

Barrie James Matthew

Der Tag: or, The Tragic Man



James Barrie

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"DER TAG" OR THE TRAGIC MAN

A bare chamber lighted by a penny dip which casts shadows. On a hard chair by a table sits an Emperor in thought. To him come his Chancellor and an Officer.

Chancellor. Your Imperial Majesty – Officer. Sire – Emperor (*the Emperor rises*). Is that the paper?

(Indicating a paper in the Chancellor's hand.)

Chancellor (*presenting it*). It awaits only your Imperial Majesty's signature.

Officer. When you have signed that paper, Sire, the Fatherland will be at war with France and Russia.

Emperor. At last, this little paper – Chancellor. Not of the value of a bird's feather until it has your royal signature. The – Emperor. Then it will sing round the planet. The vibration of it will not pass in a hundred years. My friend, how still the world has grown since I raised this pen! All Europe's listening. Europe! That's Germany, when I have signed! And yet – Officer. Your Imperial Majesty is not afraid to sign? Emperor (*flashing*). Afraid!

Officer (*abject*). Oh, Sire!

Emperor. I am irresistible to-day! "Red blood boils in my veins. To me every open door is the gift of a world! I hear a thousand nightingales! I would eat all the elephants in Hindustan and pick my teeth with the spire of Strassburg Cathedral."

Officer. That is the Fatherland to-day. Such as we are, that you have made us, each seeking to copy you in so far as man can repeat his deity. It was you fashioned us into a sword, Sire, and now the sword must speak.

Emperor (*approvingly*). There the sword spoke – and yet the wise one said: "Take not your enemies together, but separately, lest the meal go to them instead of to you." One at a time. (*To Chancellor*) Why am I not a friend of Russia till France is out of the way, or France's friend until the bear is muzzled? That was your part.

Chancellor. For that I strove, but their mean minds suspected me. Sire, your signature!

Emperor. What of Britain?

Officer (*intently*). This – The Day, to which we have so often drunk, draws near!

Emperor. The Day! To The Day! (*All salute The Day with their swords.*) But when?

Officer. Now, if she wants it!

Emperor. There is no road to Britain – until our neighbors are subdued. Then, for us, there will be no roads that do not lead to Britain.

Chancellor (*suavely*). Your Imperial Majesty, Britain will not join in just now.

Emperor. If I was sure of that!

Chancellor. I vouch for it. So well we've chosen our time, it finds her at issue with herself, her wild women let loose, her colonies ready to turn against her, Ireland aflame, the paltry British Army sulking with the civic powers.

Emperor. These wounds might heal suddenly if German bugles sounded. It is a land that in the past has done things.

Officer. In the past, your Imperial Majesty, but in the past alone lies Britain's greatness.

Emperor. Yes, that's the German truth. Britain has grown dull and sluggish; a belly of a land, she lies overfed; no dreams within her such as keep powers alive – and timid, too – without red blood in her, but in its stead a thick, yellowish fluid. The most she'll play for is her own safety. Pretend to grant her that and she'll seek her soft bed again. Britain's part in the world's making is done. "I was," her epitaph.

Chancellor. How well you know her, Sire! All she needs is some small excuse for saying, "I acted in the best interests of my money-bags." That excuse I've found for her. I have promised in your name a secret compact with her, that if she stands aloof the parts of France we do not at present need we will not at present take.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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