sea. Being such a familiar figure, no suspicion had ever been cast upon the stern, patriotic old fellow.

Sometimes his boat was stopped and examined, but, as he never had anything aboard, it had become a habit with the guardships to allow him to pass unchallenged.

When about a mile from the boom, the old fellow drew a map from his pocket, and, having examined it very carefully by the light of a flash lamp, consulted his compass. Then, altering his course, he sped along for nearly two hours in the darkening night, when at last he placed two green lights, one at port and one at bow.

He had started at ten, but it was nearly one o’clock in the morning when he began to grow anxious and consult his watch.

Presently he saw the slight tremor of a searchlight, and, fearing detection by some Italian ship, he at once extinguished all his lights, and, pulling up, waited

for nearly half an hour. It was a dark, lonely vigil, but, with the aid of another cigar, the crafty old seafarer passed the time until he again ventured to relight his green lamps.

Scarcely had he done this when, about half a mile away, he saw a tiny light winking in the Morse code. He read the familiar signal, and, cutting off his engine, waited until, of a sudden, the low hull of a submarine came up in the darkness, quite close to him. Then, adroitly manoeuvring his launch, both the vessel and boat rising and falling in the heavy swell, he drew nearer.

“Is that Beppo?” shouted a voice in Italian from the submarine.

“Yes,” shouted the old man. “I have something for you.”

He took from his pocket a small leather bag-purse, such as men carry, one of those drawn through a ring, tied it upon a tight line, and, standing up, he flung it with a seaman’s precision over the conning-tower of the submarine.

“All right,” shouted the Austrian officer, for such he was. “Wait a moment till I’ve read what you have brought.”

For a few moments he disappeared into the body of the vessel, while Beppo hauled in his wet line. Then, when the officer reappeared, he shouted:

“All right, Beppo. No answer. Buona notte e buon viaggio.”

That same evening a secret council had been held, presided over by the Admiral, when all the details were arranged. The officers and crew of the Austrian submarine Number 117 were safely under lock and key, and after the council, just before eleven o’clock, the Admiral himself visited the captured undersea boat, and inspected it. Commander Bellini, one of Italy’s most distinguished submarine officers, had been chosen, together with a picked crew, to attempt the raid, but none were informed, for the Marchese was determined this time to keep the secret of his plans.

Just before midnight a submarine, heavily awash, for the sea was rough, slipped away out of the harbour of Sarzana, winked a farewell message, and then, submerging so as not to be seen by other ships, was lost to view.

She was the raider, the intention of whose commander was to blow up, or

damage seriously, at least half a dozen of the enemy's ships lying off Fiume, on the other shore of the Adriatic.

The Italian crew consisted of a picked lot of fine patriotic fellows, who only now knew their desperate mission, and they knew also what their fate must be — either death or capture, when the truth became revealed.

After travelling swiftly all night, the periscope revealed at dawn the long, broken Austrian coast. Then, when within five miles of the entrance to the deep bay of Quarnero, at the end of which is situated Austria's important harbour, the vessel emerged and ran up her Austrian colours. Before her, high upon the green point of Monte Grosso, which guards the entrance to the bay, a signal was made, to which Number 117 replied, and then, with her grey hull showing above the surface, she sped unsuspectingly up the channel, past the small wooded islands, and the pretty town of Abbazia, into the harbour, where lay fully a dozen war vessels, including three of the enemy's biggest battleships.

Suddenly, however, just as she was about to discharge a torpedo at a battleship flying the Admiral's flag, the thunder of guns rang out from all sides, and Number 117 became the target for concentrated fire from all the forts.

As the shells hit her she flew to pieces. Next second she was seen to be rapidly sinking with all on board, not a soul being able to escape from that rain of death.

The submarine had been entrapped, and the raid had ignominiously failed.

News of the disaster reached Admiral Michelozzo-Alfani through the Naval Intelligence Department in the afternoon, and he sat in his room astounded. So well kept had been his secret that he felt absolutely positive that, outside those officers who formed his Council, nobody had any knowledge of his intention. All of those officers were men above suspicion.

That there was a traitor somewhere he was more fully convinced than ever. Other minor secrets had been known to the enemy mysteriously from time to time, yet he had been utterly unable to trace the source of the leakage. Alone in his office at the port, he sat at his table, his brow resting upon his hands.

At noon, unknown to him, his wife had telephoned to the Countess Malipiero, but was informed by the latter's maid that she had left hurriedly for Rome on the previous night, after a visit from her friend, Signor Corradini.

Throughout the afternoon she expected Carlo to call upon her, and became extremely anxious when he did not put in an appearance.

At last, unable to stand the strain longer, she sent her little sewing-maid round to Corradini's flat, but the girl returned with the letter to say that, according to the donna di casa, the Signor had left Sarzana hurriedly at ten o'clock the previous night.

The hours seemed like years as the guilty woman sat alone in her magnificent, old-world salon, pale, startled, and nervous. Upon her left hand she wore a white glove. She had worn it ever since the previous evening, and the reason had greatly perturbed her.

At last, at nearly ten o'clock that night, her husband returned, hard-faced and haggard. With him was his chief of staff, Captain Vivarini, Madame Gabrielle, and myself. The instant we entered the room she saw that Guilio was not his old self.

"Elena," he said abruptly, in a deep, hard voice, "I have something to say to you, and I have brought Vivarini here as witness."

"As witness," she echoed, starting to her feet. "Of what?"

"As witness that you are innocent of the charge made against you, that you, though my wife, are a spy of Austria."

"A spy," she laughed uneasily, in pretence of ridicule. "Have you really taken leave of your senses, Guilio?"

"I have not. Tell me," he demanded, "why are you wearing that glove?"

I saw that she held her breath. Her face was instantly blanched to the lips.

"Because last night I scratched my hand," she replied.

"Please remove it, and allow me to see the scratch."

"I refuse," she cried angrily.

Next instant, at a sign from the Marchese, Vivarini and I seized her hand, when

her husband, roughly tearing off the white kid glove, examined her palm.

He stood aghast.

“Dio!” gasped the horrified man. “The brand is here. You, Elena, my wife, you are the spy.”

“Guilio,” shrieked the unhappy woman, flinging herself frantically upon her knees before him. “Forgive me. Santa Madonna! Forgive me!”

“I may forgive you, Elena,” replied the Admiral, in a low, stern voice, “but Italy will never forgive.”

Then, turning abruptly, he left the room, the Captain following. But as he passed out two agents of the Italian secret police passed in, and a few seconds later the wretched woman found herself under arrest.

It was not until her trial by court-martial, in Milan, two weeks later, that the Marchesa learned, from the evidence given by Madame Gabrielle and myself, the truth of Carlo Corradini’s terrible vengeance — a long-nurtured grievance that he had held against her ever since those days in Budapest, when, on proposing to her, she had laughed him to scorn, and had actually told people of his poverty. He had sworn to be avenged, and truly his vengeance had been both ingenious and complete.

On the evening when she had brought to his room the information regarding the captured submarine he had handed her the Testament upon which to take her oath of secrecy. Upon the shiny black leather cover of that book he had traced with a solution of nitrate of silver, mixed with other chemicals, a geometrical design — a square divided in half, the lower part being left blank, and in the upper portion a “V,” above it being traced a small circle.

When he had placed the book into her palm it had left an indelible imprint upon her skin, a device which did not show itself until an hour later, when, very naturally, it greatly mystified her. Carlo Corradini had thus branded the woman he hated, and then, the coup having been made at Fiume, he had at once written an anonymous letter to Armand Hecq, head of the International Intelligence Bureau, denouncing the Admiral’s wife as an Austrian, who had divulged Italy’s secret.

In support of his allegation, he urged us to search the rooms of Carlo Corradini, where we should not only find evidence of espionage, but also the actual Testament by which the hand of the Marchesa had been branded. Further, that eighty thousand lire would be found in her possession, that being the price which Corradini had paid for the information concerning submarine Number 117.

The trial, held in camera, opened at eleven o'clock, and just before three sentence of death was pronounced. An hour later I was present when a firing party was drawn up in the yard of the great San Giovanni prison. Her eyes were bandaged, and the capital sentence was carried out.

Truly, Carlo Corradini was a scoundrel of the worst type, and his revenge was, indeed, a dastardly one. Fortunately, however, it reflected upon himself, for, four months later, he and his companion, the Countess, were captured, living in obscurity in a small coast village near Bari, in the extreme south of Italy, where they were hoping to escape to Greece.

Corradini's own anonymous letter proved the most direct evidence against him, and ultimately both paid the same penalty as their victim, in the yard of the Prison of San Giovanni at Milan.

The End

e-text prepared by Joe Harvat