

Le Queux William

The Great War in England in 1897



William Le Queux
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England in 1897

TO

MY FRIEND

ALFRED CHARLES HARMSWORTH

**A GENEROUS EDITOR AND
PATRIOTIC ENGLISHMAN**

I INSCRIBE THIS FORECAST

OF

THE COMING WAR

PREFACE TO NINTH EDITION

In writing this book it was my endeavour to bring vividly before the public the national dangers by which we are surrounded, and the absolute necessity which lies upon England to maintain her defences in an adequate state of efficiency. That my effort has been successful, is proved alike by the fact that eight editions of the work have already been exhausted, and by the commendatory and highly gratifying terms in which it has been criticised by prominent statesmen and leading naval and military experts, including the Commander-in-Chief of the British Army. Some professional critics have, it is true, questioned certain prophetic details concerning naval warfare, but I think the best possible answer to them is furnished by the results of recent battles in Chinese waters, which, it is admitted, present to us very serious object-lessons. A few passages I have revised in order to bring the events more thoroughly up to date, and in sending my forecast forth again it is accompanied by a devout hope that ere it be too late our present insecurity will be remedied, that a national disaster may thus be prevented, and that England may ever retain her supremacy upon the sea.

WILLIAM LE QUEUX.

London, March 1895.

CRITICISM BY LORD ROBERTS

*United Service Club,
Pall Mall, W.*

Dear Sir, – I have read with considerable interest your vivid account of the dangers to which the loss of our naval supremacy may be expected to expose us, and the means by which you think we should be able to extricate ourselves from those dangers. I hardly like to criticise a work which, to be effective, must to a great extent be imaginative, but on one or two points I would venture to offer a few remarks: —

First, You refer to the assistance the Home Army might receive from India and the Colonies. I feel confident that in such an emergency as you portray, the Colonies and Dependencies of the Empire would be most anxious to assist the Mother Country; but unless our sea power were assured, it appears to me that they would be unable to do so. Until our command of the sea had been regained, we should be powerless to move a soldier either from or to the United Kingdom.

Secondly, You very properly lay stress on the part which might be taken by the Volunteers in the defence of the United Kingdom. No one can appreciate more fully than I do the gallant and patriotic spirit which animates the Volunteer Force, and I most thoroughly agree with you as to the value it might be under such

serious circumstances as you depict. In fact, the *raison d'être* of the Force is to be able to defend the country in the event of an invasion. But to enable our Volunteers to do all that is expected of them, they must be made thoroughly efficient. Much has been done of late years to this end, but much more is required before our citizen soldiers can be depended upon to hold their own against foreign troops whose training is continually being carried on, and whose organisation is believed to be nearly perfect. It is very penny-wise and pound-foolish of us not to do all in our power to render the Volunteers the serviceable body they might be.

Thirdly, You take but little account of the Militia, which the Duke of Wellington considered to be our mainstay in the event of a threatened invasion. The Militia would seem to be rather out of fashion at present, but still it is a very useful force, which only needs encouragement and development to convert it into a reliable fighting body, capable of reinforcing and co-operating with our small regular Army.

You will gather from what I have said that, under the conditions specified by you, I should be inclined to regard your forecast of the result of the supposed conflict as being unduly favourable. I can only add that I trust such conditions may never arise, and that your estimate of the means immediately available for repelling foreign attack may be more correct than my own. — Believe me, yours very truly,

ROBERTS.

PREFACE TO FIRST EDITION

General Lord Roberts, V.C., on reading this forecast of the Coming War, wrote as follows: —

*Grove Park, Kingsbury,
Middlesex, March 26, 1894.*

Dear Sir, — I entirely concur with you in thinking it most desirable to bring home to the British public in every possible way the dangers to which the nation is exposed, unless it maintains a Navy and Army sufficiently strong and well organised to meet the defensive requirements of the Empire. — Believe me, yours faithfully,
Roberts

Field-Marshal Viscount Wolseley, K.P., in his *Life of Marlborough*, speaks plainly when he says —

The last battle fought in England was fought to secure James his crown. If through the folly and parsimony of our people we should ever see another, it will be fought in defence of London. The struggle will be, not for a dynasty, but for our own very existence as an independent nation. Are we prepared to meet it? The politician says Yes; the soldier and the sailor say No.

Such outspoken expressions of opinion from two of our chief military authorities should cause the British public to pause and reflect. On all hands it is admitted by both naval and military

experts, that, notwithstanding the increase of our Navy by the Spencer programme, our country is inadequately defended and totally unprepared for war. The extraordinary preparations now going forward in France and Russia are being made in view of an attack upon England, and it is ominous that the downfall of our Empire is a perpetual subject of discussion in the Paris press. Although a Briton, I have lived long enough in France to know that the French, while hating the Germans, despise the English, and are looking forward to a day not far hence when their battleships will bombard our south coast towns, and their legions advance over the Surrey Hills to London. When the Great War does come, it will come swiftly, and without warning. We are accustomed to scoff at the idea of an invasion of Britain. We feel secure in our sea-girt island home; we have confidence in our brave sailor defenders, in our gallant Army, and our enthusiastic Volunteers, and we entertain a supreme contempt for "mere foreigners." It is this national egotism, this insular conviction that foreign engines of war are inferior to our own, that may cause our ruin. Everything we possess, everything we hold dear, our position among nations, our very life, depends for its safety, firstly, upon the undoubted predominance of our Navy over any likely or possible combination of the Navies of Continental Powers; and, secondly, upon an Army properly equipped and ready to take the field on receipt of the momentous word "Mobilise"!

Is our Navy, even strengthened by the recent programme, in

a sufficiently efficient state to retain the supremacy of the seas? Let us face the situation boldly, and allow a well-known and distinguished officer to reply to that question. Admiral of the Fleet Sir Thomas Symonds, G.C.B., writing to me, says —

Our weak Navy, with its inefficient *personnel*, has now to perform an enormously increased duty, such as defending increased commerce, food, and coals. Our guns are the worst in the world in forty-seven vessels, mounting 350 muzzleloaders, where the French and all foreign Navies use *only breechloaders*. Dimensions, expense, and very many other reasons are given for this ruinous custom, but all other Navies mount breechloaders on vessels of the same dimensions as our own. As to expenses, such economy (so-called) means the most execrable parsimony – to ruthlessly murder men and disgrace our flag and Navy. Our forty-seven feeble vessels, weak in armament, and all composing them, reduce our Navy to comparative insignificance, and are a preparation for disgrace and ruin when at war.

Yet we are content to sit idly by, confident in a strength which two foreign Powers are slowly but surely undermining! Russia and France, both barely able to sustain their gigantic Armies, are to-day straining every nerve to enlarge their naval forces, preparatory to a swift descent upon our shores. This alarming fact we wilfully disregard, affecting to find humour in the Franco-Muscovite preparations. Thus, unless we maintain a Navy of sufficient strength to prevent invasion, War, with its attendant horrors, is inevitable, and the scene of battle will be England's

smiling fields.

Turning to our Army, what do we find? Even the civilian writer who studies it is amazed at the muddle of insufficiency in which it is steeped. Our Home Defence Scheme is a very elaborate paper problem, but as our forces have never been mobilised, its many glaring defects must, alas! remain unremedied until our highways echo to the tramp of an enemy. Upon this point a volume might be written, but a few plain facts must suffice. Military experts will, I think, agree when I assert that the 2nd Corps, as planned by this grotesque scheme, does not and cannot exist; and while the 3rd Corps may possibly stand as regards infantry, because its infantry are all Militia, yet it will have neither Regular cavalry nor guns. Every one of the staffs is a myth, and the equipment and commissariat arrangements are a complete guarantee of collapse at the outset of mobilisation. What, for instance, can be said of a system in which one unit of the 3rd Cavalry Brigade "mobilises," and obtains its "personal" and part of its "regimental" equipment at Plymouth; the other part of its regimental paraphernalia, including munitions, at Aldershot; and its horses – at Dublin? Practically, half our cavalry at home are to-day, however, incapable of mobilisation, for, according to the latest return available, I find that over six thousand cavalry men have no horses! Again, the Volunteers, upon whom we must depend for the defence of London, have no transport, and the ammunition columns for the 3rd Army Corps and the Regular cavalry do not exist. Such staggering deficits as

these are in themselves sufficient to show how critical would be our position if England were invaded, and in order to give an adequate idea of what we may expect during that reign of terror, I have penned the narrative which follows. Some, no doubt, believe that our enemies will treat us with more mercy than I have shown, but I firmly anticipate that in the desperate struggle for the supremacy of the world, towns will be bombarded and international law set at naught where our invaders see a chance of success. Consequently, the ruin must be widespread, and the loss of life enormous.

In the various strategical and tactical problems involved, I have received assistance from a number of well-known naval and military officers on the active list, whose names I am, however, not at liberty to divulge. Suffice it to say that, in addition to personally going over the whole of the ground where battles are fought, I have also obtained information from certain official documents not made public, and have endeavoured to bring this forecast up to date by introducing the latest inventions in guns, and showing the relative strength of Navies as they will appear in 1897. In this latter I have been compelled to bestow names upon many ships now building.

To Lieut. J. G. Stevens, 17th Middlesex Rifle Volunteers, who supplied me with many details regarding the Volunteers; to Mr. Alfred C. Harmsworth, F.R.G.S., whose suggestion prompted me to write this narrative; and to Mr. Harold Harmsworth, who on several occasions assisted me, I hereby acknowledge

my thanks. While many readers will no doubt regard this book chiefly as an exciting piece of fiction, I trust that no small proportion will perceive the important lesson underlying it, for the French are laughing at us, the Russians presume to imitate us, and the Day of Reckoning is hourly advancing.

WILLIAM LE QUEUX.

Prince of Wales's Club,
Coventry Street, W.

BOOK I

THE INVASION

THE GREAT WAR IN ENGLAND IN 1897

CHAPTER I.

THE SHADOW OF MOLOCH

War! *War in England!*

Growled by thoughtful, stern-visaged men, gasped with bated breath by pale-faced, terrified women, the startling news passed quickly round the Avenue Theatre from gallery to boxes. The crisis was swift, complete, crushing. Actors and audience were appalled.

Though it was a gay comic opera that was being performed for the first time, entertainers and entertained lost all interest in each other. They were amazed, dismayed, awestricken. Amusement was nauseating; War, with all its attendant horrors, was actually upon them! The popular tenor, one of the idols of the hour, blundered over his lines and sang terribly out of tune, but the hypercritical first-night audience passed the defect unnoticed. They only thought of what might happen; of the dark cavernous future that lay before.

War had been declared against Britain – Britain, the Empire that had so long rested in placid sea-girt security, confident of immunity from attack, was to be invaded! The assertion seemed preposterous.

Some, after reading eagerly the newspapers still damp from the press, smiled incredulously, half inclined to regard the startling intelligence as a mere fabrication by alarmists, or a

perfected phase of the periodical war-scare which sensational journalists annually launch upon the world during what is technically known as the "gooseberry" season.

Other readers, however, recollecting the grave political crises on the Continent, set their teeth firmly, silent and dumfounded. Upon many merchants and City men the news fell like a thunderbolt, for financial ruin stared them in the face.

Evidently a desperate attempt would be made by the enemy to land on English soil. Already the startled playgoers could hear in their excited imagination the clash of arms mingling with the triumphant yell of the victor, and the stifled, despairing cry of the hapless victim. But who, they wondered, would be the victim? Would Britannia ever fall to the dust with broken trident and shattered shield? Would her neck ever lie under the heel of the foreign invader? No, never – while Britons could fight.

The theatre, in its garish blaze of electricity, and crowded with well-dressed men and women, presented a brilliant appearance, which had suddenly become strangely incongruous with the feelings of the audience. In the boxes, where youth and beauty smiled, the bouquets which had been provided by the management gave to the theatre a bright, artistic touch of colour. Yet the pungent odour they diffused had become sickening. Intermingled with other flowers there were many tuberoses. They are funereal blossoms, ineffably emblematic of the grave. There is death in their breath.

When the astounding news fell upon the house the

performance was drawing to a close. A moment before, every one had been silent and motionless, listening with rapt attention to the tenor's plaintive love song, and admiring the grace of the fair heroine, but as the terrible truth dawned upon them they rose, amid a scene of the wildest excitement. The few papers that had been purchased at fabulous prices at the doors were eagerly scanned, many of the sheets being torn into shreds in the mad struggle to catch a glimpse of the alarming telegrams they contained. For a few moments the agitation nearly approached a panic, while above the hum and din the hoarse, strident voices of running newsmen could be heard outside, yelling, "War declared against England! Expected landing of the enemy! Extrur-speshal!"

There was a hidden terror in the word "War" that at first held the amazed playgoers breathless and thoughtful. Never before had its significance appeared so grim, so fatal, so fraught with appalling consequences.

War had been actually declared! There was no averting it! It was a stern reality.

No adroit diplomatic negotiations could stem the advancing hordes of foreign invaders; Ministers and ambassadors were as useless pawns, for two great nations had had the audacity to combine in the projected attack upon Great Britain.

It seemed incredible, impossible. True, a Great War had long been predicted, forecasts had been given of coming conflicts, and European nations had for years been gradually

strengthening their armies and perfecting their engines of war, in the expectation of being plunged into hostilities. Modern improvements in arms and ammunition had so altered the conditions of war, that there had long been a feeling of insecurity even among those Powers who, a few years before, had felt themselves strong enough to resist any attack, however violent. War-scares had been plentiful, crises in France, Germany, and Russia of frequent occurrence; still, no one dreamed that Moloch was in their midst – that the Great War, so long foreshadowed, had in reality commenced.

Yet on this hot, oppressive Saturday night in August the extra-special editions of the papers contained news that startled the world. It ran as follows: —

INVASION OF ENGLAND

WAR DECLARED BY FRANCE AND RUSSIA

HOSTILE FLEETS ADVANCING

EXTRAORDINARY MANIFESTO BY THE TSAR

[Reuter's Telegrams.]

St. Petersburg, August 14th, 4 P.M.

The most intense excitement has been caused here by a totally unexpected and amazing announcement made this afternoon by the Minister of Foreign Affairs to the French Ambassador. It appears that the Minister has addressed to the French representative a short note in which the following extraordinary passage occurs: —

"The earnest negotiations between the Imperial Government and Great Britain for a durable pacification of Bosnia not having led to the desired accord, His Majesty the Tsar, my august master, sees himself compelled, to his regret, to have recourse to force of arms. Be therefore

so kind as to inform your Government that from to-day Russia considers herself in a state of war with Great Britain, and requests that France will immediately comply with the obligations of the alliance signed by President Carnot on February 23rd, 1892."

A circular note has also been addressed by the Russian Foreign Office to its ambassadors at the principal Courts of Europe, stating that, for reasons assigned, the Tsar has resolved to commence hostilities against Great Britain, and has given his Armies and Navy orders to commence the invasion.

This declaration has, no doubt, been contemplated by the Russian Government for several days. During the past week the French Ambassador has twice had private audience of the Tsar, and soon after 11 A.M. to-day he had a long interview at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. It is understood that the Minister of War was also present.

No official notification of the Declaration of War has been given to the British Ambassador. This has created considerable surprise.

5.30 P.M.

Large posters, headed "A Manifesto of His Majesty the Emperor of Russia," and addressed to his subjects, are being posted up in the Nevski Prospekt. In this document the Tsar says —

"Our faithful and beloved subjects know the strong interest which we have constantly felt in the destinies of our Empire. Our desire for the pacification of our western

frontier has been shared by the whole Russian nation, which now shows itself ready to bear fresh sacrifices to alleviate the position of those oppressed by British rule. The blood and property of our faithful subjects have always been dear to us, and our whole reign attests our constant solicitude to preserve to Russia the benefits of peace. This solicitude never failed to actuate my father during events which occurred recently in Bulgaria, Austro-Hungary, and Bosnia. Our object, before all, was to effect an amelioration in the position of our people on the frontier by means of pacific negotiations, and in concert with the great European Powers, our allies and friends. Having, however, exhausted our pacific efforts, we are compelled by the haughty obstinacy of Great Britain to proceed to more decisive acts. A feeling of equity and of our own dignity enjoins it. By her recent acts Great Britain places us under the necessity of having recourse to arms. Profoundly convinced of the justice of our cause, we make known to our faithful subjects that we declare war against Great Britain. In now invoking a blessing upon our valiant armies, we give the order for an invasion of England."

This manifesto has excited the greatest enthusiasm. The news has spread rapidly, and dense crowds have assembled in the Nevski, the Izak Platz, and on the English Quay, where the posters are being exhibited.

The British Ambassador has not yet received any communication from the Imperial Government.

Fontainebleau, Aug. 14th, 4.30 P.M.

President Felix Faure has received a telegram from the French representative at St. Petersburg, stating that Russia has declared war against Great Britain. The President left immediately for Paris by special train.

Paris, Aug. 14th, 4.50 P.M.

An astounding piece of intelligence has this afternoon been received at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. It is no less than a Declaration of War by Russia against Britain. The telegram containing the announcement was received at the Ministry from the French Ambassador at St. Petersburg soon after three o'clock. The President was at once informed, and the Cabinet immediately summoned. A meeting is now being held for the purpose of deciding upon the course to be pursued with regard to the obligations of France contracted by the Treaty of Alliance made after the Cronstadt incident in 1891. The news of impending hostilities has just been published in a special edition of the *Soir*, and has created the wildest excitement on the Boulevards. Little doubt is entertained that France will join the invading forces, and the result of the deliberations of the Cabinet is anxiously awaited. President Felix Faure has returned from Fontainebleau.

[By Telephone through Dalziel's Agency.]

6 P.M.

The meeting of the Cabinet has just concluded. It has been resolved that France shall unreservedly render assistance to Russia. There is great activity at the War Office, and troops are already being ordered on active service. The excitement in the streets is increasing.

[Reuter's Telegrams.]

Berlin, Aug. 14th, 5.30 P.M.

Telegrams received here from St. Petersburg report that Russia has unexpectedly declared war against Great Britain, and called upon France to aid her in a combined attack. The report is scarcely credited here, and further details are being eagerly awaited. The Emperor, who was to have left for Bremen this afternoon, has abandoned his journey, and is now in consultation with the Chancellor.

Christiansand, Aug. 14th, 7.30 P.M.

The French Channel Squadron, which has been manœuvring for the past fortnight off the western coast of Norway, anchored outside the fjord here last night. This morning, according to rumour, the Russian Squadron arrived suddenly, and lay about thirty miles off land. Secret telegraphic orders were received at 6 P.M. by the Admirals of both fleets almost simultaneously, and the whole of the vessels left in company half an hour later. They sailed in a

southerly direction, but their destination is unknown.

Dieppe, Aug. 14th, 8 P.M.

Ten transport vessels are embarking troops for England. Four regiments of cavalry, including the 4th Chasseurs and 16th Guards, are – ¹

¹ The conclusion of this message has not reached us, all the wires connecting this country with France having been cut.

CHAPTER II.

A TOTTERING EMPIRE

The excitement in the theatre had increased, and the curtain had been rung down. Death shadows, grimly apparent, had fallen upon the house, and the scene was an extraordinary and unprecedented one. No such wild restlessness and impetuous agitation had ever before been witnessed within those walls. Some enthusiast of the pit, springing to his feet, and drawing a large red handkerchief from his pocket, waved it, shouting —

"Three cheers for good Old England!" to which, after a moment's silence, the audience responded lustily.

Then, almost before the last sound had died away, another patriot of the people mounted upon his seat, crying —

"No one need fear. The British Lion will quickly hold the French Eagle and the Russian Bear within his jaws. Let the enemy come; we will mow them down like hay."

This raised a combined laugh and cheer, though it sounded forced and hollow. Immediately, however, some buoyant spirits in the gallery commenced singing "Rule, Britannia," the chorus of which was taken up vigorously, the orchestra assisting by playing the last verse.

Outside, the scene in the streets was one of momentarily increasing excitement. The news had spread with marvellous rapidity, and the whole city was agog. An elbowing, waving,

stormy crowd surged down the Strand to Trafalgar Square, where an impromptu demonstration was being held, the Government being denounced by its opponents, and spoken of with confidence by its supporters. The Radical, the Socialist, the Anarchist, each aired his views, and through the throng a hoarse threatening murmur condensed into three words, "Down with Russia! Down with France!" The cry, echoed by a thousand throats, mingled weirdly with the shouts of the newsmen and the snatches of patriotic songs.

London was anxious, fevered, and turbulent, that hot, moonless August night. At that hour all the shops were closed, and the streets only lighted by the lamps. From the unlighted windows the indistinct shapes of heads looking out on the scene could be distinguished.

On the pavements of Piccadilly and Knightsbridge knots of people stood arguing and wrangling over the probable turn of events. From uncouth Whitechapel to artistic Kensington, from sylvan Highgate to the villadom of Dulwich, the amazing intelligence had been conveyed by the presses of Fleet Street, which were still belching forth tons of damp news-sheets. At first there was confidence among the people; nevertheless little by little this confidence diminished, and curiosity gave place to surprise. But what could it be? All was shrouded in the darkest gloom. In the atmosphere was a strange and terrible oppression that seemed to weigh down men and crush them. London was, it appeared, walled in by the unknown and the unexpected.

But, after all, England was strong; it was the mighty British Empire; it was the world. What was there to fear? Nothing. So the people continued to shout, "Down with France! Down with the Autocrat! Down with the Tsar!"

A young man, who had been sitting alone in the stalls, had risen, electrified at the alarming news, and rushing out, hailed a passing cab, and drove rapidly away up Northumberland Avenue. This conduct was remarkable, for Geoffrey Engleheart was scarcely the man to flinch when danger threatened. He was a tall, athletic young fellow of twenty-six, with wavy brown hair, a dark, smartly-trimmed moustache, and handsome, well-cut features. He was happy and easy-going, always overflowing with genuine *bonhomie*. As the younger son of a very distinguished officer, he contrived to employ himself for a couple of hours a day at the Foreign Office, where, although a clerk, he held a very responsible position. Belonging to a rather good set, he was a member of several fashionable clubs, and lived in cosy, well-furnished chambers in St. James's Street.

Driving first to the house of his *fiancée*, Violet Vayne, at Rutland Gate, he informed her family of the startling intelligence; then, re-entering the conveyance, he subsequently alighted before the door of his chambers. As he paid the cabman, an ill-clad man pushed a newspaper into his face, crying, "'Ere y'are, sir. Extrur-special edition o' the *People*. Latest details. Serious scandal at the Forrin' Office."

Geoffrey started. He staggered, his heart gave a bound, and his

face blanched. Thrusting half a crown into the man's dirty palm, he grasped the paper, and rushing upstairs to his sitting-room, cast himself into a chair. In breathless eagerness he glanced at the front page of the journal, and read the following: —

SCANDAL AT THE FOREIGN OFFICE

A State Secret Divulged

An extraordinary rumour is going the round of the Service clubs to-night. It is alleged that the present Declaration of War would have been impossible but for the treachery of some person through whose hands the transcript of a secret treaty between England and Germany passed to-day.

A prominent Cabinet Minister, on being questioned by our reporter on the subject, admitted that he had heard the rumour, but declined to make any definite statement whether or not it was true.

There must be a good deal behind the rumour of treachery, inasmuch as none of the prominent men who have already been interviewed gave a denial to the statement.

Geoffrey sat pale and motionless, with eyes fixed upon the printed words. He read and re-read them until the lines danced

before his gaze, and he crushed the paper in his hands, and cast it from him.

The little French clock on the mantelshelf chimed the hour of one upon its silvery bell; the lamp spluttered and burned dim. Still he did not move; he was dumfounded, rooted to the spot.

Blacker and blacker grew the crowd outside. The density of the cloud that hung over all portended some direful tragedy. The impending disaster made itself felt. An alarming sense of calmness filled the streets. A silence had suddenly fallen, and was becoming complete and threatening. What was it that was about to issue from these black storm-clouds? Who could tell?

CHAPTER III.

ARMING FOR THE STRUGGLE

London was amazed.

The provinces were awestricken, paralysed by the startling suddenness with which the appalling news of the invasion had been flashed to them. Bewildered, the people could not believe it.

Only slowly did the vivid and terrible truth dawn individually upon the millions north and south, and then, during the Day of Rest, they crowded to the newspaper and telegraph offices, loudly clamouring for further details of the overwhelming catastrophe that threatened. They sought for information from London; they expected London, the mighty, all-powerful capital, to act.

Through the blazing Sunday the dust rose from the impatient, perspiring crowds in towns and cities, and the cool night brought no rest from a turmoil now incessant. Never before were such scenes of intense enthusiasm witnessed in England, Wales, and Scotland, for this was the first occasion on which the public felt the presence of invaders at their very doors.

A mighty force was on its way to ruin their homes, to sweep from them their hard-earned savings, to crush, to conquer – to kill them!

Fierce antagonism rose spontaneously in every Briton's heart, and during that never-to-be-forgotten day, at every barracks

throughout the country, recruiting-sergeants were besieged by all sorts and conditions of men eager to accept the Queen's shilling, and strike for their country's honour. Heedless of danger, of hardship, of the fickle fortune of the fight, the determination to assist in the struggle rose instantly within them.

At York, Chester, Edinburgh, and Portsmouth, volunteers came forward by hundreds. All were enthusiastic, undrilled, but ready to use their guns – genuinely heroic patriots of our land, such as are included in no other nation than the British. Pluck, zeal for the public safety, and an intense partisanship towards their fellows induced thousands to join the colours – many, alas! to sink later beneath a foeman's bullet, unknown, unhonoured heroes!

Already the Cabinet had held a hurried meeting, at which it had been decided to call out the whole of the Reserves. Of this the War Office and Admiralty had been notified, and the Queen had given her sanction to the necessary proclamations, with the result that telegraphic orders had been issued to general officers commanding and to officers commanding Reservists to mobilise instantly.

The posters containing the proclamation, which are always kept in readiness in the hands of officers commanding Regimental Districts, were issued immediately, and exhibited on all public places throughout the kingdom. On the doors of town halls, churches, chapels, police stations, military barracks, and in the windows of post offices, these notices

were posted within a few hours. Crowds everywhere collected to read them, and the greatest enthusiasm was displayed. Militia, Yeomanry, Volunteers, all were called out, and men on reading the Mobilisation Order lost no time in obtaining their accoutrements and joining their depôts. The national danger was imminent, and towards their "places of concentration" all categories of Her Majesty's forces were already moving. In every Regimental District the greatest activity was displayed. No country maintains in peace the full complement, or anything approaching the full complement of transport which its Armies require; hence vehicles and horses to complete the Army Service Corps companies, and for the supplemental service, were being immediately requisitioned from far and near.

One of the many anomalies discovered during this critical period was, that while transport could thus be rapidly requisitioned, yet the impressment of civilians as drivers and caretakers of the animals was not permitted by the law; therefore on all hands the organisation of this requisitioned transport was fraught with the utmost difficulty, the majority of owners and employees refusing to come forward voluntarily. Registered horses were quickly collected, but they were far from sufficient for the requirements, and the want of animals caused loud outcries from every Regimental District.

The general scheme was the constitution of a Field Army of four cavalry brigades and three army corps, with behind them a semi-mobile force made up of thirty-three Volunteer infantry

brigades and eighty-four Volunteer batteries of position. The garrisons having been provided for, the four cavalry brigades and the 1st and 2nd Army Corps were to be composed entirely of Regulars, the 3rd Army Corps being made up of Regulars, Militia, and Volunteers. Organised in brigades, the Yeomanry were attached to the various infantry brigades or divisions of the Field Army, and the Regular Medical Staff Corps being much too weak, was strengthened from companies of the Volunteer Medical Staff Corps. In brief, the scheme was the formation of a composite Field Army, backed by a second line of partially trained Auxiliaries.

Such a general scheme to set in battle order our land forces for home defence was, no doubt, well devised. Nevertheless, from the first moment the most glaring defects in the working out of details were everywhere manifested. Stores were badly disposed, there was a sad want of clothing, camp equipment, and arms, and the arrangements for the joining of Reservists were throughout defective. Again, the whole Reserve had been left totally untrained from the day the men left the colours; and having in view the fact that all leading authorities in Europe had, times without number, told us that the efficiency of an Army depended on drill, discipline, and shooting, what could be expected from a system which relied in great part for the safety of the country on a Reserve, the members of which were undisciplined, undrilled, and unpractised in shooting for periods ranging from nine years in the Guards to five years in the case

of the Line?

On the day of mobilisation not a single regiment in the United Kingdom was ready to move forward to the front as it stood on parade! Not an officer, not a man, was prepared. England had calmly slept for years, while military reforms had been effected in every other European country. Now she had been suddenly and rudely awakened!

Everywhere it was commented upon that no practical peace trial of the mobilisation scheme had ever been made. Little wonder was there, then, that incomplete details hampered rapid movements, or that the carrying out of the definite and distinct programme was prevented by gaps occurring which could not be discovered until the working of the system had been tested by actual experiment.

It was this past apathy of the authorities, amounting to little less than criminal negligence, that formed the text of the vehement outpourings of Anarchists, Socialists, and "No War" partisans. A practical test of the efficiency of the scheme to concentrate our forces should have taken place even at the risk of public expenditure, instead of making the experiment when the enemy were actually at our doors.

Another anomaly which, in the opinion of the public, ought long ago to have been removed, was the fact that the billeting of troops on the march on the inhabitants of the United Kingdom, other than owners of hotels, inns, livery stables, and public-houses, is illegal, while troops when not on the march cannot be

billeted at all! At many points of concentration this absurd and antiquated regulation, laid down by the Army Act in 1881, was severely felt. Public buildings, churches, and schools had to be hired for the accommodation of the troops, and those others who could not find private persons hospitable enough to take them in were compelled to bivouac where they could. Of tents they had scarcely any, and many regiments were thus kept homeless and badly fed several days before moving forward!

Was there any wonder, then, that some men should lose heart? Did not such defects portend – nay, invite disaster?

Strange though it may seem, Geoffrey Engleheart was one of but two persons in England who had on that Saturday anticipated this sudden Declaration of War.

Through the hot night, without heed of the wild turbulence outside, regardless of the songs of patriots, of gleeful shouts of Anarchists, that, mingling into a dull roar, penetrated the heavy curtains before the window of his room, he sat with brows knit and gaze transfixed.

Words now and then escaped his compressed lips. They were low and ominous; utterances of blank despair.

CHAPTER IV.

THE SPY

Count von Beilstein was a polished cosmopolitan. He was in many ways a very remarkable man.

In London society he was as popular as he had previously been in Paris and in Berlin. Well-preserved and military-looking, he retained the vigour, high spirits, and spruce step of youth, spent his money freely, and led the almost idyllic life of a careless bachelor in the Albany.

Since his partnership with Sir Joseph Vayne, the well-known shipowner, father of Geoffrey's *fiancée*, he had taken up a prominent position in commercial circles, was a member of the London Chamber of Commerce, took an active part in the various deliberations of that body, and in the City was considered a man of considerable importance.

How we of the world, however shrewd, are deceived by outward appearances!

Of the millions in London there were but two men who knew the truth; who were aware of the actual position held by this German landed proprietor. Indeed, the Count's friends little dreamed that under the outward cloak of careless ease induced by wealth there was a mind endowed with a cunning that was extraordinary, and an ingenuity that was marvellous. Truth to tell, Karl von Beilstein, who posed as the owner of the

great Beilstein estates, extending along the beautiful valley of the Moselle, between Alf and Cochem, was not an aristocrat at all, and possessed no estate more tangible than the proverbial château in Spain.

Count von Beilstein was a *spy*!

His life had been a strangely varied one; few men perhaps had seen more of the world. His biography was recorded in certain police registers. Born in the Jews' quarter at Frankfort, he had, at an early age, turned adventurer, and for some years was well known at Monte Carlo as a successful gamester. But the Fickle Goddess at last forsook him, and under another name he started a bogus loan office in Brussels. This, however, did not last long, for the police one night made a raid on the place, only to discover that Monsieur had flown. An extensive robbery of diamonds in Amsterdam, a theft of bonds while in transit between Hanover and Berlin, and the forgery of a large quantity of Russian rouble notes, were events which followed in quick succession, and in each of them the police detected the adroit hand of the man who now called himself the Count von Beilstein. At last, by sheer ill-luck, he fell into the grip of the law.

He was in St. Petersburg, where he had opened an office in the Bolshaia, and started as a diamond dealer. After a few genuine transactions he obtained possession of gems worth nearly £20,000, and decamped.

But the Russian police were quickly at his heels, and he was arrested in Riga, being subsequently tried and condemned by the

Assize Court at St. Petersburg to twelve years' exile in Siberia. In chains, with a convoy of convicts he crossed the Urals, and tramped for weeks on the snow-covered Siberian Post Road.

His name still appears on the register at the forwarding prison of Tomsk, with a note stating that he was sent on to the silver mines of Nertchinsk, the most dreaded in Asiatic Russia.

Yet, strangely enough, within twelve months of his sentence he appeared at Royat-les-Bains, in Auvergne, posing as a Count, and living expensively at one of the best hotels.

There was a reason for all this. The Russian Government, when he was sentenced, were well aware of his perfect training as a cosmopolitan adventurer, of his acquaintance with persons of rank, and of his cool unscrupulousness. Hence it was that one night while on the march along the Great Post Road to that bourne whence few convicts return, it was hinted to him by the captain of Cossacks, that he might obtain his liberty, and a good income in addition, if he consented to become a secret agent of the Tsar.

The authorities desired him to perform a special duty; would he consent? He could exchange a life of heavy toil in the Nertchinsk mines for one of comparative idleness and ease. The offer was tempting, and he accepted.

That same night it was announced to his fellow-convicts that the Tsar had pardoned him; his leg-fetters were thereupon struck off, and he started upon his return to St. Petersburg to receive instructions as to the delicate mission he was to perform.

It was then, for the first time, that he became the Count von Beilstein, and his subsequent actions all betrayed the most remarkable daring, forethought, and tact. With one object in view he exercised an amount of patience that was almost incredible. One or two minor missions were entrusted to him by his official taskmasters on the banks of the Neva, and in each he acquitted himself satisfactorily. Apparently he was a thoroughly patriotic subject of the Kaiser, with tastes strongly anti-Muscovite, and after his partnership with Sir Joseph Vayne he resided in London, and mixed a good deal with military men, because he had, he said, held a commission in a Hussar regiment in the Fatherland, and took the liveliest interest in all military matters.

Little did those officers dream that the information he gained about improvements in England's defences was forwarded in regular and carefully-written reports to the Russian War Office, or that the Tsar's messenger who carried weekly despatches between the Russian Ambassador in London and his Government frequently took with him a packet containing plans and tracings which bore marginal notes in the angular handwriting of the popular Count von Beilstein!

Early in the morning of this memorable day when the startling news of the Declaration of War had reached England, a telegram had been handed to the Tsar's secret agent while he was still in bed.

He read it through; then stared thoughtfully up at the ceiling. The message, in code, from Berlin, stated that a draft of a

most important treaty between Germany and England had been despatched from the German Foreign Office, and would arrive in London that day. The message concluded with the words, "It is imperative that we should have a copy of this document, or at least a summary of its contents, immediately."

Although sent from Berlin, the Count was well aware that it was an order from the Foreign Minister in St. Petersburg, the message being transmitted to Berlin first, and then retransmitted to London, in order to avoid any suspicion that might arise in the case of messages exchanged direct with the Russian capital. Having read the telegram through several times, he whistled to himself, rose quickly, dressed, and breakfasted. While having his meal, he gave some instructions to Grevel, his valet, and sent him out upon an errand, at the same time expressing his intention of waiting in until his return.

"Remember," the Count said, as his man was going out, "be careful to arouse no suspicion. Simply make your inquiries in the proper quarter, and come back immediately."

At half-past twelve o'clock, as Geoffrey Engleheart was busy writing alone in his room at the Foreign Office, he was interrupted by the opening of the door.

"Hulloa, dear boy! I've found my way up here by myself. Busy, as usual, I see!" cried a cheery voice as the door slowly opened, and Geoffrey looking up saw it was his friend the Count, well groomed and fashionably attired in glossy silk hat, perfect-fitting frock coat, and varnished boots. He called very frequently upon

Engleheart, and had long ago placed himself on excellent terms with the messengers and doorkeepers, who looked upon him as a most generous visitor.

"Oh, how are you?" Engleheart exclaimed, rising and shaking his hand. "You must really forgive me, Count, but I quite forgot my appointment with you to-day."

"Oh, don't let me disturb you, pray. I'll have a glance at the paper till you've finished," and casting himself into a chair near the window he took up the *Times* and was soon absorbed in it.

A quarter of an hour went by in silence, while Engleheart wrote on, calmly unconscious that there was a small rent in the newspaper the Count was reading, and that through it he could plainly see each word of the treaty as it was transcribed from the secret code and written down in plain English.

"Will you excuse me for ten minutes?" Geoffrey exclaimed presently. "The Cabinet Council is sitting, and I have to run over to see Lord Stanbury for a moment. After I return I must make another copy of this paper, and then I shall be free."

The Count, casting the newspaper wearily aside, glanced at his watch.

"It's half-past one," he said. "You'll be another half-hour, if not more. After all, I really think, old fellow, I'll go on down to Hurlingham. I arranged to meet the Vaynes at two o'clock."

"All right. I'll run down in a cab as soon as I can get away," answered Engleheart.

"Good. Come on as soon as you can. Violet will be expecting

you, you know."

"Of course I shall," replied his unsuspecting friend, and they shook hands, after which the Count put on his hat and sauntered jauntily out.

In Parliament Street he jumped into his phaeton, but instead of driving to Hurlingham gave his man orders to proceed with all speed to the General Post Office, St. Martin's-le-Grand. Within half an hour from the time he had shaken the hand of his unsuspecting friend, a message in code – to all intents and purposes a commercial despatch – was on its way to "Herr Brandt, 116 Friedrich Strasse, Berlin."

That message contained an exact transcript of the secret treaty!

Almost immediately after the Count had left, Geoffrey made a discovery. From the floor he picked up a small gold pencil-case which he knew belonged to von Beilstein.

Engleheart was sorely puzzled to know why the Count should require a pencil if not to write, and it momentarily flashed across his mind that he might have copied portions of the treaty. But the next minute he dismissed the suspicion as ungrounded and preposterous, and placing the pencil in his pocket went in search of Lord Stanbury.

It was only the statement he read in the *People* later, alleging treachery at the Foreign Office, that recalled the incident to his mind. Then the horrible truth dawned upon him. He saw how probable it was that he had been tricked.

He knew that the mine was already laid; that the only thing that had prevented an explosion that would shake the whole world had been the absence of definite knowledge as to the exact terms of the alliance between England, Germany, Italy, and Austria.

CHAPTER V.

BOMBARDMENT OF NEWHAVEN

At sea the night was dark and moonless. A thick mist hung near the land. The Coastguard and Artillery on our southern and eastern shores spent a terribly anxious time, peering from their points of vantage out into the cavernous darkness where no light glimmered. The Harbour Defence Flotilla was in readiness, and under the black cliffs sentinels kept watch with every nerve strained to its highest tension, for the safety of England now depended upon their alertness. The great waves crashed and roared, and the mist, obscuring the light of vessels passing up and down the Channel, seemed to grow more dense as the hours wore on.

In the midst of the feverish excitement that had spread everywhere throughout the length and breadth of the land, the troops were, a couple of hours after the receipt of the alarming news in London, already being mobilised and on their way south and east by special trains. Men, arms, ammunition, and stores were hurried forward to repel attack, and in the War Office and Admiralty, where the staffs had been suddenly called together, the greatest activity prevailed. Messages had been flashed along the wires in every direction giving orders to mobilise and concentrate at certain points, and these instructions were being obeyed with that promptness for which British soldiers and

sailors are proverbial.

Yet the high officials at the War Office looked grave, and although affecting unconcern, now and then whispered ominously together. They knew that the situation was critical. An immediate and adequate naval defence was just possible, but the Channel Squadron was manœuvring off the Irish coast, and both the Coastguard Squadron and the Steam Reserve at the home ports were very weak. It was to our land army that we had to trust, and they were divided in opinion as to the possibility to mobilise a sufficient force in time to bar the advance.

Military experts did not overlook the fact that to Dunkirk, Calais, Boulogne, Dieppe, Fécamp, Havre, Honfleur, and Cherbourg ran excellent lines of railway, with ample rolling-stock, all Government property, and at the beck and call of the French War Minister. In the various ports there was adequate wharf accommodation and plenty of steam tonnage. From the brief official despatches received from Paris before the cutting of the wires, it was apparent that the French War Office had laid its plans with much forethought and cunning, and had provided against any *contretemps*. An army of carpenters and engineers had been put to work in the ports to alter the fittings of such of the merchant steamers as were destined to convey horses, and these fittings, prepared beforehand, were already in position. Four army corps had for several weeks been manœuvring in Normandy, so that the Reservists had become accustomed to their work, and in excellent condition for war; therefore these

facts, coupled with the strong support certain to be rendered by the warships of the Tsar, led experts to regard the outlook as exceedingly gloomy.

For years military and naval men had discussed the possibilities of invasion, haggled over controversial points, but had never arrived at any definite opinion as to the possibility of an enemy's success. Now, however, the defences of the country were to be tested.

Our great Empire was at stake.

The power of steam to cause rapid transit by land and sea, the uncertainty of the place of disembarkment, and the great weight of modern naval artillery, combined to render the defences of England on the coast itself most uncertain and hazardous, and to cause grave doubts to arise in the minds of those who at that critical moment were directing the forward movement of the forces.

The British public, whose national patriotism found vent in expressions of confidence in the Regular Army and Volunteers, were ignorant of the facts. They knew that two great Powers had combined to crush our island stronghold, and were eager that hostilities should commence in order that the enemy should be taught a severe lesson for their presumption.

They, however, knew nothing of the plain truth, that although the 1st Army Corps at Aldershot would be ready to move at a few hours' notice, yet it was hopeless to try and prevent the disembarkation of the French army corps along a long line of

unprotected coast by the action of a land force only one-third of their strength.

So, by the water's edge, the lonely posts were kept through the night by patient, keen-sighted sentinels, ready at any moment to raise the alarm. But the dense mist that overhung everything was tantalising, hiding friend and foe alike, and no sound could be heard above the heavy roar of the waters as they rolled in over the rocks.

London, infuriated, enthusiastic, turbulent, knew no sleep that night. The excitement was at fever-heat. At last, soon after daybreak, there came the first news of the enemy. A number of warships had suddenly appeared through the fog off the Sussex coast, and had lost no time in asserting their presence and demanding a large sum from the Mayor of Newhaven.

The French first-class battery cruiser *Tage*, the *Dévastation*, the *Pothuau*, the *Aréthuse* and others, finding that their demand was unheeded, at once commenced shelling the town. Although our Coastguard Squadron and first-class Steam Reserve had mobilised, yet they had received orders and sailed away no one knew whither. The forts replied vigorously, but the fire of the enemy in half an hour had wrought terrible havoc both in the town and in the forts, where several of the guns had been rendered useless and a number of men had been killed. Hostilities had commenced.

Never during the century had such scenes been witnessed in the streets of London as on that memorable Sunday morning.

The metropolis was thrilled.

Dawn was spreading, saffron tints were in the sky heralding the sun's coming. Yet Regent Street, Piccadilly, and the Strand, usually entirely deserted at that hour on a Sabbath morning, were crowded as if it were midday.

Everywhere there was excitement. Crowds waited in front of the newspaper offices in Fleet Street, boys with strident voices sold the latest editions of the papers, men continued their snatches of patriotic ballads, while women were blanched and scared, and children clung to their mothers' skirts timidly, vaguely fearing an unknown terror.

The shadow of coming events was black and dim, like a funeral pall. The fate of our Empire hung upon a thread.

Twenty-four hours ago England was smiling, content in the confidence of its perfect safety and immunity from invasion; yet all the horrors of war had, with a startling, appalling suddenness, fallen and bewildered it. The booming of French cannon at Newhaven formed the last salute of many a brave Briton who fell shattered and lifeless.

As the sun rose crimson from the grey misty sea, the work of destruction increased in vigour. From the turrets of the floating monsters smoke and flame poured forth in continuous volume, while shot and shell were hurled into the town of Newhaven, which, it was apparent, was the centre of the enemy's attack, and where, owing to the deepening of the harbour, troops could effect a landing under cover of the fire from the ironclads.

Frightful havoc was wrought by the shells among the houses of the little town, and one falling on board the Brighton Railway Company's mail steamer *Paris*, lying alongside the station quay, set her on fire. In half an hour railway station and quays were blazing furiously, while the flames leaped up about the ship, wrapping themselves about the two white funnels and darting from every porthole.

The Custom House opposite quickly ignited, and the inflammable nature of its contents caused the fire to assume enormous proportions. Meanwhile the bombardment was kept up, the forts on shore still replying with regularity, steadiness, and precision, and the armoured coast train of the 1st Sussex Artillery Volunteers, under Captain Brigden, rendering excellent service. In one of the forts a man was standing in front of a small camera-obscura, on the glass of which were a number of mysterious marks. This glass reflected the water and the ships; and as he stood by calmly with his hand upon a keyboard, he watched the reflections of the hostile vessels moving backwards and forwards over the glass. Suddenly he saw a French gunboat, after a series of smartly-executed manœuvres, steaming straight over one of the marks, and, quick as lightning, his finger pressed one of the electric keys. A terrific explosion followed, and a column of green water shot up at the same instant. The gunboat *Lavel* had been suddenly blown almost out of the water by a submarine mine! Broken portions of her black hull turned over and sank, and mangled remains of what a second before had been

a crew of enthusiastic Frenchmen floated for a few moments on the surface, then disappeared. Not a soul on board escaped.

Along the telegraph line from the signal-station on Beachy Head news of the blowing up of the enemy's gunboat was flashed to London, and when, an hour later, it appeared in the newspapers, the people went half mad with excitement. Alas, how they miscalculated the relative strength of the opposing forces!

They were unaware that our Channel Fleet, our Coastguard Squadron, and our Reserve were steaming away, leaving our southern shores *practically unprotected*!

CHAPTER VI.

LANDING OF THE FRENCH IN SUSSEX

The Briton is, alas! too prone to underrate his adversary. It is this national egotism, this fatal over-confidence, that has led to most of the reverses we have sustained in recent wars.

The popular belief that one Briton is as good as half a dozen foreigners, is a fallacy which ought to be at once expunged from the minds of every one. The improved and altered conditions under which international hostilities are carried on nowadays scarcely even admit of a hand-to-hand encounter, and the engines of destruction designed by other European Powers being quite as perfect as our own, tact and cunning have now taken the place of pluck and perseverance. The strong arm avails but little in modern warfare; strategy is everything.

Into Brighton, an hour after dawn, the enemy's vessels were pouring volley after volley of deadly missiles. A party had landed from the French flagship, and, summoning the Mayor, had demanded a million pounds. This not being forthcoming, they had commenced shelling the town. The fire was, for the most part, directed against the long line of shops and private residences in King's Road and at Hove, and in half an hour over a hundred houses had been demolished. The palatial Hôtel

Métropole stood a great gaunt ruin. Shells had carried large portions of the noble building away, and a part of the ruin had caught fire and was burning unchecked, threatening to consume the whole. Church steeples had been knocked over like ninepins, and explosive missiles dropped in the centre of the town every moment, sweeping the streets with deadly effect. The enemy met with little or no opposition. Our first line of defence, our Navy, was missing! The Admiralty were unaware of the whereabouts of three whole Fleets that had mobilised, and the ships remaining in the Channel, exclusive of the Harbour Defence Flotilla, were practically useless.

At Eastbourne, likewise, where a similar demand had been made, shot fell thick as hail, and shells played fearful havoc with the handsome boarding-houses and hotels that line the sea front. From the redoubt, the Wish Tower, and a battery on the higher ground towards Beachy Head, as well as a number of other hastily constructed earthworks, a reply was made to the enemy's fire, and the guns in the antiquated martello towers, placed at intervals along the beach, now and then sent a shot towards the vessels. But such an attempt to keep the great ironclads at bay was absurdly futile. One after another shells from the monster guns of the Russian ship *Pjotr Velikij*, and the armoured cruisers *Gerzog Edinburskij*, *Krejser*, and *Najezdnik*, crashed into these out-of-date coast defences, and effectually silenced them. In Eastbourne itself the damage wrought was enormous. Every moment shells fell and exploded in Terminus and Seaside Roads, while the

aristocratic suburb of Upperton, built on the hill behind the town, was exposed to and bore the full brunt of the fray. The fine modern Queen Anne and Elizabethan residences were soon mere heaps of burning débris. Every moment houses fell, burying their occupants, and those people who rushed out into the roads for safety were, for the most part, either overwhelmed by débris, or had their limbs shattered by flying pieces of shell.

The situation was awful. The incessant thunder of cannon, the screaming of shells whizzing through the air, to burst a moment later and send a dozen or more persons to an untimely grave, the crash of falling walls, the clouds of smoke and dust, and the blazing of ignited wreckage, combined to produce a scene more terrible than any witnessed in England during the present century.

And all this was the outcome of one man's indiscretion and the cunning duplicity of two others!

At high noon Newhaven fell into the hands of the enemy.

The attack had been so entirely unexpected that the troops mobilised and sent there had arrived too late. The town was being sacked, and the harbour was in the possession of the French, who were landing their forces in great numbers. From Dieppe and Havre transports were arriving, and discharging their freights of fighting men and guns under cover of the fire from the French warships lying close in land.

Notwithstanding all the steps taken during the last twenty years to improve the condition of our forces on land and sea,

this outbreak of hostilities found us far from being in a state of preparedness for war. England, strangely enough, has never yet fully realised that the conditions of war have entirely changed. In days gone by, when troops and convoys could move but slowly, the difficulty of providing for armies engaged in operations necessarily limited their strength. It is now quite different. Improved communications have given to military operations astonishing rapidity, and the facilities with which large masses of troops, guns, and stores can now be transported to great distances has had the effect of proportionately increasing numbers. As a result of this, with the exception of our own island, Europe was armed to the teeth. Yet a mobilisation arrangement that was faulty and not clearly understood by officers or men, was the cause of the enemy being allowed to land. It is remarkable that the military authorities had not acted upon the one principle admitted on every side, namely, that the only effective defence consists of attack. The attack, to succeed, should have been sudden and opportune, and the Army should have been so organised that on the occurrence of war a force of adequate strength would have been at once available.

In a word, we missed our chance to secure this inestimable advantage afforded by the power of striking the first blow.

There was an old and true saying, that "England's best bulwarks were her wooden walls." They are no longer wooden, but it still remains an admitted fact that England's strongest bulwarks should be her Navy, and that any other nation may be

possessed of an equally good one; also that our best bulwark should be equal to, or approach, the fighting power of the bulwarks owned by any two possible hostile nations.

To be strong is to stave off war; to be weak is to invite attack. It was our policy of *laissez faire*, a weak Navy and an Army bound up with red tape, that caused this disastrous invasion of England. Had our Fleet been sufficient for its work, invasion would have remained a threat, and nothing more. Our Navy was not only our first, but our last line of defence from an Imperial point of view; for, as a writer in the *Army and Navy Gazette* pointed out in 1893, it was equally manifest and unquestionable that without land forces to act as the spearhead to the Navy's over-sea shaft, the offensive tactics so essential to a thorough statesmanlike defensive policy could not be carried out. Again, the mobility and efficiency of our Regular Army should have been such that the victory of our Fleet could be speedily and vigorously followed by decisive blows on the enemy's territory.

Already the news of the landing of the enemy had – besides causing a thrill such as had never before been known in our "tight little island" – produced its effect upon the price of food in London as elsewhere. In England we had only five days' bread-stuffs, and as the majority of our supplies came from Russia the price of bread trebled within twelve hours, and the ordinary necessities of life were proportionately dearer.

But the dice had been thrown, and the sixes lay with Moloch.

CHAPTER VII.

BOMB OUTRAGES IN LONDON

On that never-to-be-forgotten Sunday, scenes were witnessed in the metropolis which were of the most disgraceful character. The teeming city, from dawn till midnight, was in a feverish turmoil, the throngs in its streets discussing the probable turn of affairs, singing patriotic songs, and giving vent to utterances of heroic intentions interspersed with much horse play.

In Trafalgar Square, the hub of London, a mass meeting of Anarchists and Socialists was held, at which the Government and military authorities were loudly denounced for what was termed their criminal apathy to the interests and welfare of the nation. The Government, it was contended, had betrayed the country by allowing the secret of the German alliance to fall into the hands of its enemies, and the Ministers, adjudged unworthy the confidence of the nation, were by the resolutions adopted called upon to resign immediately. The crisis was an excuse for Anarchism to vent its grievances against law and order, and, unshackled, it had spread with rapidity through the length and breadth of the land. In "The Square" the scarlet flag and the Cap of Liberty were everywhere in evidence, and, notwithstanding the presence of the police, the leaders of Anarchy openly advocated outrage, incendiarism, and murder. At length the police resolved to interfere, and this was the signal

for a terrible uprising. The huge mob, which in the mellow sunset filled the great Square and blocked all its approaches, became a seething, surging mass of struggling humanity. The attack by the police, who were ordered to disperse them, only incensed them further against the authorities, whom they blamed for the catastrophe that had befallen our country. Angry and desperate they fought with the police, using both revolvers and knives.

The scene was terrible. The scum of the metropolis had congregated to wage war against their own compatriots whom they classed among enemies, and for an hour in the precincts of the Square the struggle was for life. Dozens of constables were shot dead, hundreds of Anarchists and Socialists received wounds from batons, many succumbing to their injuries, or being trampled to death by the dense mob. It was a repetition of that historic day known as "Bloody Sunday," only the fight was more desperate and the consequences far worse, and such as would disgrace any civilised city.

Before sundown the police had been vanquished; and as no soldiers could be spared, Anarchism ran riot in the Strand, Pall Mall, St. Martin's Lane, Northumberland Avenue, and Parliament Street. Pale, determined men, with faces covered with blood, and others with their clothes in shreds, shouted hoarse cries of victory, as, headed by a torn red flag, they rushed into Pall Mall and commenced breaking down the shutters of shops and looting them. Men were knocked down and murdered, and the rioters, freed from all restraint, commenced sacking all

establishments where it was expected spoil could be obtained. At one bank in Pall Mall they succeeded, after some difficulty, in breaking open the strong room with explosives, and some forty or fifty of the rebels with eager greediness shared the gold and notes they stole.

At the Strand corner of the Square a squad of police was being formed, in order to co-operate with some reinforcements which were arriving, when suddenly there was a terrific explosion.

A bomb filled with picric acid had been thrown by an Anarchist, and when the smoke cleared, the shattered remains of thirty-four constables lay strewn upon the roadway!

This was but the first of a series of dastardly outrages. The advice of the Anarchist leaders in their inflammatory speeches had been acted upon, and in half an hour a number of bomb explosions had occurred in the vicinity, each doing enormous damage, and killing numbers of innocent persons. After the petard had been thrown in Trafalgar Square a loud explosion was almost immediately afterwards heard in Parliament Street, and it was soon known that a too successful attempt had been made to blow up the Premier's official residence in Downing Street. The programme of the outrages had apparently been organised, for almost before the truth was known another even more disastrous explosion occurred in the vestibule of the War Office in Pall Mall, which wrecked the lower part of the building, and blew to atoms the sentry on duty, and killed a number of clerks who were busy at their important duties in the apartments on the ground

floor.

Through Pall Mall and along Whitehall the mob ran, crying "Down with the Government! Kill the traitors! Kill them!" About three thousand of the more lawless, having looted a number of shops, rushed to the Houses of Parliament, arriving there just in time to witness the frightful havoc caused by the explosion of two terribly powerful bombs that had been placed in St. Stephen's Hall and in Westminster Abbey.

A section of the exultant rioters had gained access to the National Gallery, where they carried on ruthless destruction among the priceless paintings there. Dozens of beautiful works were slashed with knives, others were torn down, and many, cut from their frames, were flung to the howling crowd outside. Suddenly some one screamed, "What do we want with Art? Burn down the useless palace! Burn it! Burn it!"

This cry was taken up by thousands of throats, and on every hand the rebels inside the building were urged to set fire to it. Intoxicated with success, maddened by anger at the action of the police, and confident that they had gained a signal victory over the law, they piled together a number of historic paintings in one of the rooms, and then ignited them. The flames leaped to the ceiling, spread to the woodwork, and thence, with appalling rapidity, to the other apartments. The windows cracked, and clouds of smoke and tongues of fire belched forth from them.

It had now grown dusk. The furious, demoniacal rabble surging in the Square set up loud, prolonged cheering when they

saw the long dark building burning. In delight they paused in their work of destruction, watching the flames growing brighter as they burst through the roof, licking the central dome; and while the timber crackled and the fire roared, casting a lurid glare upon the tall buildings round and lighting up the imposing façade of the Grand Hotel, they cheered vociferously and sang the "Marseillaise" until the smoke half choked them and their throats grew hoarse.

These denizens of the slums, these criminal crusaders against the law, were not yet satiated by their wild reckless orgies. Unchecked, they had run riot up and down the Strand, and there was scarcely a man among them who had not in his pocket some of the spoils from jewellers' or from banks. In the glare of the flames the white bloodstained faces wore a determined expression as they stood collecting their energies for some other atrocious outrage against their so-called enemies, the rich.

At the first menace of excesses, dwellers in the locality had left their houses and fled headlong for safety to other parts of the city. The majority escaped, but many fell into the hands of the rioters, and were treated with scant humanity. Men and women were struck down and robbed, even strangled or shot if they resisted. The scene was frightful – a terrible realisation of Anarchist prophecies that had rendered the authorities absolutely helpless. On the one hand, an enemy had landed on our shores with every chance of a successful march to London, while on the other the revolutionary spirit had broken out unmistakably among the

criminal class, and lawlessness and murder were everywhere rife.

The homes of the people were threatened by double disaster – by the attack of both enemy and "friend." The terrible bomb outrages and their appalling results had completely disorganised the police, and although reinforcements had been telegraphed for from every division in London, the number of men mustered at Scotland Yard was not yet sufficient to deal effectually with the irate and rapidly increasing mob.

As evening wore on the scenes in the streets around the Square were terrible. Pall Mall was congested by the angry mob who were wrecking the clubs, when suddenly the exultant cries were succeeded by terrified shrieks mingled with fierce oaths. Each man fought with his neighbour, and many men and women, crushed against iron railings, stood half suffocated and helpless. The National Gallery was burning fiercely, flames from the great burning pile shot high in the air, illuminating everything with their flood of crimson light, and the wind, blowing down the crowded thoroughfare, carried smoke, sparks, and heat with it.

Distant shrieks were heard in the direction of the Square, and suddenly the crowd surged wildly forward. Gaol-birds from the purlieu of Drury Lane robbed those who had valuables or money upon them, and committed brutal assaults upon the unprotected. A moment later, however, there was a flash, and the deafening sound of firearms at close quarters was followed by the horrified shrieks of the yelling mob. Again and again the sound was repeated. Around them bullets whistled, and men and

women fell forward dead and wounded with terrible curses upon their lips.

The 10th Hussars had just arrived from Hounslow, and having received hurried orders to clear away the rioters, were shooting them down like dogs, without mercy. On every hand cries of agony and despair rose above the tumult. Then a silence followed, for the street was thickly strewn with corpses.

CHAPTER VIII.

FATEFUL DAYS FOR THE OLD FLAG

A cloudy moonless night, with a gusty wind which now and then swept the tops of the forest trees, causing the leaves to surge like a summer sea.

Withered branches creaked and groaned, and a dog howled dismally down in Flimwell village, half a mile away. Leaning with his back against the gnarled trunk of a giant oak on the edge of the forest, his ears alert for the slightest sound, his hand upon his loaded magazine rifle, Geoffrey Engleheart stood on outpost duty. Dressed in a rough shooting suit, with a deerstalker hat and an improvised kit strapped upon his back, he was half hidden by the tall bracken. Standing motionless in the deep shadow, with his eyes fixed upon the wide stretch of sloping meadows, he waited, ready, at the slightest appearance of the enemy's scouts, to raise the alarm and call to arms those who were sleeping in the forest after their day's march.

The City Civilian Volunteer Battalion which he had joined was on its way to take part in the conflict, which every one knew would be desperate. Under the command of Major Mansford, an experienced elderly officer who had long since retired from the Lancashire Regiment, but who had at once volunteered to lead the battalion of young patriots, they had left London by train for Maidstone, whence they marched by way of Linton, Marden, and

Goudhurst to Frith Wood, where they had bivouacked for the night on the Sussex border.

It was known that Russian scouts had succeeded in getting as far as Wadhurst, and it was expected that one of the French reconnoitring parties must, in their circuitous survey, pass the border of the wood on their way back to their own lines. Up to the present they had been practically unmolested. The British army was now mobilised, and Kent, Sussex, and Hampshire were overrun with soldiers. Every household gave men accommodation voluntarily, every hostelry, from the aristocratic hotels of the watering-places to the unassuming Red Lions of the villages, was full of Britain's brave defenders. The echoes of old-world village streets of thatched houses with quaint gables were awakened night and day by the rumbling of heavy artillery, the shouts of the drivers as they urged along their teams, and the rattle of ammunition carts and of ambulance waggons, while on every high road leading south battalions were on the march, and eager to come within fighting range of the audacious foreigners.

At first the peaceful people of the villages gazed, wondered, and admired, thinking some manœuvres were about to take place – for military manœuvres always improve village trade. But they were very quickly disillusioned. When they knew the truth – that the enemy was actually at their doors, that the grey-coated masses of the Russian legions were lying like packs of wolves in the undulating country between Heathfield, Etchingham, and

the sea – they were panic-stricken and appalled. They watched the stream of redcoats passing their doors, cheering them, while those who were their guests were treated to the best fare their hosts could provide.

Tommy Atkins was now the idol of the hour.

Apparently the enemy, having established themselves, were by no means anxious to advance with undue haste. Having landed, they were, it was ascertained, awaiting the arrival of further reinforcements and armaments from both Powers; but nothing definite was known of this, except some meagre details that had filtered through the American cables, all direct telegraphic communication with the Continent having now been cut off.

Alas! Moloch had grinned. He had sharpened his sickle for the terrible carnage that was to spread through Albion's peaceful land.

Terrible was the panic that the invasion had produced in the North.

Food had risen to exorbitant prices. In the great manufacturing centres the toiling millions were already feeling the pinch of starvation, for with bread at ninepence a small loaf, meat at a prohibitive figure, and the factories stopped, they were compelled to remain with empty stomachs and idle hands.

Birmingham, Manchester, Liverpool, Newcastle, and the larger towns presented a gloomy, sorry aspect. Business was suspended, the majority of the shops were closed, the banks barred and bolted, and the only establishments where any trade

flourished were the taverns and music halls. These were crowded. Drink flowed, gold jingled, and the laughter at wild jest or the thunder of applause which greeted dancing girls and comic vocalists was still as hearty as of old. Everywhere there was a sordid craving for amusement which was a reflex of the war fever. The people made merry, for ere long they might be cut down by a foeman's steel.

Restless impatience thrilled the community from castle to cottage, intensified by the vain clamourings of Anarchist mobs in the greater towns. As in London, these shock-headed agitators held high revel, protesting against everything and everybody – now railing, now threatening, but always mustering converts to their harebrained doctrines. In Manchester they were particularly strong. A number of serious riots had occurred in Deansgate and in Market Street. The mob wrecked the Queen's Hotel, smashed numbers of windows in Lewis's great emporium, looted the *Guardian* office, and set fire to the Town Hall. A portion of the latter only was burned, the fire brigade managing to subdue the flames before any very serious damage was occasioned. Although the police made hundreds of arrests, and the stipendiary sat from early morning until late at night, Anarchist demonstrations were held every evening in the city and suburbs, always resulting in pillage, incendiarism, and not unfrequently in murder. In grey, money-making Stockport, in grimy Salford, in smoky Pendleton, and even in aristocratic Eccles, these demonstrations were held, and the self-styled

"soldiers of the social revolution" marched over the granite roads, headed by a dirty scarlet flag, hounding down the Government, and crying shame upon them for the apathy with which they had regarded the presence of the bearded Caucasian Tcherkesses of the White Tsar.

The kingdom was in wild turmoil, for horror heaped upon horror. Outrages that commenced in London were repeated with appalling frequency in the great towns in the provinces. An attempt had been made to assassinate the Premier while speaking in the Town Hall, Birmingham, the bomb which was thrown having killed two hard-working reporters who were writing near; but the Prime Minister, who seemed to lead a charmed existence, escaped without a scratch.

In Liverpool, where feeling against the War Office ran high, there were several explosions, two of which occurred in Bold Street, and were attended by loss of life, while a number of incendiary fires occurred at the docks. At Bradford the Town Hall was blown up, and the troops were compelled to fire on a huge mob of rioters, who, having assembled at Manningham, were advancing to loot the town.

The cavalry barracks at York was the scene of a terrific explosion, which killed three sentries and maimed twenty other soldiers; while at Warwick Assizes, during the hearing of a murder trial, some unknown scoundrel threw a petard at the judge, killing him instantly on the bench.

These, however, were but few instances of the wild

lawlessness and terrible anarchy that prevailed in Britain, for only the most flagrant cases of outrage were reported in the newspapers, their columns being filled with the latest intelligence from the seat of war.

It must be said that over the border the people were more law-abiding. The Scotch, too canny to listen to the fiery declamations of hoarse and shabby agitators, preferred to trust to British pluck and the strong arm of their brawny Highlanders. In Caledonia the seeds of Anarchy fell on stony ground.

In Northern and Midland towns, however, the excitement increased hourly. It extended everywhere. From Ventnor to the Pentlands, from Holyhead to the Humber, from Scilly to the Nore, every man and every woman existed in fearfulness of the crash that was impending.

It was now known throughout the breadth of our land that the Government policy was faulty, that War Office and Admiralty organisation was a rotten make-believe, and, worst of all, that what critics had long ago said as to the inadequacy of our naval defence, even with the ships built under the programme of 1894, had now, alas! proved to be true.

The suspense was awful. Those who were now living in the peaceful atmospheres of their homes, surrounded by neighbours and friends in the centre of a great town, and feeling a sense of security, might within a few days be shot down by French rifles, or mowed down brutally by gleaming Cossack *shushkas*. The advance of the enemy was expected daily, hourly; and the people

in the North waited, staggered, breathless, and terrified. Men eagerly scanned the newspapers; women pressed their children to their breasts.

In the mining districts the shock had not inspired the same amount of fear as at the ports and in the manufacturing centres. Possibly it was because work was still proceeding in the pits, and constant work prevents men from becoming restless, or troubling themselves about a nation's woes. Toilers who worked below knew that foreign invaders had landed, and that the Militia and Volunteers had been called out, but they vaguely believed that, the seat of war being away down south – a very long distance in the imagination of most of them – everything would be over before they could be called upon to take part in the struggle. In any case coal and iron must be got, they argued, and while they had work they had little time for uneasiness. Nevertheless, great numbers of stalwart young miners enrolled themselves in the local Volunteer corps, and burned to avenge the affront to their country and their sovereign.

Those were indeed fateful, ever-to-be-remembered days.

Amid this weary, anxious watching, this constant dread of what might next occur, an item of news was circulated which caused the greatest rejoicing everywhere. Intelligence reached New York, by cable from France, that Germany had combined with England against the Franco-Russian alliance, that her vast army had been mobilised, and that already the brave, well-drilled legions of the Emperor William had crossed the Vosges,

and passed the frontier into France. A sharp battle had been fought near Givet, and that, as well as several other French frontier towns which fell in 1870, were again in the hands of the Germans.

How different were German methods to those of the British!

With a perfect scheme of attack, every detail of which had been long thought out, and which worked without a hitch, the Kaiser's forces were awaiting the word of command to march onward – to Paris. For years – ever since they taught France that severe lesson in the last disastrous war – it had been the ambition of every German cavalryman to clink his spurs on the asphalté of the Boulevards. Now they were actually on their way towards their goal!

The papers were full of these latest unexpected developments, the details of which, necessarily meagre owing to the lack of direct communication, were eagerly discussed. It was believed that Germany would, in addition to defending her Polish frontier and attacking France, also send a naval squadron from Kiel to England.

The Tsar's spy had been foiled, and Russia and France now knew they had made a false move! Russia's rapid and decisive movement was intended to prevent the signing of the secret alliance, and to bar England and Germany from joining hands. But happily the sly machinations of the Count von Beilstein, the released convict and adventurer, had in a measure failed, for Germany had considered it diplomatic to throw in her fortune

with Great Britain in this desperate encounter.

A feeling of thankfulness spread through the land. Nevertheless, it was plain that if Germany intended to wield the double-handled sword of conquest in France, she would have few troops to spare to send to England.

But those dark days, full of agonising suspense, dragged on slowly. The French well knew the imminent danger that threatened their own country, yet they could not possibly withdraw. Mad enthusiasts always!

It must be war to the death, they decided. The conflict could not be averted. So Britons unsheathed their steel, and held themselves in readiness for a fierce and desperate fray.

The invasion had indeed been planned by our enemies with marvellous forethought and cunning. There was treachery in the Intelligence Department of the British Admiralty, foul treachery which placed our country at the mercy of the invader, and sacrificed thousands of lives. On the morning following the sudden Declaration of War, the officer in charge of the telegraph bureau at Whitehall, whose duty it had been to send the telegrams ordering the naval mobilisation, was found lying dead beside the telegraph instrument – stabbed to the heart! Inquiries were made, and it was found that one of the clerks, a young Frenchman who had been taken on temporarily at a low salary, was missing. It was further discovered that the murder had been committed hours before, immediately the Mobilisation Orders had been sent; further, that fictitious telegrams had been despatched cancelling

them, and ordering the Channel Fleet away to the Mediterranean, the Coastguard Squadron to Land's End, and the first-class Reserve ships to proceed to the North of Scotland in search of the enemy! Thus, owing to these orders sent by the murderer, England was left unprotected.

Immediately the truth was known efforts were made to cancel the forged orders. But, alas! it was too late. Our Fleets had already sailed!

CHAPTER IX.

COUNT VON BEILSTEIN AT HOME

Karl von Beilstein sat in his own comfortable saddlebag-chair, in his chambers in the Albany, lazily twisting a cigarette.

On a table at his elbow was spread sheet 319 of the Ordnance Survey Map of England, which embraced that part of Sussex where the enemy were encamped. With red and blue pencils he had been making mystic marks upon it, and had at last laid it aside with a smile of satisfaction.

"She thought she had me in her power," he muttered ominously to himself. "The wolf! If she knew everything, she could make me crave again at her feet for mercy. Happily she is in ignorance; therefore that trip to a more salubrious climate that I anticipated is for the present postponed. I have silenced her, and am still master of the situation – still the agent of the Tsar!" Uttering a low laugh, he gave his cigarette a final twist, and then regarded it critically.

The door opened to admit his valet, Grevel.

"A message from the Embassy. The man is waiting," he said.

His master opened the note which was handed to him, read it with contracted brows, and said —

"Tell him that the matter shall be arranged as quickly as possible."

"Nothing else?"

"Nothing. I am leaving London, and shall not be back for a week – perhaps longer."

With a slight yawn he rose and passed into his dressing-room, while his servant went to deliver his message to the man in waiting. The note had produced a marked effect upon the spy. It was an order from his taskmasters in St. Petersburg. He knew it must be obeyed. Every moment was of vital consequence in carrying out the very delicate mission intrusted to him, a mission which it would require all his tact and cunning to execute.

In a quarter of an hour he emerged into his sitting-room again, so completely disguised that even his most intimate acquaintances would have failed to recognise him. Attired in rusty black, with clean shaven face and walking with a scholarly stoop, he had transformed himself from the foppish man-about-town to a needy country parson, whose cheap boots were down at heel, and in the lappel of whose coat was displayed a piece of worn and faded blue.

"Listen, Pierre," he said to his man, who entered at his summons. "While I am away keep your eyes and ears open. If there is a shadow of suspicion in any quarter, burn all my papers, send me warning through the Embassy, and clear out yourself without delay. Should matters assume a really dangerous aspect, you must get down to the Russian lines, where they will pass you through, and put you on board one of our ships."

"Has the Ministry at Petersburg promised us protection at last?"

"Yes; we have nothing to fear. When the game is up among these lambs, we shall calmly go over to the other side and witness the fun."

"In what direction are you now going?"

"I don't know," replied the spy, as he unlocked a drawer in a small cabinet in a niche by the fireplace and took from it a long Circassian knife. Drawing the bright blade from its leathern sheath, he felt its keen double edge with his fingers.

It was like a razor.

"A desperate errand – eh?" queried the valet, with a grin, noticing how carefully the Count placed the murderous weapon in his inner pocket.

"Yes," he answered. "Desperate. A word sometimes means death."

And the simple rural vicar strode out and down the stairs, leaving the crafty Pierre in wonderment.

"Bah!" the latter exclaimed in disgust, when the receding footsteps had died away. "So you vainly imagine, my dear Karl, that you have your heel upon my neck, do you? It is good for me that you don't give me credit for being a little more wideawake, otherwise you would see that you are raking the chestnuts from the fire for me. *Bien!* I am silent, docile, obedient; I merely wait for you to burn your fingers, then the whole of the money will be mine to enjoy, while you will be in the only land where the Tsar does not require secret agents. Vain, avaricious fool! *You'll be in your grave!*"

Von Beilstein meanwhile sped along down the Haymarket and Pall Mall to Whitehall. The clock on the stone tower of the Horse Guards showed it was one o'clock, and, with apparently aimless purpose, he lounged about on the broad pavement outside Old Scotland Yard, immediately opposite the dark façade of the Admiralty. His hawk's eye carefully scrutinised every single person of the busy throng entering or leaving the building. There was great activity at the naval headquarters, and the courtyard was crowded with persons hurrying in and out. Presently, after a short but vigilant watch, he turned quickly so as to be unobserved, and moved slowly away.

The cause of this sudden manœuvre was the appearance of a well-dressed, dark-bearded man of about forty, having the appearance of a naval officer in mufti, who emerged hastily from the building with a handbag in his hand, and crossed the courtyard to the kerb, where he stood looking up and down the thoroughfare.

"My man!" exclaimed von Beilstein, under his breath. "He wants a cab. I wonder where he's going?"

Five minutes later the naval officer was in a hansom, driving towards Westminster Bridge, while, at a little distance behind, the Tsar's agent was following in another conveyance. Once on the trail, the Count never left his quarry. Crossing the bridge, they drove on rapidly through the crowded, turbulent streets of South London to the Elephant and Castle, and thence down the Old Kent Road to the New Cross Station of the South-Eastern

Railway.

As a protest against the action of the Government, and in order to prevent the enemy from establishing direct communication with London in case of British reverses, the lines from the metropolis to the south had been wrecked by the Anarchists. On the Chatham and Dover Railway, Penge tunnel had been blown up, on the Brighton line two bridges near Croydon had been similarly treated, and on the South-Eastern four bridges in Rotherhithe and Bermondsey had been broken up and rendered impassable by dynamite, while at Haysden, outside Tunbridge, the rails had also been torn up for a considerable distance. Therefore traffic to the south from London termini had been suspended, and the few persons travelling were compelled to take train at the stations in the remoter southern suburbs.

As the unsuspecting officer stepped into the booking-office, his attention was not attracted by the quiet and seedy clergyman who lounged near enough to overhear him purchase a first-class ticket for Deal. When he had descended to the platform the spy obtained a third-class ticket to the same destination, and leisurely followed him. Travelling by the same train, they were compelled to alight at Haysden and walk over the wrecked permanent way into Tunbridge, from which place they journeyed to Deal, arriving there about six o'clock. Throughout, it was apparent to the crafty watcher that the man he was following was doing his utmost to escape observation, and this surmise was strengthened by his actions on arriving at the quaint old town, now half ruined;

for, instead of going to a first-class hotel, he walked on until he came to Middle Street, – a narrow little thoroughfare, redolent of fish, running parallel with the sea, – and took up quarters at the Mariners' Rest Inn. It was a low, old-fashioned little place, with sanded floors, a smoke-blackened taproom, a rickety time-mellowed bar, with a comfortable little parlour beyond.

In this latter room, used in common by the guests, on the following day the visitor from London first met the shabby parson from Canterbury. The man from the Admiralty seemed in no mood for conversation; nevertheless, after a preliminary chat upon the prospect of the invasion, they exchanged cards, and the vicar gradually became confidential. With a pious air he related how he had been to Canterbury to conduct a revival mission which had turned out marvellously successful, crowds having to be turned away at every service, and how he was now enjoying a week's vacation before returning to his poor but extensive parish in Hertfordshire.

"I came to this inn, because I am bound to practise a most rigid economy," he added. "I am charmed with it. One sees so much character here in these rough toilers of the sea."

"Yes," replied his friend, whose card bore the words "Commander Yerbery, R.N." "Being a sailor myself, I prefer this homely little inn, with its fisher folk as customers, to a more pretentious and less comfortable establishment."

"Are you remaining here long?" asked his clerical friend.

"I – I really don't know," answered the officer hesitatingly.

"Possibly a day or so."

The spy did not pursue the subject further, but conducted himself with an amiability which caused his fellow-traveller to regard him as "a real good fellow for a parson." Together they smoked the long clays of the hostelry, they sat in the taproom of an evening and conversed with the fishermen who congregated there, and frequently strolled along by the shore to Walmer, or through the fields to Cottingham Court Farm, or Sholden. Constantly, however, Commander Yerbery kept his eyes seaward. Was he apprehensive lest Russian ironclads should return, and again bombard the little town; or was he expecting some mysterious signal from some ship in the Downs?

CHAPTER X.

A DEATH DRAUGHT

On several occasions the spy had, with artful ingenuity, endeavoured to discover the object of Commander Yerbery's sojourn, but upon that point he preserved a silence that was impenetrable. In their wanderings about the town they saw on every side the havoc caused by the bombardment which had taken place three days previously. Whole rows of houses facing the sea had been carried away by the enemy's shells, and the once handsome church spire was now a mere heap of smouldering débris. The barracks, which had been one of the objects of attack, had suffered most severely. Mélinite had been projected into them, exploding with devastating effect, and demolishing the buildings, which fell like packs of cards. Afterwards, the enemy had sailed away, apparently thinking the strategical position of the place worthless.

And all this had been brought about by this despicable villain – the man who had now wrapped himself in the cloak of sanctity, and who, beaming with well-feigned good fellowship, walked arm-in-arm with the man upon whom he was keeping the most vigilant observation! By night sleep scarcely came to his eyes, but in his little room, with its clean old-fashioned dimity blinds and hangings, he lay awake, – scheming, planning, plotting, preparing for the master-stroke.

One morning, after they had been there three days, he stood alone in his bedroom with the door closed. From his inner pocket he drew forth the keen Circassian blade that reposed there, and gazed thoughtfully upon it.

"No," he muttered, suddenly rousing himself, as if a thought had suddenly occurred to him. "He is strong. He might shout, and then I should be caught like a rat in a trap."

Replacing the knife in his pocket, he took from his vest a tiny phial he always carried; then, after noiselessly locking the door, he took from the same pocket a small cube of lump sugar. Standing by the window he uncorked the little bottle, and with steady hand allowed one single drop of the colourless liquid to escape and fall upon the sugar, which quickly absorbed it, leaving a small darkened stain. This sugar he placed in a locked drawer to dry, and, putting away the phial, descended to join his companion.

That night they were sitting together in the private parlour behind the bar, smoking and chatting. It was an old-fashioned, smoke-begrimed room, with low oak ceiling and high wainscot, – a room in which many a seafarer had found rest and comfort after the toils and perils of the deep, a room in which many a stirring tale of the sea has been related, and in which one of our best-known nautical writers has gathered materials for his stirring ocean romances.

Although next the bar, there is no entrance on that side, neither is there any glass, therefore the apartment is entirely

secluded from the public portion of the inn. At midnight the hearty Boniface and his wife and servant had retired, and the place was silent, but the officer and his fellow-guest still sat with their pipes. The parson, as became one who exhibited the blue pledge of temperance in his coat, sipped his coffee, while the other had whisky, lemon, and a small jug of hot water beside him. The spy had been using the sugar, and the basin was close to his hand.

His companion presently made a movement to reach it, when the pleasant-spoken vicar took up the tongs quickly, saying — "Allow me to assist you. One lump?"

"Yes, thanks," replied the other, holding his glass for the small cube to be thrown in. Then he added the lemon, whisky, and hot water. Beilstein, betraying no excitement, continued the conversation, calmly refilled his pipe, and watched his companion sip the deadly potion.

Karl von Beilstein had reduced poisoning to a fine art.

Not a muscle of his face contracted, though his keen eyes never left the other's countenance.

They talked on, the Commander apparently unaffected by the draught; his friend smilingly complacent and confident.

Suddenly, without warning, the officer's face grew ashen pale and serious. A violent tremor shook his stalwart frame.

"I – I feel very strange," he cried, with difficulty. "A most curious sensation has come over me – a sensation as if – as if – ah! heavens! Help, help! – I – I can't breathe!"

The mild-mannered parson jumped to his feet, and stood before his friend, watching the hideous contortions of his face.

"Assistance!" his victim gasped, sinking inertly back in the high-backed Windsor arm-chair. "Fetch me a doctor – quick."

But the man addressed took no heed of the appeal. He stood calmly by, contemplating with satisfaction his villainous work.

"Can't you see – I'm ill?" the dying man cried in a feeble, piteous voice. "My throat and head are burning. Give me water —*water!*"

Still the spy remained motionless.

"You – you refuse to assist me – you scoundrel! Ah!" he cried hoarsely, in dismay. "Ah! I see it all now! *God! You've poisoned me!*"

With a frantic effort he half-raised himself in his chair, but fell back in a heap; his arms hanging helplessly at his side. His breath came and went in short hard gasps; the death-rattle was already in his throat, and with one long deep-drawn sigh the last breath left the body, and the light gradually died out of the agonised face.

Quick as thought the Count unbuttoned the dead man's coat, and searching his pockets took out a large white official envelope bearing in the corner the blue stamp of the Admiralty. It was addressed to "Sir Michael Culme-Seymour, Admiral commanding the Channel Squadron," and was marked "Private."

"Good!" ejaculated the spy, as he tore open the envelope. "I was not mistaken, after all! He was waiting until the flagship came into the Downs to deliver it."

The envelope contained a letter accompanied by a chart of the South Coast, upon which were certain marks at intervals in red with minute directions, as well as a copy of the code of secret signals in which some slight alterations had lately been made.

"What fortune!" cried the Count gleefully, after reading the note. "Their plans and the secret of their signals, too, are now ours! The Embassy were correct in their surmise. With these the French and Russian ships will be able to act swiftly, and sweep the British from the sea. Now for London as quickly as possible, for the information will be absolutely invaluable."

Without a final glance at the corpse, huddled up in its chair, he put on his hat, and stealing noiselessly from the house, set out in the moonlight to walk swiftly by way of Great Mongeham and Waldershare to Shepherd's Well station, whence he could get by train to London.

The immense importance of these secret documents he had not overrated. Their possession would enable the Russian ships to decipher many of the hitherto mysterious British signals.

The spy had accomplished his mission!

CHAPTER XI.

THE MASSACRE AT EASTBOURNE

Hourly the most alarming reports were being received at the War Office, and at newspaper offices throughout the country, of the rapidly-increasing forces of the invaders, who were still landing in enormous numbers. Vague rumours were also afloat of desperate encounters at sea between our Coastguard Squadron that had returned and the French and Russian ironclads.

Nothing definite, however, was known. News travelled slowly, and was always unreliable.

Mobilisation was being hurried forward with all possible speed. Nevertheless, so sudden had been the descent of the enemy, that Eastbourne, Newhaven, and Seaford had already fallen into their hands. Into the half-wrecked town of Eastbourne regiment after regiment of Russian infantry had been poured by the transports *Samojed* and *Artelscik*, while two regiments of dragoons, one of Cossacks, and many machine-gun sections had also been landed, in addition to a quantity of French infantry from the other vessels. The streets of the usually clean, well-ordered town were strewn with the débris of fallen houses and shops that had been wrecked by Russian shells. The Queen's Hotel at Splash Point, with its tiers of verandahs and central spire, stood out a great gaunt blackened ruin.

Along Terminus Road the grey-coated hordes of the Great

White Tsar looted the shops, and showed no quarter to those who fell into their hands. The Grand Hotel, the Burlington, the Cavendish, and others, were quickly transformed into barracks, as well as the half-ruined Town Hall, and the Floral Hall at Devonshire Park.

Robbery, outrage, and murder ran riot in the town, which only a few days before had been a fashionable health resort, crowded by aristocratic idlers. Hundreds of unoffending persons had been killed by the merciless fire from the enemy's battleships, and hundreds more were being shot down in the streets for attempting a feeble resistance. The inhabitants, surrounded on all sides by the enemy, were powerless.

The huge guns of the *Pamyat Azova*, the *Imperator Nicolai I.*, the *Pjotr Velikij*, the *Krejser*, the *Najezdnik*, and others, had belched forth their death-dealing missiles with an effect that was appalling.

The thunder of cannon had ceased, but was now succeeded by the sharp cracking of Russian rifles, as those who, desperately guarding their homes and their loved ones, and making a stand against the invaders, were shot down like dogs. A crowd of townspeople collected in the open space outside the railway station, prepared to bar the advance of the Russians towards the Old Town and Upperton. Alas! it was a forlorn hope for an unarmed mob to attempt any such resistance.

A Russian officer suddenly shouted a word of command that brought a company of infantry to the halt, facing the crowd.

Another word and a hundred rifles were discharged. Again and again they flashed, and the volley was repeated until the streets were covered with dead and dying, and the few who were not struck turned and fled, leaving the invaders to advance unopposed.

Horrible were the deeds committed that night. English homes were desecrated, ruined, and burned. Babies were murdered before the eyes of their parents, many being impaled by gleaming Russian bayonets; fathers were shot down in the presence of their wives and children, and sons were treated in a similar manner.

The massacre was frightful. Ruin and desolation were on every hand.

The soldiers of the Tsar, savage and inhuman, showed no mercy to the weak and unprotected. They jeered and laughed at piteous appeal, and with fiendish brutality enjoyed the destruction which everywhere they wrought.

Many a cold-blooded murder was committed, many a brave Englishman fell beneath the heavy whirling sabres of Circassian Cossacks, the bayonets of French infantry, or the deadly hail of machine guns. Battalion after battalion of the enemy, fierce and ruthless, clambered on over the débris in Terminus Road, enthusiastic at finding their feet upon English soil. The flames of the burning buildings in various parts of the town illuminated the place with a bright red glare that fell upon dark bearded faces, in every line of which was marked determination and fierce hostility. Landing near Langney Point, many of the battalions

entered the town from the east, destroying all the property they came across on their line of advance, and, turning into Terminus Road, then continued through Upperton and out upon the road leading to Willingdon.

The French forces, who came ashore close to Holywell, on the other side of the town, advanced direct over Warren Hill, and struck due north towards Sheep Lands.

At about a mile from the point where the road from Eastdean crosses that to Jevington, the force encamped in a most advantageous position upon Willingdon Hill, while the Russians who advanced direct over St. Anthony's Hill, and those who marched through Eastbourne, united at a point on the Lewes Road near Park Farm, and after occupying Willingdon village, took up a position on the high ground that lies between it and Jevington.

From a strategic point of view the positions of both forces were carefully chosen. The commanding officers were evidently well acquainted with the district, for while the French commanded Eastbourne and a wide stretch of the Downs, the Russians also had before them an extensive tract of country extending in the north to Polegate, in the west to the Fore Down and Lillington, and in the east beyond Willingdon over Pevensey Levels to the sea.

During the night powerful search-lights from the French and Russian ships swept the coast continually, illuminating the surrounding hills and lending additional light to the ruined and

burning town. Before the sun rose, however, the majority of the invading vessels had rounded Beachy Head, and had steamed away at full speed down Channel.

Daylight revealed the grim realities of war. It showed Eastbourne with its handsome buildings scorched and ruined, its streets blocked by fallen walls, and trees which had once formed shady boulevards torn up and broken, its shops looted, its tall church steeples blown away, its railway station wrecked, and its people massacred. Alas! their life-blood was wet upon the pavements.

The French and Russian legions, ever increasing, covered the hills. The heavy guns of the French artillery and the lighter but more deadly machine guns of the Russians had already been placed in position, and were awaiting the order to move north and commence the assault on London.

It was too late! Nothing could now be done to improve the rotten state of our defences. The invasion had begun, and Britain, handicapped alike on land and on sea, must arm and fight to the death.

By Tuesday night, three days after the Declaration of War, two French and half a Russian army corps, amounting to 90,000 officers and men, with 10,000 horses and 1500 guns and waggons, had landed, in addition to which reinforcements constantly arrived from the French Channel and Russian Baltic ports, until the number of the enemy on English soil was estimated at over 300,000.

The overwhelming descent on our shores had been secretly planned by the enemy with great forethought, every detail having been most carefully arranged. The steam tonnage in the French harbours was ample and to spare, for many of the vessels, being British, had been at once seized on the outbreak of hostilities. The sudden interruption of the mail and telegraphic services between the two countries left us in total ignorance of the true state of affairs. Nevertheless, for weeks an army of carpenters and engineers had been at work preparing the necessary fittings, which were afterwards placed in position on board the ships destined to convey horses and men to England.

In order to deceive the other Powers, a large number of military transport vessels had been fitted out at Brest for a bogus expedition to Dahomey. These ships actually put to sea on the day previous to the Declaration of War, and on Saturday night, at the hour when the news reached Britain, they had already embarked guns, horses, and waggons at the Channel ports. Immediately after the Tsar's manifesto had been issued the Russian Volunteer Fleet was mobilised, and transports which had long been held in readiness in the Baltic harbours embarked men and guns, and, one after another, steamed away for England without the slightest confusion or any undue haste.

CHAPTER XII.

IN THE EAGLE'S TALONS

Many British military and naval writers had ridiculed the idea of a surprise invasion without any attempt on the part of the enemy to gain more than a partial and temporary control of the Channel. Although an attack on territory without having previously command of the sea had generally been foredoomed to failure, it had been long ago suggested by certain military officers in the course of lectures at the United Service Institution, that under certain conditions such invasion was possible, and that France might ere long be ruled by some ambitious soldier who might be tempted to try a sudden dash on *le perfide Albion*. They pointed out that at worst it would entail on France the loss of three or four army corps, a loss no greater than she would suffer in one short land campaign. But alas! at that time very little notice was taken of such criticisms and illustrations, for Britons had always been prone to cast doubts upon the power of other nations to convey troops by sea, to embark them, or to land them. Thus the many suggestions directed towards increasing the mobility and efficiency of the Army were, like other warnings, cast aside, the prevailing opinion in the country being that sudden invasion was an absolute impossibility.

Predictions of prophets that had so long been scorned, derided, and disregarded by an apathetic British public were

rapidly being fulfilled. Coming events had cast dark shadows that had been unheeded, and now the unexpected bursting of the war cloud produced panic through our land.

General Sir Archibald Alison struck an alarming note of warning when he wrote in *Blackwood* in December 1893: "No one can look carefully into the present state of Europe without feeling convinced that it cannot continue long in its present condition. Every country is maintaining an armed force out of all proportion to its resources and population, and the consequent strain upon its monetary system and its industrial population is ever increasing, and must sooner or later become unbearable."

It had never been sufficiently impressed upon the British public, that when mobilised for war, and with all the Reserves called out, Russia had at her command 2,722,000 officers and men, while France could put 2,715,000 into the field, making a total force of the Franco-Russian Armies of 5,437,000 men, with 9920 field guns and 1,480,000 horses.

This well-equipped force was almost equal to the combined Armies of the Triple Alliance, Germany possessing 2,441,000, Austria 1,590,000, and Italy 1,909,000, a total of 5,940,000 officers and men, with 8184 field guns and 813,996 horses.

Beside these enormous totals, how ridiculously small appeared the British Army, with its Regular forces at home and abroad amounting to only 211,600 of all ranks, 225,400 Volunteers, and 74,000 Reserves, or 511,000 fighting men! Of these, only 63,000 Regulars remained in England and Wales, therefore our

Reserves and Volunteers were the chief defenders of our homes.

What a mere handful they appeared side by side with these huge European Armies!

Was it not surprising that in such circumstances the constant warnings regarding the weakness of our Navy – the force upon which the very life of our Empire depended – should have been unheeded by the too confident public?

When we were told plainly by a well-known authority that the number of our war vessels was miserably inadequate, that we were 10,000 men and 1000 officers short, and, among other things, that a French cruiser had, for all practical purposes, three times the fighting efficiency of an English cruiser, no one troubled. Nor was any one aroused from his foolishly apathetic confidence in British supremacy at sea. True, our Navy was strengthened to a certain extent in 1894, but hard facts, solemn warnings, gloomy forebodings, all were, alas! cast aside among the "scares" which crop up periodically in the press during a Parliamentary recess, and which, on the hearing of a murder trial, or a Society scandal, at once fizzle out and are dismissed for ever.

On this rude awakening to the seriousness of the situation, Service men now remembered distinctly the prophetic words of the few students of probable invasion. Once they had regarded them as based on wild improbabilities, but now they admitted that the facts were as represented, and that critics had foreseen catastrophe.

Already active steps had been taken towards the defence of

London.

Notwithstanding the serious defects in the mobilisation scheme, the 1st Army Corps, formed at Aldershot under Sir Evelyn Wood, and three cavalry brigades, were now in the field, while the other army corps were being rapidly conveyed southwards.

Independently of the Field Army, the Volunteers had mobilised, and were occupying the lines north and south of the metropolis. This force of Volunteer infantry consisted of 108,300 officers and men, of whom 73,000, with 212 guns, were placed on the line south of the Thames.

It stretched along the hills from Guildford in Surrey to Halstead in Kent, with intermediate concentration points at Box Hill and Caterham. At the latter place an efficient garrison had been established, consisting of 4603 of all ranks of the North London Brigade, 4521 of the West London, 5965 of the South London, 5439 of the Surrey, and 6132 of the Lancashire and Cheshire. This force was backed by eleven 16-pounder batteries of the 1st Norfolk from Yarmouth, the 1st Sussex from Brighton, the 1st Newcastle and the 2nd Durham from Seaham, and ten 40-pounder batteries of the 3rd and 6th Lancashire from Liverpool, the 9th Lancashire from Bolton, the 1st Cheshire from Chester, the 1st Cinque Ports from Dover, and the 2nd Cinque Ports from St. Leonards. At Halstead, on the left flank, there were massed about 20,470 Volunteer infantry, these being made up of the South Wales Brigade 4182, Welsh Border 5192, the North

Midland 5225, and the South Midland 5970. The eleven 16-pounder batteries came from the Woolwich Arsenal, Monmouth, Shropshire, and Stafford Corps, and five 40-pounder batteries from the Preston Corps.

To Guildford 4471 infantry in the Home Counties Brigade and 4097 in the Western Counties were assigned, while the guns consisted of four 40-pounder batteries from the York and Leeds Corps, the 16-pounder batteries of the Fife, Highland, and Midlothian Corps being unable, as yet, to get south on account of the congested state of all the northern railways.

For this same reason, too, the force at Box Hill, the remaining post in the south line of defence, was a very weak one. To this the Volunteers assigned were mostly Scottish.

Of the Glasgow Brigade 8000 of all ranks arrived, with 4000 from the South of Scotland Brigade; but the Highland Brigade of 4400 men, all enthusiastically patriotic, and the 16-pounder batteries from Ayr and Lanark, were compelled, to their chagrin, to wait at their headquarters for several days before the railways – every resource of which was strained to their utmost limits – could move them forward to the seat of war.

The five heavy batteries of the Aberdeen and North York Corps succeeded in getting down to their place of concentration early, as likewise did the 16-pounder battery from Galloway. Volunteers also undertook the defences north of the metropolis, and a strong line, consisting of a number of provincial brigades, stretched from Tilbury to Brentwood and Epping.

The British Volunteer holds no romantic notions of "death or glory," but is none the less prepared to do his duty, and is always ready "to do anything, and to go anywhere." Every officer and every man of this great force which had mounted guard north and south of the Thames was resolved to act his part bravely, and, if necessary, lay down his life for his country's honour.

At their posts on the Surrey Hills, ready at any moment to go into action, and firmly determined that no invader should enter the vast Capital of the World, they impatiently awaited the development of the situation, eager to face and annihilate their foreign foe.

Britannia had always been justly proud of her Volunteer forces, although their actual strength in time of invasion had never before been demonstrated. Now, however, the test which had been applied showed that, with an exception of rarest occurrence, every man had responded to this hasty call to arms, and that on active service they were as fearless and courageous as any body of Regulars ever put in the field.

Every man was alive to Britain's danger; every man knew well how terrible would be the combat – the struggle that must result in either victory or death.

The double-headed Eagle had set his talons in British soil!

CHAPTER XIII.

FIERCE FIGHTING IN THE CHANNEL

In the Channel disastrous events of a most exciting character were now rapidly occurring.

Outside Seaford Bay, Pevensey Bay, and off Brighton and the Mares at Cuckmere Haven, the enemy's transports, having landed troops and stores, rode at anchor, forming a line of retreat in case of reverses, while many fast French cruisers steamed up and down, keeping a sharp lookout for any British merchant or mail steamers which, ignorant of the hostilities, entered the Channel.

The officers and crews of these steamers were in most cases so utterly surprised that they fell an easy prey to the marauding vessels, many being captured and taken to French ports without a shot being fired. Other vessels, on endeavouring to escape, were either overhauled or sunk by the heavy fire of pursuing cruisers. One instance was that of the fast mail steamer *Carpathian*, belonging to the Union Steamship Company, which, entering the Channel on a voyage from Cape Town to Southampton, was attacked off the Eddystone by the Russian armoured cruiser *Gerzog Edinburskij*. The panic on board was indescribable, over a hundred steerage passengers being killed or mutilated by the

shells from the bow guns of the cruiser, and the captain himself being blown to atoms by an explosion which occurred when a shot struck and carried away the forward funnel. After an exciting chase, the *Carpathian* was sunk near Start Point, and of the five hundred passengers and crew scarcely a single person survived.

This terrible work of destruction accomplished, the Russian cruiser turned westward again to await further prey. As she steamed away, however, another ship rounded the Start following at full speed in her wake. This vessel, which was flying the British flag, was the barbette-ship *Centurion*. Already her captain had witnessed the attack and sinking of the *Carpathian*, but from a distance too great to enable him to assist the defenceless liner, and he was now on his way to attack the Tsar's cruiser. Almost immediately she was noticed by the enemy. Half an hour later she drew within range, and soon the two ships were engaged in a most desperate encounter. The gunners on the *Centurion*, seeing the Russian cross flying defiantly, and knowing the frightful havoc already wrought on land by the enemy, worked with that pluck and indomitable energy characteristic of the Britisher. Shot after shot was exchanged, but hissed and splashed without effect until the ships drew nearer, and then nearly every shell struck home. The rush of flame from the quick-firing guns of the *Centurion* was continuous, and the firing was much more accurate than that of her opponent, nevertheless the latter was manipulated with remarkable skill.

The roar of the guns was deafening. Clouds of smoke rose so

thickly that the vessels could scarcely distinguish each other. But the firing was almost continuous, until suddenly a shell struck the *Centurion* abaft the funnel, and for a moment stilled her guns.

This, however, was not for long, for in a few moments she recovered from the shock, and her guns were again sending forth shells with regularity and precision. Again a shell struck the *Centurion*, this time carrying away one of her funnels and killing a large number of men.

The British captain, still as cool as if standing on the hearthrug of the smoking-room of the United Service Club, took his vessel closer, continuing the fire, heedless of the fact that the Russian shells striking his ship were playing such fearful havoc with it. Every preparation had been made for a desperate fight to the death, when suddenly a shot struck the vessel, causing her to reel and shiver.

So well had the Russians directed their fire that the British vessel could not reply. One of her 29-tonners had been blown completely off its carriage, and lay shattered with men dead all around, while two of her quick-firing broadside guns had been rendered useless, and she had sustained other injuries of a very serious character, besides losing nearly half her men.

She was silent, riding to the swell, when wild exultant shouts in Russian went up from the enemy's ship, mingling with the heavy fire they still kept up.

At that moment, however, even while the victorious shouts resounded, the captain of the *Centurion*, still cool and collected,

swung round his vessel, and turning, touched one of the electric knobs at his hand. As he did so a long silvery object shot noiselessly from the side of the ship, and plunged with a splash into the rising waves.

Seconds seemed hours. For a whole three minutes the captain waited; then, disappointed, he turned away with an expression of impatience. The torpedo had missed its mark, and every moment lost might determine their fate. With guns still silent he again adroitly manœuvred his ship. Once again he touched the electric knob, and again a torpedo, released from its tube, sped rapidly through the water.

Suddenly a dull and muffled explosion from the Russian cruiser sounded. Above the dense smoke a flame shot high, with great columns of spray, as the guns suddenly ceased their thunder.

There was a dead stillness, broken only by the wash of the sea.

Then the smoke clearing showed the débris of the *Gerzog Edinburskij* fast sinking beneath the restless waters. Some splinters precipitated into the air had fallen with loud splashes in every direction, and amid the victorious shouts of the British bluejackets the disabled ship, with its fluttering Russian cross, slowly disappeared for ever, carrying down every soul on board.

The torpedo, striking her amidships, had blown an enormous hole right through her double bottom, and torn her transverse bulkheads away so much that her watertight doors were useless for keeping her afloat, even for a few minutes.

Partially crippled as she was, the *Centurion* steamed slowly westward, until at noon on the following day she fell in with a division of the Coastguard Squadron, which, acting under the fictitious telegraphic orders of the French spy, had been to Land's End, but which, now the enemy had landed, had received genuine orders from the Admiralty.

Compared with the number and strength of the French and Russian vessels mustered in the Channel, this force was so small as to appear ludicrous. To send this weak defending division against the mighty power of the invaders was sheer madness, and everybody on board knew it. The vessels were weaker in every detail than those of the enemy.

At full speed the British vessels steamed on throughout that day, until at 8 P.M., when about twenty miles south of Selsey Bill, they were joined by forces from the Solent. These consisted of the turret-ship *Monarch*, the turret-ram *Rupert*, the barbette-ship *Rodney*, the belted cruiser *Aurora*, and the coast defence armour-clads *Cyclops* and *Gorgon*, together with a number of torpedo boats. The night was calm, but moonless, and without delay the vessels all continued the voyage up Channel silently, with lights extinguished.

Two hours later the officers noticed that away on the horizon a light suddenly flashed twice and then disappeared.

One of the enemy's ships had signalled the approach of the defenders!

This caused the British Admiral to alter his course slightly,

and the vessels steamed along in the direction the light had shown.

In turrets and in broadside batteries there was a deep hush of expectation. Officers and men standing at their quarters scarcely spoke. All felt the fight must be most desperate.

Presently, in the far distance a small patch of light in the sky showed the direction of Brighton, and almost immediately the Admiral signalled to the cruisers *Aurora*, *Galatea*, and *Narcissus*, and the new battleship *Hannibal*, built under the 1894 programme, to detach themselves with six torpedo boats, and take an easterly course, in order to carry out instructions which he gave. These tactics caused considerable comment.

The orders were to make straight for Eastbourne, and to suddenly attack and destroy any of the hostile transports that were lying there, the object being twofold – firstly, to cut off the enemy's line of retreat, and secondly, to prevent the vessels from being used for the purpose of landing further reinforcements.

Soon after 2 A.M. this gallant little division had, by careful manoeuvring, and assisted by a slight mist which now hung over the sea, rounded Beachy Head without being discovered, and had got outside Pevensey Bay about eight miles from land. Here a number of Russian transports and service steamers were lying, among them being the *Samojed* and *Olaf*, *Krasnaya Gorka* and *Vladimir*, with two smaller ones – the *Dnepr* and the *Artelscik*.

Silently, and without showing any lights, a British torpedo boat sped quickly along to where the dark outline of a ship loomed

through the mist, and, having ascertained that it was the *Olaf*, drew up quickly.

A few minutes elapsed, all being quiet. Then suddenly a bright flash was followed by a fearful explosion, and the bottom of the Tsar's vessel being completely ripped up by the torpedo, she commenced to settle down immediately, before any of those on board could save themselves. The enemy had scarcely recovered from their surprise and confusion when three other loud explosions occurred, and in each case transport vessels were blown up. British torpedo boats, darting hither and thither between the Russian ships, were dealing terrible blows from which no vessel could recover. So active were they, indeed, that within the space of fifteen minutes six transports had been blown up, as well as the first-class torpedo boat *Abo*. The loss of life was terrible.

Simultaneously with the first explosion, the guns of the *Aurora*, *Galatea*, and *Narcissus* thundered out a terrible salute. The bright search-lights of the Russian cruisers and of the battleship *Navarin* immediately swept the sea, and through the mist discerned the British ships. The lights served only to show the latter the exact position of the enemy, and again our guns belched forth shot and shell with disastrous effect.

Quickly, however, the Russian vessels replied. Flame flashed continuously from the turret of the *Navarin* and the port guns of the *Opricnik* and the *Najezdnik*, while the search-lights were at the same time shut off.

At first the fire was very ineffectual, but gradually as the vessels crept closer to each other the encounter became more and more desperate.

The Russian torpedo boats *Vzryv*, *Vindava*, and *Kotlin* were immediately active, and the *Narcissus* had a very narrow escape, a Whitehead torpedo passing right under her bows, while one British torpedo boat, which at the same moment was endeavouring to launch its deadly projectile at the *Navarin*, was sent to the bottom by a single shot from the *Najezdnik*.

The combat was desperate and terrible. That the British had been already successful in surprising and sinking a torpedo boat and six of the hostile transports was true; nevertheless the number of Russian ships lying there was much greater than the British Admiral had anticipated, and, to say the least, the four vessels now found themselves in a most critical position.

The *Navarin* alone was one of the most powerful of the Tsar's battleships, and, in addition to the seven cruisers and nine torpedo boats, comprised an overwhelming force.

Yet the English warships held their own, pouring forth an incessant fire. Each gun's crew knew they were face to face with death, but, inspired by the coolness of their officers, they worked on calmly and indefatigably. Many of their shots went home with frightful effect. One shell which burst over the magazine of the *Lieut. Iljin* ripped up her deck and caused severe loss of life, while in the course of half an hour one of the heavy turret guns of the *Navarin* had been disabled, and two more Russian

torpedo boats sunk. Our torpedo boat destroyers operating on the Channel seaboard were performing excellent work, the *Havock*, *Shark*, *Hornet*, *Dart*, *Bruiser*, *Hasty*, *Teaser*, *Janus*, *Surly*, and *Porcupine* all being manœuvred with splendid success. Several, however, were lost while sweeping out the enemy's torpedo boat shelters, including the *Ardent*, *Charger*, *Boxer*, and *Rocket*.

But the British vessels were now suffering terribly, hemmed in as they were by the enemy, with shells falling upon them every moment, and their decks swept by the withering fire of machine guns. Suddenly, after a shell had burst in the stern of the *Aurora*, she ceased firing and swung round, almost colliding with the *Narcissus*. Her steam steering-gear had, alas! been broken by the shot, and for a few moments her officers lost control over her.

A Russian torpedo boat in shelter behind the *Navarin*, now seeing its chance, darted out and launched its projectile.

The officers of the *Aurora*, aware of their danger, seemed utterly powerless to avert it. It was a terrible moment. A few seconds later the torpedo struck, the cruiser rose as if she had ridden over a volcano, and then, as she gradually settled down, the dark sea rolled over as gallant a crew as ever sailed beneath the White Ensign.

Immediately afterwards the *Navarin* exchanged rapid signals with a number of ships which were approaching with all speed from the direction of Hastings, and the captains of the three remaining British vessels saw that they had fallen into a trap.

The *Narcissus* had been drawn between two fires. Both

her funnels had been shot away, two of her broadside guns were useless, and she had sustained damage to her engines; nevertheless, her captain, with the dogged perseverance of a British sailor, continued the desperate combat. With the first flush of dawn the fog had lifted, but there was scarcely sufficient wind to spread out the British ensign, which still waved with lazy defiance.

On one side of her was the ponderous *Navarin*, from the turret of which shells were projected with monotonous regularity, while on the other the British cruiser was attacked vigorously by the *Najezdnik*. The *Narcissus*, however, quickly showed the Russians what she could do against such overwhelming odds, for presently she sent a shot from one of her 20-ton guns right under the turret of the *Navarin*, causing a most disastrous explosion on board that vessel, while, at the same time, her 6-inch breechloaders pounded away at her second antagonist, and sank a torpedo boat manœuvring near.

Both the *Galatea* and the *Hannibal* were in an equally serious predicament. The enemy's torpedo boats swarmed around them, while the cruisers *Opricnik*, *Admiral Korniloff*, *Rynda*, and several other vessels, kept up a hot, incessant fire, which was returned energetically by the British vessels.

The sight was magnificent, appalling! In the spreading dawn, the great ships manœuvring smartly, each strove to obtain points of vantage, and vied with each other in their awful work of destruction. The activity of the British torpedo boats, darting

here and there, showed that those who manned them were utterly reckless of their lives. As they sped about, it was indeed marvellous how they escaped destruction, for the Russians had more than double the number of boats, and their speed was quite equal to our own.

Nevertheless the British boats followed up their successes by other brilliant deeds of daring, for one of them, with a sudden dash, took the *Rynda* off her guard, and sent a torpedo at her with awful result, while a few moments later two terrific explosions sounded almost simultaneously above the thunder of the guns, and it was then seen that the unprotected cruiser *Asia*, and the last remaining transport the *Krasnaya Gorka*, were both sinking.

It was a ghastly spectacle.

Hoarse despairing shrieks went up from hundreds of Russian sailors who fought and struggled for life in the dark rolling waters, and three British torpedo boats humanely rescued a great number of them. Many, however, sank immediately with their vessels, while some strong swimmers struck out for the distant shore. Yet, without exception, all these succumbed to exhaustion ere they could reach the land, and the long waves closed over them as they threw up their arms and sank into the deep.

During the first few minutes following this sudden disaster to the enemy the firing ceased, and the *Navarin* ran up signals. This action attracted the attention of the officers of the British vessels to the approaching ships, and to their amazement and dismay they discovered that they were a squadron of the enemy who had

returned unexpectedly from the direction of Dover.

The British ships, in their half-crippled condition, could not possibly withstand such an onslaught as they knew was about to be made upon them, for the enemy's reinforcements consisted of the steel barbette-ships *Gangut*, *Alexander II.*, and *Nicolai I.*, of the Baltic Fleet, the great turret-ship *Petr Veliky*, the *Rurik*, a very powerful central-battery belted cruiser of over ten thousand tons, two new cruisers of the same type that had been recently completed, the *Enara* and *Ischma*, with three other cruisers and a large flotilla of torpedo boats. Accompanying them were the French 10,000-ton armoured barbette-ship *Magenta*, the central-battery ship *Richelieu*, the armoured turret-ship *Tonnerre*, and the *Hoche*, one of the finest vessels of our Gallic neighbour's Navy, as well as the torpedo cruisers *Hirondelle* and *Fleurus*, and a number of swift torpedo boats and "catchers."

The captains of the British vessels saw that in the face of such a force defeat was a foregone conclusion; therefore they could do nothing but retreat hastily towards Newhaven, in the hope of finding the division of the British Coastguard Squadron which had gone there for the same purpose as they had rounded Beachy Head, namely, to destroy the enemy's transports.

Without delay the three vessels swung round with all speed and were quickly headed down Channel, while the remaining attendant torpedo boats, noticing this sudden retreat, also darted away. This manœuvre did not, of course, proceed unchecked, the enemy being determined they should not escape. Signals were

immediately made by the *Alexander II.*, the flagship, and the *Petr Veliky* and *Enara*, being within range, blazed forth a storm of shell upon the fugitives. The shots, however, fell wide, and ricocheted over the water, sending up huge columns of spray; whereupon the *Narcissus* and *Galatea* replied steadily with their 6-inch guns, while the heavy guns of the *Hannibal* were also quickly brought into play.

In a few minutes the *Magenta* and *Tonnerre* with the *Alger*, *Cécille*, and *Sfax*, started in pursuit, and an intensely exciting chase commenced. The engines of the British vessels were run at the highest possible pressure, but the French ships proved several knots swifter. As they steamed at full speed around Beachy Head towards Seaford Bay the enemy gradually overhauled them. The brisk fire which was being kept up soon began to tell, for all three retreating ships had lost many men, and the scenes of bloodshed on board were frightful.

Eagerly the officers swept the horizon with their glasses to discover signs of friendly aid, but none hove in sight. All three ships were weak, their guns disabled, with whole guns' crews lying dead around, and many of the officers had fallen. In strength, in speed, in armaments – in fact, in everything – they were inferior to their opponents, and they saw it was a question of sheer force, not one of courage.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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