Altsheler Joseph Alexander

The Guns of Europe

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Altsheler J.

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Содержание

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FOREWORD

"The Guns of Europe" is the first of three connected romances, of which "The Forest of Swords" and "The Hosts of the Air" are to be respectively the second and third, dealing with the world war in Europe.

It was the singular fortune of the author to be present at the beginning of this, the most gigantic struggle in the history of our globe. He was in Vienna the day Austria-Hungary declared war upon Servia, thus setting the torch that lighted the general conflagration. Returning westward, he reached Munich the day Germany declared war upon Russia. He remained in Germany nearly a month, having witnessed in turn the Austrian and German mobilizations, and then arrived in England in time to see the gathering of the British Empire's armed hosts.

He was also, upon his return, in Quebec when the greatest colony of the British was rallying to their support. Such an experience at such an extraordinary crisis makes ineffaceable impressions, and through his characters, the author has striven his best to reproduce them in these three romances.

CHAPTER I
THE SISTINE MADONNA

John turned a little to the left, going nearer to the window, where he could gain a better view of the Madonna, which he had heard so often was the most famous picture in the world. He was no technical judge of painting – he was far too young for such knowledge – but he always considered the effect of the whole upon himself, and he was satisfied with that method, feeling perhaps that he gained more from it than if he had been able to tear the master-work to pieces, merely in order to see how Raphael had made it.

"Note well, John, that this is the Sistine Madonna," began William Anson in his didactic, tutorial tone. "Observe the wonderful expression upon the face of the Holy Mother. Look now at the cherubs gazing up into the blue vault, in which the Madonna like an angel is poised. Behold the sublime artist's mastery of every detail. There are those who hold that the Madonna della Sedia at Florence is its equal in beauty and greatness, but I do not agree with them. To me the Sistine Madonna is always first. Centuries ago, even, its full worth was appreciated. It brought a great price at – "

The rest of his speech trailed off into nothingness. John had impatiently moved further away, and had deliberately closed his ear also to any dying sounds of oratory that might reach him. He had his own method of seeing the wonders of the Old World. He was interested or he was not. It was to him a state of mind, atmospheric in a way. He liked to breathe it in, and the rattle of a guide or tutor's lecture nearly always broke the spell.

Anxious that Mr. Anson should not have any further chance to mar his pleasure he moved yet closer to the great window from which came nearly all the light that fell upon the Sistine Madonna. There he stood almost in the center of the beams and gazed upon the illumined face, which spoke only of peace upon earth and good will. He was moved deeply, although there was no sign of it in his quiet eyes. He did not object to emotion and to its vivid expression in others, but his shy nature, feeling the need of a defensive armor, rejected it for himself.

It was a brighter day than the changeful climate of Dresden and the valley of the Elbe usually offered. The sunshine came in a great golden bar through the window and glowed over the wonderful painting which had stood the test of time and the critics. He had liked the good, gray city sitting beside its fine river. It had seemed friendly and kind to him, having in it the quality of home, something almost American in its simplicity and lack of caste.

They had arrived as soon as the doors were opened, and but few people were yet in the room. John came from his mood of exaltation and glanced at the others, every one in turn. Two women, evidently teachers, stood squarely in front of the picture and looked alternately at the Madonna and one of the red volumes that mark the advance of the American hosts in Europe. A man with a thick, black beard, evidently a Russian, moved incessantly back and forth, his feet keeping up a light shuffle on the floor. John wondered why some northern races should be so emotional and others so reserved. He had ceased to think that climate ruled expression.

A stout German frau stood gazing in apparent stolidity. Yet she was not so stolid as she seemed, because John caught a beam of appreciation in her eye. Presently she turned and went out, doubtless returning to some task of the thrifty housewife in this very city of Dresden. John thought her emblematic of Germany, homely herself, but with the undying love of the beautiful shown so freely in her fine cities, and in the parks, gardens and fountains more numerous than in an other country.

Her place was taken by an officer in a uniform, subdued in color, but martial. He was a tall, stiff man, and as he walked with a tread akin to the goosestep his feet clanked upon the floor. He wore a helmet, the cloth cover over the spike, but John noticed that he did not take off the helmet in the presence of the Sistine Madonna. He moved to a place in front of the picture, brushing against the

sisterhood of the red book, and making no apology. There he stood, indifferent to those about him, holding himself as one superior, dominant by force, the lord by right of rank over inferior beings.

John's heart swelled with a sense of resentment and hostility. He knew perfectly well that the stranger was a Prussian officer – a strong man too, both in mind and body. He stood upright, more than six feet tall, his wide shoulders thrown well back, his large head set upon a powerful neck. Reddish hair showed beneath the edges of the helmet, and the blue eyes that gazed at the picture were dominant and masterful. He was about thirty, just at the age when those who are strong have tested their minds against other men in the real arena of life and find them good. The heavy, protruding jaw and the compressed lips made upon John the impression of power.

The picture grew somewhat dim. One of those rapid changes to which Dresden is subject occurred. The sunshine faded and a grayness as of twilight filtered into the room. The glances of the young American and the Prussian officer turned away from the Madonna at the same time and met.

John was conscious that the blue eyes were piercing into him, but he had abundant courage and resolution and he gave back the look with a firmness and steadiness, equal to the Prussian's own. The cold steel of that glance rested upon him only for a few moments. It passed on, dissected in an instant the two teachers with the red guide book, and then the man walking, to the window, looked out at the gray walls of the city.

John had not lowered his eyes before the intrusive gaze, but he felt now as if he had been subjected to an electric current. He was at once angry and indignant, but, resolving to throw it off, he shrugged his shoulders a little, and turned to his older friend who was supposed to be comrade and teacher at the same time.

Mr. Anson, the didactic strain, strong in him, recovered his importance, and began to talk again. He did not confine himself any longer to the Sistine Madonna, but talked of other pictures in the famous gallery, the wonderful art of Rubens and Jordaens, although it seemed to John's normal mind that they had devoted themselves chiefly to studies in fat. But the longest lecture must come to an end, and as the inevitable crowd gathered before the Madonna William Anson was forced by courtesy into silence. The Prussian had already gone, still wearing his defiant helmet, his sword swinging stiffly from his belt, his heavy boots clanking on the floor.

"Did you notice that officer?" asked John.

"I gave him a casual glance. He is not different from the others. You see them everywhere in Germany."

"He seemed typical to me. I don't recall another man who has impressed me so much. To me he personified the great German military organization which we are all so sure is invincible."

"And it *is* invincible. Nothing like the German army has ever before stood on this planet. A great race, strong in both body and mind, has devoted itself for half a century to learning everything that is to be learned about war. It's a magnificent machine, smooth, powerful, tremendous, unconquerable, and for that very reason neither you nor I, John, will ever see a war of the first magnitude in Europe. It would be too destructive. The nations would shrink back, appalled. Besides, the tide is the other way. Remember all those ministers who came over with us on the boat to attend the peace conference at Constance."

John accepted readily all that Mr. Anson said, and the significance of the Prussian, due he was sure to his own imagination, passed quickly from his mind. But he was tired of pictures. He had found that he could assimilate only a certain quantity, and after that all the rest, even be they Raphael, Murillo and Rubens, became a mere blur.

"Let's go out and walk on the terraces over the river," he said.

"But many other famous pictures are here. We can't afford to go back to America, and admit that we haven't seen some of the masterpieces of the Dresden gallery."

John laughed.

"No, we can't," he said, "because if we do ignore a single one that's the very one all our friends will tell us we should certainly have seen. But my eyes are growing tired, there's a congestion in the back of my head, and these polished floors have stiffened my ankles. Besides, we've plenty of time, and we can come back as often as we wish."

"I suppose then that we must go," said Mr. Anson, reluctantly. "But one should make the most of the opportunities for culture, vouchsafed to him."

John made no reply. He had heard that note so often. Mr. Anson was tremendous on "culture", and John thought it all right for him and others like him, but he preferred his own methods for himself. He led the way from the gallery and the older man followed reluctantly.

The sun, having gone behind the clouds, stayed there and Dresden was still gray, but John liked it best in its sober colors. Then the homely touch, the friendly feeling in the air were stronger. These people were much like his own. Many of them could have passed for Americans, and they welcomed as brethren those who came from beyond the Atlantic.

He looked from the Bruhl Terraces over the Elbe – a fine river too he thought it – the galleries, the palaces, the opera house, the hotels, and all the good gray city, beloved of English and Americans as well as Germans.

"What is that buzzing and whirring, John?" asked Mr. Anson suddenly.

"Look up! Always look up, when you hear that sound, and you will see the answer to your question written in the skies! There it goes! It's passing over the portion of the city beyond the river."

The long black shape of the Zeppelin dirigible was outlined clearly, as it moved off swiftly toward the southwest. It did not seem to diminish in size, as it left the city, but hung huge and somber against the sky, its whirr and buzz still audible.

"An interesting toy," said Mr. Anson.

"If a toy, it's certainly a gigantic one," said John.

"Tremendous in size, but a toy nevertheless."

"We're going up in it you know."

"Are you still bent upon that wild flight?"

"Why there's no danger. Herr Simmering, the proprietor of our hotel, chartered a dirigible last week, and took up all the guests who were willing to pay and go. I've talked to some of them and they say it was a wonderful experience. You remember that he's chartered another for next week, and you promised me we could go."

"Yes, I promised, but I thought at the time that something would surely happen to prevent it."

"Indian promises! I won't let you back out now!"

William Anson sighed. His was a sober mind. He liked the solid earth for his travels, and he would fain leave the air to others. The daring of young John Scott, for whom he felt in a measure responsible, often alarmed him, but John concealed under his quiet face and manner an immense fund of resolution.

"Suppose we go to the hotel," Mr. Anson said. "The air is rather keen and I'm growing hungry."

"First call in the dining-car," said John, "and I come."

"I notice that you're always eager for the table, although you shirk the pictures and statues, now and then."

"It's merely the necessity of nature, Mr. Anson. The paint and marble will do any time."

William Anson smiled. He liked his young comrade, all the more so perhaps because they were so different. John supplied the daring and adventurous spirit that he lacked, and the youth had enough for two.

"I wonder if any new people have come," said John, as they walked down the steps from the terrace. "Don't think I'm weak on culture, Mr. Anson, but it's always interesting to me to go back to the hotel, see what fresh types have appeared, and guess from what countries they have come."

"The refuge of a lazy mind which is unwilling to cope with its opportunities for learning and progress. John, I feel sometimes that you are almost hopeless. You have a frivolous strain that you ought to get rid of as soon as you can."

"Well, sir, I had to laugh at those fat Venuses of Rubens and Jordaens. They may be art, but I never thought that Venus weighed three hundred pounds. I know those two painters had to advertise all through the Low Countries, before they could get models fat enough."

"Stop, John! Is nothing sacred to you?"

"A lady can be too fat to be sacred."

Mr. Anson shook his head. He always stood impressed, and perhaps a little awed before centuries of culture, and he failed to understand how any one could challenge the accepted past. John's Philistine spirit, which he deemed all the more irregular in one so young pained him at times. Yet it was more assumed than real with young Scott.

They reached their hotel and passed into the dining-room, where both did full justice to the good German food. John did not fail to make his usual inspection of guests, but he started a little, when he saw the Prussian officer of the gallery, alone at a table by a window overlooking the Elbe. It was one of the pleasantest views in Europe, but John knew very well that the man was thinking little of it. His jaw had not lost is pugnacious thrust, and he snapped his orders to the waiter as if he were rebuking a recruit.

Nobody had told John that he was a Prussian, but the young American knew it nevertheless, and he knew him to be a product, out of the very heart of that iron military system, before which the whole world stood afraid, buttressed as it was by tremendous victories over France, and a state of readiness known to be without an equal.

Herr Simmering, fat, bland and bald, was bending over them, asking them solicitously if all was right. John always liked this bit of personal attention from the European hotel proprietors. It established a friendly feeling. It showed that one was not lost among the swarm of guests, and here in Germany it invariably made his heart warm to the civilians.

"Can you tell us, Herr Simmering," he asked, "who is the officer alone in the alcove by the window?"

Herr Gustav Adolph Simmering, the soul of blandness and courtesy, stiffened in an instant. With the asking of that simple question he seemed to breathe a new and surcharged air. He lost his expansiveness in the presence of the German army or any representative of it. Lowering his voice he replied:

"A captain attached in some capacity to the General Staff in Berlin. Rudolf von Boehlen is his name. It is said that he has high connections, a distant cousin of the von Moltkes, in much favor, too, with the Emperor."

"Do Prussian officers have to come here and tell the Saxons what to do?"

The good Herr Simmering spread out his hands in horror. These simple Americans surely asked strange and intrusive questions. One could forgive them only because they were so open, so much like innocent children, and, unlike those disagreeable English, quarreled so little about their bills.

"I know no more," he replied. "Here in Germany we never ask why an officer comes and goes. We trust implicitly in the Emperor and his advisers who have guarded us so well, and we do not wish to learn the higher secrets of state. We know that such knowledge is not for us."

Dignified and slow, as became an important landlord, he nevertheless went away with enough haste to indicate clearly to John that he wished to avoid any more questions about the Prussian officer. John was annoyed. He felt a touch of shame for Herr Simmering.

"I wish the Germans wouldn't stand in such tremendous awe of their own army," he said. "They seem to regard it as some mysterious and omnipotent force which is always right."

"Don't forget their education and training, John. The great German empire has risen upon the victories of 1870, and if ever war between them should come again Germany could smash France as easily as she did then."

"I could never become reconciled to the spectacle of an empire treading a republic into the earth."

Mr. Anson smiled. He had dined well, and he was at peace with the earth.

"Names mean little," he said indulgently.

John did not reply, but his under jaw thrust forward in a pugnacious manner, startlingly like that of the Prussian. The officer, although no word had passed between them, nor even a glance of real hostility had aroused a stubborn antagonism, increased by the obvious awe of Herr Simmering and the deference paid to him by the whole establishment of the hotel.

He saw Captain von Boehlen go out, and drawn by a vague resolve he excused himself, abandoning Mr. Anson who was still trifling pleasantly with the fruit, and also left the dining-room. He saw the captain receive his helmet from an obsequious waiter, put it on his head and walk into the parlor, his heavy boots as usual clanking upon the polished floor. In the final analysis it was this very act of keeping his helmet on, no matter where he was, that repelled young Scott and aroused his keen enmity.

John went to the smoking-room. Von Boehlen lingered a moment or two in the parlor, and then took his way also down the narrow passage to the smoking-room. It was perhaps a part of the American's vague plan that he should decide suddenly to go by the same way to the parlor. Hence it was inevitable that they should meet if Captain von Boehlen kept his course – an invariable one with him – in the very center of the hall. John liked the center of the hall, too, particularly on that day. He was tall and strong and he knew that he would have the advantage of readiness, which everybody said was the cardinal virtue of the Prussian army.

Just before they reached the point of contact the Prussian started back with a muttered oath of surprise and annoyance. His hand flew to the hilt of his sword, and then came away again. John watching him closely was sure that hand and hilt would not have parted company so readily had it been a German civilian who was claiming with Captain Rudolf von Boehlen an equal share of the way.

But John saw the angry flash in the eyes of the Prussian die suddenly like a light put out by a puff of wind, and the compressed line of the lips relax. He knew that it was not the result of innate feeling, but of a mental effort made by von Boehlen, and he surmised that the fact of his being a foreigner had all to do with it. Yet he waited for the other to apologize first.

"Pardon," said the captain, "it is somewhat dark here, and as I was absorbed in thought. I did not notice you."

His English was excellent and his manner polite enough. John could do nothing less than respond in kind.

"It was perhaps my fault more than yours," he said.

The face of Captain von Boehlen relaxed yet further into a smile.

"You are an American," he said, "a member of an amiable race, our welcome guests in Europe. What could our hotels and museums do without you?"

When he smiled he showed splendid white teeth, sharp and powerful. His manner, too, had become compelling. John could not now deny its charm. Perhaps his first estimate of Captain von Boehlen had been wrong.

"It is true that we come in shoals," he responded. "Sometimes I'm not sure whether we're welcome to the general population."

"Oh, yes, you are. The Americans are the spoiled children of Europe."

"At least we are the children of Europe. The people on both sides of the Atlantic are apt to forget that. We're transplanted Europeans. The Indians are the only people of the original American stock."

"But you are not Europeans. One can always tell the difference. You speak English, but you are not English. I should never take an American for an Englishman."

"But our basis is British. Despite all the infusions of other bloods, and they've been large, Great Britain is our mother country. I feel it myself."

Von Boehlen smiled tranquilly.

"Great Britain has always been your chief enemy," he said. "You have been at war with her twice, and in your civil war, when you were in dire straits her predominant classes not only wished for your destruction, but did what they could to achieve it."

"Old deeds," said John. "The bad things of fifty or a hundred years ago are dead and buried."

But the Prussian would not have it so. Germany, he said, was the chief friend of America. Their peoples, he insisted, were united not only by a tie of blood, but by points of view, similar in so many important cases. He seemed for some inscrutable reason anxious to convince one as young as his listener, and he employed a smoothness of speech and a charm of manner that John in the morning in the gallery would have thought impossible in one so stiff and haughty. The spell that this man was able to cast increased, and yet he was always conscious of a pitiless strength behind it.

John presently found himself telling his name, how he was traveling with William Anson, older than himself, and in a way both a comrade and a tutor, how he expected to meet his uncle, James Pomeroy, a United States Senator, in Vienna, and his intention of returning to America early in the autumn to finish his course at the university.

"I should like to see that America of yours," said von Boehlen, after he had told something of himself, "but I fear it is not to be this year."

"You stay in Dresden long?" asked John.

"No, I leave tonight, but we may meet again, and then you can tell me more of that far western world, so vast and so interesting, but of which we Europeans really know so little."

John noticed that he did not tell where he was going. But he surmised that Prussian army officers usually kept their destination to themselves. His talk with von Boehlen had impressed him more than ever with the size, speed and overwhelming power of the German army machine. It was not possible for anything to stand before it, and the mystery that clothed it around imparted to it a superhuman quality.

But he brushed away such thoughts. The sun was shining again. It danced in a myriad golden beams over the Elbe, it clothed in warmth the kindly city, and von Boehlen, with a politeness that was now unimpeachable rose to tell him good-bye. He acknowledged to himself that he felt a little flattered by the man's attention, and his courtesy was equal to that of the Prussian. Then the officer, dropping his hand to the hilt of his sword, apparently a favorite gesture, stalked away.

It was John's first impulse to tell Mr. Anson of his talk with von Boehlen, but he obeyed his second and kept it to himself. Even after he was gone the feeling that some motive was behind the Prussian's blandness remained.

A letter came that afternoon from his uncle, the Senator. He was in Vienna, and he wished his nephew and Mr. Anson to join him there, cutting short their stay in Dresden. They could come by the way of Prague, and a day or two spent in that old Bohemian city would repay them. John showed the letter to Mr. Anson, who agreed with him that a wish from the Senator was in reality a command, and should be obeyed promptly.

John, although he liked Dresden, had but one regret. He could not go up in the Zeppelin dirigible and he hastened to tell Herr Simmering that his entry was withdrawn.

"I'll have to cut out the dirigible," he said in his colloquial tongue. "Perhaps you can find somebody to take my place."

"Perhaps," said the landlord, "and on the other hand it may be that the dirigible will not go up for me.

"Why? I thought you had chartered it for a second trip."

Herr Simmering compressed his lips. John saw that, under impulse, he had said more than he intended. It was an objection of his to Germany – this constant secrecy and mystery that seemed to him not only useless but against the natural flow of human nature.

"Are all the Zeppelins confiscated by the government?" he asked, speaking wholly at random.

Herr Simmering started. Fat and smooth, he shot a single, menacing glance at the young American. But, in a moment, he was smiling again and John had not noticed.

"Our government never tells its plans," he said. "Mr. Anson says that you leave tomorrow for Prague."

"Yes," said John curiously, "and I can almost infer from your tone, Herr Simmering, that you will be glad to see us go."

But Herr Simmering protested earnestly that he never liked to lose paying guests, above all those delightful Americans, who had so much appreciation and who made so little trouble. The German soul and the American soul were akin.

"Well, we do like your country and your people," said John. "That's the reason we come here so much."

In the evening, while Mr. Anson was absorbed in the latest English newspapers which had just come in, John went out for a walk. His favorite method of seeing a European city was to stroll the streets, and using his own phrase to "soak" it in.

He passed now down the street which led by the very edge of the Elbe, and watched the long freight boats go by, lowering their smokestacks as they went under the bridges. The night was cloudy, and the city behind him became dusky in the mists and darkness. Dresden was strangely quiet, too, but he soon forgot it, as he moved back into the past.

The past, not the details, but the dim forgotten life, always made a powerful appeal to John. He had read that Dresden began with a little fishing village, and now he was trying to imagine the tawny men of a thousand years ago, in their rude canoes, casting their nets and lines in the river which flowed so darkly before him. But the mood did not endure long. He strolled presently upon the terraces and then back toward the king's palace, drawn there by a great shouting.

As he approached the building he became conscious that an event of interest was occurring. A huge crowd had gathered, and the youth of it was demonstrating with energy, cheering and breaking soon into national songs.

John pressed into the edge of the crowd, eager to know what it was all about, but not yet able to see over the heads of the close ranks in front of him. "What is it? What is it?" he asked of several, but they merely shrugged their shoulders, unable to understand English.

John was angry at himself once more for knowing nothing of German. The whole life of a nation flowed past him, and all of it was mysterious, merely because he did not have that little trick of tongue. He caught sight at last of a man in an automobile that moved very slowly in the heart of the crowd, the people fairly pressed against the body of the machine. It was obvious that the stranger furnished the occasion for the cheering and the songs, and John repeated his questions, hoping that he would ultimately encounter some one in this benighted multitude who understood English.

His hope was not in vain. A man told him that it was the King of Saxony returning to his capital and palace. John then drew away in some distaste. He did not see why the whole population of a city, even though they were monarchists, should go wild over the coming home of a sovereign. Doubtless the King of Saxony, who was not so young, had come home thousands of times before, and there must be something servile in a people who made such an old story an occasion for a sort of worship.

He pushed his way out of the crowd and returned to the terrace. But the noise of the shouting and the singing reached him there. Now it was mostly singing, and it showed uncommon fervor. John shrugged his shoulders. He liked such an unreasonable display less than ever, and walked far along the river, until no sound from the crowd reached him.

When he returned toward the hotel everybody had gone, save a few policemen, and John hoped that the king was not only in his palace, but was sound asleep. It must be a great tax upon Saxon energy to demonstrate so heavily every time he came back to the palace, perhaps from nothing more than a drive. He found that Mr. Anson, having exhausted the newspapers, had gone to his room, and pleasantly weary in both body and mind, he sought his own bed.

CHAPTER II
THE THUNDERBOLT

John and Mr. Anson ate breakfast not long after daylight, as they expected to take an early train for Prague. They sat by a window in a small dining-room, overlooking pleasant gardens, and the Elbe, flowing just beyond the stretch of grass and flowers. The weather of the fickle valley had decided once again to be good. The young sunshine gilded the surface of the river and touched the gray buildings with gold. John was reluctant to leave it, but he had the anticipation, too, of fresh conquests, of new cities to be seen and explored.

"We'll be in Prague tonight," he said, "and it will be something very different, a place much more medieval than any we have yet visited."

"That's so," said Mr. Anson, and he trailed off into a long historical account of Prague, which would serve the double purpose of instructing John, and of exhibiting his own learning. The waiter, who could speak English, and with whom John, being young, did not hesitate to talk at times, was bent over, pouring coffee at his elbow.

"Pardon me, sir, but where did you say you were going?" he asked almost in a whisper.

"To Prague?"

"I shouldn't go there, sir, if I were you."

"Why not?"

"You'll run into a war."

"What do you mean, Albrecht?"

But Albrecht was already on the way to the kitchen, and he was so long in returning that John dismissed his words as merely the idle talk of a waiter who wished to entertain Herr Simmering's American guests. But when they went to an agency, according to their custom, to buy the railway tickets to Prague they were informed that it would be better for them not to go to the Czech capital. Both were astonished.

"Why shouldn't we go to Prague?" asked Mr. Anson with some indignation. "I've never heard that the Czechs object to the presence of Americans."

"They don't," replied the agent blandly. "You can go to Prague without any trouble, but I don't think you could leave it for a long time."

"And why not. Who would wish to hold us in Prague?"

"Nobody in particular. But there would be no passenger trains during the mobilization."

The eyes of John and Mr. Anson opened wider.

"Mobilization. What mobilization?" asked the elder.

"For the war that Austria-Hungary is going to make on Servia. The various army corps of Bohemia will be mobilized first."

"A war!" exclaimed Mr. Anson, "and not a word about it beforehand! Why this is a thunderbolt!"

John was thoughtful. The agent had made an amazing statement. It was, in truth a thunderbolt, as Mr. Anson had said, and it came out of a perfectly clear sky. He suddenly remembered little things, meaning nothing at the time, but acquiring significance now, the curious actions of Captain von Boehlen, the extraordinary demonstration at the return of the Saxon king to his palace, and the warning words of the waiter. He felt anew their loss in not knowing the language of the country and he gave voice to it.

"If we'd been able to speak German we might have had some hint of this," he said.

"We'll learn German, and be ready for it the next time we come," said Mr. Anson. "Now, John, in view of what we've heard, it would be unwise to go to Prague. Have you anything else in mind?"

"Let's go straight to Vienna. It's a great capital, and it has so much railroad communication that we could certainly get out of it, when we want to do so. Besides, I'm bound to see the Danube."

"And your uncle, the Senator, is there. Well, we'll chance it and go to Vienna. Can we get a train straight through to that city?"

"One leaves in an hour and is due at nine tonight," replied the agent to whom he had addressed the question.

They bought the tickets, and when the Vienna express left the station the two with their baggage were aboard it. John was by the window of their compartment, watching the beautiful country. He loved rivers and lakes and hills and mountains more than either ancient or modern cities, and as they sped along the valley of the Elbe, often at the very edge of the river, his mind and his eyes were content. His absorption in what was flitting by the window kept him for some time from noticing what was passing in the train. A low, but impatient exclamation from Mr. Anson first drew his attention.

"I never saw such crowding before in a European train," said he. "This compartment is marked for six, and already nine people have squeezed into it."

"That's so," said John, "and there are men sitting on their valises in the corridors. An enormously large proportion of them are officers, and I've noticed that great crowds are gathered at every station we pass. The Austrians seem to get a lot of excitement out of a war with a little country like Servia, in which the odds in their favor are at least twenty to one."

"The Austrians are a polite, agreeable, but volatile race," said Mr. Anson. "They are brave, but in war they are usually beaten. Napoleon made his early reputation out of the Austrians. They are – wait a minute, John, and I will read you more about them from this excellent book on Austria that I bought in Dresden."

"Excuse me this time; won't you, sir. We're coming to another station, and the crowd is bigger than ever. I want to see if they cheer us more than they did at the one a few miles back."

When they were beyond the town John turned his attention to the occupants of the compartment who had now increased to ten. They did not differ from ordinary travelers, but his attention was held longest by a young man, not much above his own age. He was handsome and blonde with a fine open face, and John put him down as a Viennese. He knew that the Viennese, although fellow Germans, were much unlike the Berliners, their souls being more akin to those of the French.

He could not remember at what station the young man had boarded the train, but it was evident that he was already weary, as his head rested heavily against the cushion and his eyelids drooped. "A good fellow, I'm sure," said John to himself. "I'd like to know him. I hope he's going on to Vienna with us."

They were well across the Austrian border now, and an officer came through the train, asking for passports. Luckily, John and Mr. Anson had provided themselves with such documents, not because they believed them of any value, but, as John said, they always ran true to form, and if any official paper were offered they meant to have their share of it. Now they found these documents, considered worthless hitherto, very useful. The Austrian officer smiled when he looked at them.

"Amerikanischer," he said, showing his large, even white teeth. "I haf a cousin leeving in New York."

"I've no doubt he's a fine fellow," said John, as the officer passed on, "and I wish I knew him. I believe it's true, Mr. Anson, that we Americans are the spoiled children of the world."

"It's so, John, although I object to the adjective, 'spoiled' and it's so because we're far away, and mind our own business. Of course a democracy like ours does many foolish things, and often we make ourselves look ridiculous, but remember John, that we're an honest, straight-forward people, and it's foreign to all our nature to tread on the weak or cower before the strong."

John thought little of the words then, Mr. Anson preached so much – although he was to remember them later – because his attention was diverted to the young stranger whom the officer was now asking for his passport. The youth – he was little more than such – raised his head languidly from

the cushion and without wholly lifting his weary lids produced his passport from the inside pocket of his coat. John could not keep from seeing the name on it, "August Wilhelm Kempner."

"Ah, from Vienna," said the examining officer, "and your occupation is described here as that of a painter."

"Yes," said the weary youth, "but I fear that it is no occupation at all in times like these."

As he spoke in German John did not understand him, but he knew that he was making some sort of explanation. He also saw that the officer was satisfied, as, smiling with the courtesy common to the Austrians, he passed into the corridor, and entered the next compartment. John, by and by, spoke to young Kempner, using good French – he remembered that many Austrians understood French – and the young man promptly replied but in broken and fragmentary French.

The two managed to carry on a more or less connected conversation, in which several people in the compartment joined freely with scraps of English, French and German, helping out one another, as best they could, and forming a friendly group. It seemed to John that something of the ordinary stiffness prevailing among strangers was relaxed. All of them, men and women, were moved by an unusual emotion and he readily attributed it to the war, although a great state like Austria-Hungary should not become unduly excited over a struggle with a little one like Servia.

But he let Mr. Anson do most of the talking for America, and by and by began to watch through the window again. The green of the rich country rested both eye and brain, and, a war between Austria-Hungary and Servia was not such a tremendous affair. There was always trouble down in that Balkan region. Trouble there, was far less remarkable than the absence of it. As for himself he wanted to see the Danube, which these careless Viennese persisted in calling the Donau, and the fine old capital which had twice turned back the Turks, but not Napoleon.

He soon saw that they would reach Vienna long after the destined time. The stops at every station were long and the waiting crowds thickened. "I did not know so many people were anxious to see our entry into the capital," said John.

"They are numerous, but not more so than we deserve," replied Mr. Anson in the same vein.

It was midnight when they reached Vienna. John bade farewell to Kempner, his companion of the journey to whom he had been strongly attracted, and after the slight customs examination drove away with Mr. Anson to a modest hotel.

It was so late and he was so tired that he thought he would sleep heavily. But sleep passed him by, and it was such a rare thing that John was troubled greatly. What was the matter with him? It could not be all those sounds of shouting and singing that were floating in at the open window! He had slept many a time at home, when the crowds were cheering continuously on election night.

The noise increased, although it was at least two in the morning. He had always heard that Vienna was a gay city, and never slept, but he had scarcely expected such an ebullient night life, and, his curiosity aroused, he rose and dressed.

From his seat at the window he heard the singing much more plainly, and far down the avenue he saw columns of marching men. He could not understand the words they sang, but he knew from the beat of the music that they were Austrian and German patriotic songs, and his curiosity increasing, he went down into the street, nodding to the dozing porter who stood at the door.

He found the streets thronged with a multitude constantly growing larger, and vivid with a pleased excitement. He had no doubt that it was the war with the little Balkan state that caused it all, and he could not refrain from silent criticism of a great nation which made so much ado over a struggle with a country that it outnumbered enormously. But he recalled that the Viennese were a gay, demonstrative people, and their excitement and light-heartedness were certainly infectious.

He was sorry again that he could not speak German, and then he was glad, when he saw young Kempner leaning against a closed window watching the parades. "I suppose that like me you couldn't sleep," he said in French.

Kempner started. He had not seen John's approach, and, for the moment, John almost thought that the look he gave him was not one of welcome. But it passed swiftly. Then he stretched out his hand and replied.

"No, I couldn't. If you who come from across the sea wish to witness the enthusiasm of my countrymen how much more would it appeal to me?"

"Has anything definite happened?"

"Yes, Austria-Hungary declared war on Servia today. It had to come. As our Viennese will tell you the Servians are a race of murderers. They murdered their own king, and now they have murdered our Archduke and Archduchess, heaping another sorrow upon the head of our aged emperor. We will finish them in a week."

John remembered some words of Burke about no one being able to indict a whole nation, and he was about to quote them, but second thought kept him silent. He must not argue with a people, perhaps justly infuriated about what was no business of his. He remained with Kempner, but sensitive and quick to receive impressions he soon concluded that the young Austrian wished to be alone. Perhaps he, too, was going to the war, and would soon have to tell his people good-by. That might account for his absent manner.

John, as soon as he conveniently could, gave an excuse and turned away. Kempner was polite, but did not seek to detain him. The American returned to his hotel, but at the first crossing looked back. He saw the form of Kempner disappearing into a narrow alley. "Taking a short cut home," said John to himself, "and it's what I ought to do, too. I've no business wandering about a strange city at such a time."

The same sleepy porter nodded to him, as he passed in and asked him no questions. Now slumber came quickly and he did not awake for breakfast, until Mr. Anson had pounded long and heavily on his door.

"Get up, John!" he cried. "Here's your uncle to see you, and you a sluggard, lying abed this late!"

John sprang up at the announcement of his uncle's presence. Sleep still lay heavy on his eyelids, and he was in a mental daze, but by the time he reached the door he had come out of it. They had not looked for his uncle the night before, owing to the lateness of the hour, although they were sure that he was stopping at the same hotel.

"Just a moment," he exclaimed, and without waiting to dress he opened the door, admitting the stalwart figure of the Senator, who hurried in to greet his favorite nephew.

"Jackie, my lad," he cried in a loud voice which had become oratorical from much use on the stump. "The sight of you is good for weak eyes. I'm always glad to see any American, any member of the finest race on God's earth, but I'm particularly glad to see you – they do say you look like me when I was a boy – although I'm bound to tell you that you're more than half asleep, on this your first morning in Vienna."

"I slipped out late to hear the shouting and singing and see the crowds, Uncle Jim. I haven't been in bed more than three or four hours. The city was so much awake that I had to stay awake, too."

"Well, don't you do it again. Always get your sleep, especially when you are on foreign travel. It's as hard work as political campaigning in the states, and that, Jackie, my boy, is no soft snap, as I ought to know, having done it more than thirty years."

Senator James Pomeroy, a western man, was something past sixty, of medium height, portly, partly bald, but heavy of mustache and with a short pointed beard. His eyes were gray, his face full, and he was of great physical strength. He was self-made and the job was no discredit to him. His nature was simple and open. America was the finest country, had the finest government and the finest people on earth, and the state of which he was the senior Senator was the choicest flower of the flowery flock.

"There was enough to keep a fellow awake," he said, "but I always sleep well. You must learn to do it, if you expect to achieve a success of life. When I was making my first campaign for the Lower

House of our state, and I was barely old enough to be eligible, I lay awake and fretted over the votes that might be lacking to me when election came. I at last said to myself: 'Don't do it! Don't do it!' You may roll and you may tumble, but it won't win you a single vote. It's the smooth work you've done before that brings 'em in. Now, hustle on your clothes, Jackie, lad, and we'll have breakfast, not one of these thin continental affairs, but a real breakfast, if I have to go in the kitchen myself and seize it."

"What about this war, Uncle Jim?"

"A small affair, soon over. We came very near having one, too, with Mexico, but luckily we've got a president who doesn't play to the gallery, and he sat hard on the war-maniacs. I think I was of some little assistance to him myself in that crisis. But, my boy, Europe is the pet home of war scares. They're always coming across the Atlantic by mail and wire. 'War clouds in the Balkans!' 'Eastern question sets Europe by the ears!' 'France plots to get back Alsace-Lorraine and Germany arms!' 'German Kaiser warns Austrian Kaiser against Triple Entente!' Bang! Boom! everybody going to war in the next five minutes – but they don't. You'll find 'em all a half hour later in the cafés, eating and drinking. Europe can't fight, because there isn't time between meals. They eat five times a day here, and they eat long at a time. How could they possibly sandwich in a war. I'm sixty-two years old, and as far back as I can remember European war clouds have been passing like little summer clouds, and they will continue to pass long after you're an old man, Jackie. I make that statement deliberately, and I challenge successful contradiction."

He expanded his great chest, and looked around with an air of defiance. It was his favorite oratorical manner, now grown into a habit. But no one challenged him, and they went to a bountiful breakfast, for which the Senator paid willingly, demanding no greater return than the attention of the others while he talked.

Later in the day the three drove together in the grounds of Schönbrunn, and John's thoughts passed for a while to the great Corsican who had slept there, and who had led his army to victory over this the haughtiest of European monarchies, and perhaps for that reason the weakest. The tremendous convulsion upon which Napoleon had ridden to such dazzling heights seemed to him impossible: it was clearly impossible according to all the rules of logic, and yet it had occurred. That was the most startling period in the history of the modern world, and, forgetting what was about him, he tried to evoke it from the past.

He was recalled to the present by their driver, an eager Austrian, who asked them in broken English if they wished to see the old emperor arrive home from Ischl. He pointed with his whip to an open space, adjoining the Schönbrunn grounds, where people were already gathering.

"Of course, my good man," replied Senator Pomeroy in oratorical tones. "We will go to see the emperor, but only as an object of curiosity. Far be it from me to pay any homage to the representative of a decayed system. I look on, merely as a free American citizen, no better and no worse than the millions whom I strive to the best of my ability to represent in our National legislative halls. Get us in as close as you can, driver."

John was frankly eager. He disliked the military monarchies as much as the Senator did, but he wanted to see the old emperor at whom fate had shot so many cruel arrows. His carriage was to come down a certain street from the railway station, and their skillful driver maneuvered them to the very edge of it. The crowd was immense, and it was electric with excitement. It was no ordinary occasion and all the emotions of the excitable Viennese had been aroused.

As far as John could see the multitude ran, and the packed heads seemed to rise and fall like waves of the sea. Troops in magnificent uniforms of the most vivid colors were everywhere. The day itself seemed to be ablaze with their gorgeousness. If John had been asked to define the chief difference between Europe and America he would have replied that it was a matter of uniforms.

The crowd which seemed already to fill every space nevertheless grew larger, and waves of emotion ran through it. John did not think they could be defined in any other way. At home people differed in their opinions, every man to his own, but here they appeared to receive them from

somebody higher up, and the crowd always swayed together, to this point or that, according to the directing power.

He had never before seen so much emotional excitement. Vienna's thrill, so obvious the night before, had carried over into the day, increasing as it went along, and it was a happy intoxication, infectious in its nature. He began to feel it in his own veins, although his judgment told him that it was no business of his. Yet the brilliant uniforms, the shimmer of steel, the vast shifting crowd of eager faces, the deep and unbroken murmur of anticipation would have moved an older and dryer mind.

Anticipatory shouts arose. They were in German, but John knew that they meant: "He comes!" Nevertheless "he," which was the Emperor, did not yet come, and the crowd thickened and thickened. He saw the people stretching along leafy avenues, and in the distance they were wedged into a solid mass, faces and figures running together, until they presented the complete likeness of the waving sea.

"A strange sight and highly interesting," said the Senator oratorically. "It must take generations of education to teach a people to make a symbol of one man. And yet if we could get at the reality we'd surely find him a poor and broken creature."

"Man doesn't always grow according to his nature, he's shaped by continual pressure," said Mr. Anson.

John scarcely heard either of them, because he saw far down the avenue that the waves of the human sea were rolling higher than before. An increasing volume of sound also came from that solid sheet of faces, and it seemed to part slightly in the center, as if a sword had been thrust between. Carriages, automobiles and the flame of uniforms appeared in the cut. A roar like thunder arose from two hundred thousand people.

John knew that the Emperor, in truth, was now coming. Such a spontaneous outburst could be for nothing else, and, in spite of every effort of the will, his own excitement increased. He leaned forward for a better view and just in front of their carriage he saw a slender upright figure that looked familiar. A second glance told him that it was Kempner.

"Oh, Kempner!" he called, full of friendly feeling. "Come here with us. You can see better!"

Kempner glanced up, and John distinctly saw a shadow come over his face. Then he looked at them as one looks at strangers with a blank, uncomprehending gaze, and the next instant slipped with extraordinary agility into some crevice of the crowd and disappeared.

John flushed. Kempner's conduct was both rude and strange. He glanced at his uncle and Mr. Anson, but they, absorbed in the coming of the Emperor, had neither seen nor heard, and he was glad. His own attention now turned to the event of the moment, because the mighty roar was increasing in volume and coming nearer, and down the opening lane a carriage followed by others was speeding. Along either side of the lane the soldiers were packed so closely that they formed a living wall, but John, standing up in their own carriage, saw over their heads.

He saw an old, old man in splendid uniform, sitting by the side of an impassive officer also in a splendid uniform. The old man's cheeks were sunken, and the heavy-lidded eyes stared straight before him. He sat erect, but whether it was his own strength or the arrangement of the seat John could not tell. His hand flew up, forward, then down, and up forward and down again in automatic salute.

He was so near presently that it was only a spear's length over the heads of the soldiers. Then John saw how truly old he was, and suddenly his heart revolted. Why should this old, old man, broken by appalling sorrows, be dragged out to have wars made in his name? The schemers and plotters, whoever they were might let him rest in peace.

The carriage flashed on, and behind it came the others as fast. They would not linger, to give a chance for bombs and knives. In an instant the emperor was gone through the gates of Schönbrunn, and first the soldiers and then the roaring crowd closed in behind.

The Senator gave the order, and their carriage drove slowly away, the three discussing what they had seen while the happy driver exulted over the glorious show, so dear to the heart of a Viennese.

But John once more thought the excitement was not warranted by a little war with a little country like Servia.

They devoted three or four days to Vienna, a capital, they had often heard, as gay as Paris, and certainly splendid in appearance, but pleasure seemed to hang fire. There was a cloud over the city, the cheering and singing parades went on all through the nights, but at times in the day the spirits of men seemed to droop.

John told himself over and over again that this heavy change in the atmosphere was not justified by the size of Servia. The three of them once more and often bewailed their lack of German. People talked all around them and they heard nothing. Austrians who hitherto had a fair knowledge of English forgot it entirely, when they were asked questions.

The Senator in the privacy of their rooms thundered and thundered. He hated all this secrecy. He wondered what those men were doing at Schönbrunn in the name of the old Emperor. As for himself he liked the arena of public life in the United States, where you rolled up your sleeves – such was his metaphor – and told what you were for and what you were against, without fear or favor. Democracies did wrong or rather foolish things, but in them it was impossible for a few military leaders, hid in a palace, to play with the lives of hundreds of thousands.

John, although saying nothing, agreed with him fully. The last three or four days had depressed him in a manner unusual in one so young. His silent rebuff by Kempner had hurt his spirit to an extent far beyond the nature of the incident, and, realizing it, he wondered why. He kept a sharp watch in the streets for the young Austrian, but he did not see him again.

At last there came a time when the greatest of all thunderbolts fell. It was the simple hand of a waiter that caused it to fall. The others had finished their coffee and rolls at breakfast and had gone out, leaving John alone at the table.

"What is the matter with Vienna?" he said casually to the waiter, who he knew could speak English.

The man hesitated, then he leaned over and said in a fearful whisper:

"It's not a little war. It's not just a war with Servia which we can finish in a week, but it's to be such a war as the world has never seen."

John started, looked up at the man. His face was intensely earnest. How should one in his humble calling have news of such import? And yet at Dresden he had been warned by another waiter, and warned truly.

"Are you sure?" he asked.

"Yes, sir, they're all going into it. Europe will be covered with armies!"

"When?"

"In a few hours! Now, sir! Oh, I can't say any more!"

He hurried away, leaving John convinced that he told the truth. It was stunning, appalling, unbelievable, impossible, but he believed it nevertheless. There were underground channels of communication and true news might come by the way of the kitchen as well as the palace. He was absolutely convinced that he had heard a fact. Now he knew the cause of that heaviness and depression in the atmosphere. Well the clouds might gather, when such a thunderbolt as a general war was going to fall!

He immediately hunted up his uncle and Mr. Anson who had not yet left the hotel, and told them what he had heard. Conviction seized them also.

"It's come at last, this European war! after a thousand false alarms, it's come!" said the Senator, "and my boy, Vienna is no place for three honest Americans who do not work in the dark. I say it, and I say it without fear of contradiction, that it behooves us to flee westward with all the speed we can."

"You won't hear any contradiction from me," said Mr. Anson. "Vienna is a fine city, but nothing becomes it more than our leaving it. Which way do we go?"

"There's a train in two hours for Salzburg and Munich," suggested John.

"Hurried packing," said the Senator, "but we can do it. Get ready the baggage you two and I'll pay the bills. We'll go to Salzburg and sleep there tonight, and tomorrow we'll reach Munich. The more I think about this the less I like it. Why didn't we read all those signs earlier! I suppose it's because we'd heard the false cry of wolf so many dozens of times."

John and Mr. Anson made all speed with the baggage while the Senator paid the bills, and, as they drove in their cab to the station, the three felt more than ever the need of haste. The clouds seemed to be shutting down completely on Vienna. John felt that it was hard to breathe, but he knew it was the effect of the imagination. He was oppressed by a sense of an impending and appalling catastrophe, something more tremendous than anything that the world had yet experienced. He had an impression that he had come to the end of an era, and the impression was all the more powerful because it had been made so suddenly.

They passed through an excited station filled with a swirling crowd, and secured places on a train, they scarcely knew how. Here people sat and stood upon one another, and, as the train sped westward, they knew that the storm was bursting with terrific violence. The nervous people around them no longer restrained themselves. Europe was to be swept with fire and sword, but above all the Germans and Austrians were going to smash up France. They dwelt most upon that. The French and the French Republic must go. There was no longer a place for them in the world.

To John's modest wish that France would not come into it they gave a stare and frown of disapproval. France had to come in, she must come in, the two German powers would see that she was smitten down as a nation was never overwhelmed before. Oh, no, Britain would do nothing. Of course she wouldn't. She'd stay behind her barrier of the sea, and, perhaps, at the last when the spoils of war were to be snatched from the exhausted combatants, she'd step in and snatch them. No, they needn't consider Britain, and Germany and Austria could easily dispose of France and Russia.

Much of this was said in English and French to the three travelers and John's heart sickened. Poor France! Why should she be smashed up! Why should the French nation be exterminated? He did not forget that France was a republic like his own country. She had been beaten once by Germany – and the victor's terms were hard – and whatever her faults had been that was enough. He did not like Frenchmen personally any better than Germans, but at that moment his sympathies went to the French and he felt a great pity for France.

The train crept along, and, after double the usual time, they reached Salzburg, where they passed an uneasy night, and, the next day, boarded another train which was to cross the German border and take them to Munich. It, too, was packed with an excited mass of humanity, and as John passed along the corridor he saw Kempner in one of the compartments.

Remembering his previous rebuffs he intended to take no notice, but the young Austrian nodded at him and smiled.

"I see that you flee," he said in his broken French, "and you do well to flee. Europe is aflame."

"That's so," said John, "and, since it's no fire of ours, we Americans mean to be on the Atlantic foam, as soon as we can."

As there was a vacant seat in the compartment and Kempner seemed very friendly now, John sat down to talk a little. He longed occasionally for companionship of his own age, and his heart warmed again to the young Austrian.

"I see that you're running, too," said John.

"Yes," smiled Kempner. "I'm a man of peace, a painter, or rather I would be one, and as my heart is a little weak I'm not drawn for military service. I'm on my way to Munich, where I mean to study the galleries."

"I'm going to Munich, too," said John. "So we can travel together."

"Then if we expect to reach Munich we'd better jump out now. Quick!"

"What for?"

"It seems that this is the Austrian border, and trains are not crossing it now, owing to the mobilization. A German train has come to meet us. Look, most of the passengers have transferred already!"

John saw his uncle and Mr. Anson standing on the steps of the German train and looking about vainly for him. There had been no announcement of the change, and, annoyed, he ran down the corridor and sprang to the ground, closely followed by Kempner.

"Passporten! passporten!" shouted some one, putting a strong hand on his arm.

John saw his uncle and Mr. Anson going into the German train, evidently thinking that he was inside, and his alarm increased.

"Amerikanischer! Amerikanischer!" he said to the Austrian officer, who was holding his arm and demanding his passport. The officer shook his head and spoke voluble German. John did not understand it, but he knew that the man at such a time would insist upon seeing his passport. Kempner just behind him was in the same bad case.

The whistle of departure sounded from the train, and John, in despair, tore at the passport in an inside pocket. He saw that the officer would never be able to read it in time, and he endeavored to snatch himself from the detaining grasp. But the Austrian hung on firmly.

As he fairly thrust the document in the face of the official he saw the wheels of the coaches moving.

"I'll come on the next train!" he shouted to the air.

The officer looked over the passport deliberately and handed it back. The train was several hundred yards down the track.

"Now, yours," he said to Kempner, and the young man passed it to him.

"August Wilhelm Kempner," said the officer, and then he added, looking the young man squarely in the eye: "I happen to know August William Kempner who lives in Vienna and he bears no resemblance to you. How do you happen to have his passport?"

"That I won't explain to you," said the false Kempner, and suddenly he struck him a stunning blow on the temple with his clenched fist.

The officer, strong though he was, went down unconscious.

"Run! Run! Follow me!" exclaimed the young man. "They'll think you were my comrade and it may mean your death!"

His action had been so violent, and he spoke with such vehemence that John was mentally overborne. Driven by a powerful impulse he followed the flying man.

Kempner, for so John still called him, darted into a narrow street not wider than an alley, leading between two low houses. He had had no opportunity hitherto to observe the border place in which they had stopped. It was small, but like many of the old European towns it was very closely built, and some of its streets were scarcely wide enough for two abreast.

The fugitives ran swiftly. Kempner evidently knew the place, as he sprang in and out with amazing agility, and the sounds of pursuit died in a minute or two. Then he darted between two buildings that almost touched, entered a small churchyard in the rear of a Gothic church and threw himself down behind a great tombstone. And even as he did so he pulled John down beside him.

As they lay close, still trembling from exertion and excitement, Kempner said to John, and now he spoke in perfect French:

"Since I got you into this trouble I think it my duty to get you out of it again if I can. Of course the people of the town saw us running, and I rushed through that narrow passage in order to evade their sight."

His tone had a dry and quaint touch of humor and John, despite his exhaustion and alarm, could not keep from replying in a similar vein.

"If I don't owe you thanks for the first statement I do at least for the second. I don't know German, and so I couldn't understand what you and that Austrian officer said, but I fancy your name is not Kempner."

"No. It's not, and I'm not an Austrian. I'm a Frenchman, for which I return thanks to the good God. Not that Americans are not great and noble people, but it's a fortunate thing that so many of us are satisfied with our birth."

"I was thinking so when you announced with such pride that you were a Frenchman."

The other laughed softly.

"A fair hit," he said, "and I laid myself open to it."

"Now since you're not August William Kempner, and are not an Austrian, will you kindly tell me your name and your nation, as in any event I am no enemy of yours and will betray you to nobody."

"My race, as you might infer from the beauty and purity with which I speak my native language, is French, and my name, which I no longer have a motive in concealing from you, is Philip Lannes. I'm a collateral descendant of Napoleon's great marshal, Lannes, and I'm willing to boast of it."

"Occupation – I will risk another inference – is something like that of a spy."

The Frenchman looked keenly at the American and again laughed lightly.

"You're not far wrong," he said. "It was the passport of another man that I carried, and I happened to meet an official who knew better. It was mere chance that you were with me at the time and would have been taken for my comrade. Didn't you know that a great war was going to burst?"

"I've just learned it."

"And one of the objects of those who are making the war is to smash my country, France. How could one serve her better than by learning the preparations and forces against her? Oh, I've been among the Austrians and I've been watching them! They've made some terrible mistakes. But then the Austrians always make mistakes. There's an old saying that what the Austrian crown loses by war it wins back by marriage. But I don't think royal marriages count for so much in these days. Lie close! I think I hear soldiers in the alley!"

John hugged the earth in the shadow of the great tombstone.

CHAPTER III
THE REFUGE

John Scott, in those moments of hiding and physical exhaustion, had little time to think, yet he was dimly conscious that he, an American who meant to meddle in the business of nobody, had fallen into a most extraordinary situation. By a sudden mischance he had lost in a few moments his uncle and the man who was at once his comrade and tutor, and now he had been running for his life with a stranger.

Yet he obeyed the warning words of Lannes and fairly tried to burrow into the earth. The name, Lannes, had exerted at once a great influence over him. The career of Napoleon had fascinated him, and of all his marshals the brave and democratic Lannes had appealed to him most. And now he was hiding with one who had in his veins kindred blood of this great and gallant figure.

Despite his anxiety John turned a little and looked at the young Frenchman who lay beside him. Lannes was but a year or two older than the American. Tall, slender, narrow of waist, and broad of chest and shoulders he seemed built for both agility and strength. He was fair of hair and gray of eye. But those gray eyes were his most remarkable feature. They were intensely bright, and the light in them seemed to shift and change, but no matter what the change might be they were always gay and merry. John surmised that he was one of the few, who by a radiant presence, are born to be a source of joy to the world, and time was to confirm him in his opinion.

"Luckily the big tombs of dead and forgotten Germans rise on either side of us," whispered Lannes, "and the chances are good that we won't be discovered, but we must keep on lying close. We're on the German side in this town and the Germans will look longer than the Austrians. They're at the end of the alley now, not thirty feet away."

John heard them marching. The thump, thump of solid German feet was plainly audible. It was a sound that he was to hear again, and again, and never forget, that heavy thump, thump of the marching German feet, a great military empire going forward to crush or be crushed. Even in those moments he was impressed less by his sense of personal danger than by his feeling that a nation was on the march.

"They've turned," said Lannes, and John heard the thump, thump of the feet passing away. But he and the young Frenchman lay still, until the last echo had died. Then Lannes sat up and peeped over the edge of one of the tombs.

"They'll search elsewhere," he said, "but they won't come here again. We'll have to be cautious, however, as they'll never stop, until they've gone all through the town. Trust the Germans for that. Now aren't you glad I brought you among the tombs? Could we have found a better hiding place?"

His manner was so gay and light-hearted that John found it infectious. Yet, he was resolved not to yield entirely. He had been dragged or pushed into too desperate a quandary.

"Suppose they don't find us now, what then?" he asked. "It may be all right for you, but as for me, my uncle and my friend are on the way to Munich, and I'm marooned in a land, the language of which I don't understand."

"But you're with me!"

"So I am, but you're a stranger. You belong to a country with which Germany is at war or going to war. You're a spy, and if you're caught, which is highly probable, you'll be hanged or shot, and because I'm with you they'll do the same to me."

Lannes plucked a grass stem and chewed it thoughtfully, although his eyes at no time lost their cheerful twinkle.

"I do seem to have plunged you into a whole lake of trouble," he said at length. "I'll admit that my own neck is in the halter, and it behooves me to escape as soon as I can, but don't think I'll ever neglect you. I mean to see that you get to Munich and rejoin your friends."

"How?"

"It's a secret for the present, confined to me. But trust me! can't you?"

His speech had glided from French into English so good that it was colloquial, and of the vernacular. Now he looked directly into John's eyes, and John, looking back, saw only truth in their gray smiling depths. There are some things that we feel, instinctively, and with overwhelming power, and he knew that the young Frenchman would be as true as steel. He held out his hand and said:

"I believe every word you say. I'll ask no questions, but wait for what happens."

Lannes took the outstretched hand and gave it a grasp of extraordinary power. The joyous lights in his wonderful gray eyes shifted and changed with extraordinary rapidity.

"I like you, John Scott, you Yankee," he said. "You and I will be the best of friends and for life. Thus does the great American republic, which is you, pledge eternal friendship with France, the great European republic, which is me."

"You put it well, and now what are we going to do?"

"Graveyards are good places, my old – my old, being as you know, a translation of *mon vieux*, a term of friendship, becoming to you because of your grave demeanor – but it's not well to stay in them too long. You've noticed doubtless that the skies are darkening over the spur of the Alps toward Salzburg?"

"And what then?"

"It means that we must seek quarters for the night, and night is always friendly to fugitives. I promised that I'd take you to your friends in Munich – I can't do it in an hour or even in two, although I'll lead you to food and a bed, which are not to be despised. But we must wait a little longer."

"Until night comes fully?"

"Truly, until it's complete night. And, fortunately for you, it will be very dark, as I see plenty of clouds sailing in this direction from the mountains."

John, who was lying on his back, looked toward the south, and saw that the crests of the peaks and ridges were already dim with somber masses floating northward and westward. The air was growing cooler, and, in a half hour, the ancient churchyard was sure to be veiled in darkness. For the present Philip and he relapsed into silence, and John's thoughts traveled anxiously toward his uncle and Mr. Anson. What would they think had become of him? He knew that the Senator who was very fond of him would be alarmed greatly, and it was a bad time in Europe for any one to be missing.

But there was stern stuff in John Scott, and knowing that they must wait he put anxiety from him as much as he could and waited.

The heavy clouds, although they did not give forth rain, swept up, and brought black darkness with them. The white tombstones became pale, and the town beyond was invisible. Lannes rose and stretched himself deliberately, limb by limb.

"Are you willing, John Scott?" he asked, "to follow me and ask no questions?"

"Yes, Philip Lannes, I am."

"Well, then, John – I think I'll call you that because you and I are friends, and you may say Philip, too, which will save time – I'm going to lead you to temporary safety and comfort. I'll tell you, too, enough to assuage your curiosity. There's a little Huguenot quarter to this town. Louis Quatorze, as you know, drove many good people out of France. Some went to your own new land, but the majority settled in the surrounding countries. They've intermarried chiefly with themselves, and, after more than two hundred years on foreign soil, many of them still have French hearts in French bodies."

"Lead on then. I think I'd like to meet these good Huguenots. I'm growing tremendously hungry, Philip."

"Hunger is frequent in a great war. You'll grow used to it."

His manner took away any sting that his words might have contained. John could yet see those wonderful gray eyes shining through the twilight, and his heart warmed anew to the young Frenchman. If he were to be cast away in this strange German town Lannes was just the comrade whom he would have chosen.

"We're resurrected," continued Lannes, "and we'll leave our graveyard. May it be a long time before I enter another! And yet with a world going to war who can tell?"

But the touch of gravity was only for an instant. The joyous note quickly returned to his voice.

"Keep by my side," he said, "and walk in the most careless manner, as if you were a native of the town. If anybody asks question let me make all the replies. God gave me one special gift, and it was an easy tongue. It's not work for me to talk. I like to do it."

"And I like to hear you," said John.

"Which leaves us both satisfied. Now, it's lucky for us that our old European towns are so very old. In the Middle Ages they built with narrow streets, and all sorts of alleys and passages. Leading from the cemetery is just the sort of passage that you and I need at this time. Ah, here it is, and luckily it's empty!"

They had crossed the narrow street beyond the cemetery, and were looking into a dark tunnel between two low stone houses. No one was in sight. Lannes stepped without hesitation into the tunnel.

"Keep with me," he said, repeating his injunction, "and we'll soon be under shelter."

His manner was so cheerful, so confident that John instinctively believed him, and walked boldly by his side into the well of darkness. But as his eyes grew used to it he made out the walls crumbling with age and dripping with damp. Then the sound of heavy feet came thundering down the passage.

"Some one leading a horse," whispered Lannes. "There's a stable on our right. It's nothing. Seem not to notice as you pass."

The thunder of the feet, magnified in the confined space, increased, and presently John saw a boy leading one of those huge-footed horses, used for draft in Europe. The animal stepped slowly and heavily, and the boy was half asleep. John and Philip, hovering in the shadow of the wall, passed him so lightly that doubtless he was not conscious of their presence.

The Frenchman turned into a tributary alley, narrower and darker than the other, and Lannes knocked at a heavy oaken doorway, before which a small lantern cast a dim light. John had good eyes, and accustomed to the heavy shadows, he saw fairly well.

He concealed an imaginative temperament under a quiet manner, and he was now really back in the Middle Ages. It must have been at least four or five hundred years since people lived up little alleys like this. And the door with its heavy iron bands, the shuttered window above it, and the dim lantern that lighted the passage could belong only to long ago. The house and its neighbors seemed to have been built as much for defense as for habitation.

Lannes knocked again, and then John heard inside the soft tread of feet, and the lifting of heavy bars. It was another mediæval touch, and he swung yet further back into the past. The door was opened slightly and the face of an elderly woman appeared at the crevice.

"It's Philip Lannes with a friend, Mother Krochburg," said the young Frenchman in a whisper, "and friend as you've often been to me I never needed the friendship of you and your house more than I do now."

She said something in German and opened the door wider. Lannes and John pressed in, and she instantly closed it behind them, putting the heavy bars in place. They stood in complete darkness, but they heard her moving about, and presently she lighted a small lamp which did not dispel the shadows beyond the range of a few feet.

But as she stood in the center of the beams the woman was outlined clearly for John. She was at least sixty, but she was tall and strong, and bore herself like a grenadier. She was looking at Lannes, and John had never beheld a gaze of more intense, burning curiosity.

"Well?" she said, and to John's surprise she now spoke in French. Lannes gave back her gaze with one fully as concentrated and burning.

"Angelique Krochburg, wife of Paul Krochburg, descendant of the Krochburgs, rightly called the Crochevilles," he said, drawing himself up and speaking with wonderful distinctness, "it has come at last."

"The war! The great war!" she said in a sharp whisper. John noticed that her strong figure trembled.

"Yes, the great war!" returned Lannes with dramatic intensity. "Germany declares war today on Russia. I know it. No matter how I know it, but I know it. She will make war on France tomorrow, and it will be the first object of her princes and military caste to destroy our republic. They reckon that with the aid of Austria they will rule the whole continent, and that in time the tread of their victorious armies will be heard all over the world."

The woman drew a breath so deep and sharp that it made a hissing sound between her teeth. John saw the lamp in her hand trembling.

"Then Philip Lannes," she said, "which is it to be – the peoples or the kings?"

Lannes drew himself up again – John recognized the dramatic quality in him – and replied in words that he shot forth like bullets:

"The peoples. Armies can be defeated, but nations cannot be put down. Our Napoleon, despite his matchless genius, found it so in his later empire. And they have reckoned ill at Berlin and Vienna. The world in alarm at military domination will be against them. They say the English won't fight and will keep out. But Mother Krochburg or Crocheville – I prefer the sound of Crocheville – we French know better. A thousand years of our history say that the English will fight. We have Agincourt and Cressy and Poitiers and La Belle Alliance to say that they will fight. And now they will fight again, but on our side. The bravest of our ancient enemies will stand with us, brothers in arms, shoulder to shoulder against an arrogant foe!"

"Do you know this, Philip Lannes, or is it some dream of that hopeful brain of yours?"

"It's not a dream. I know it. It hasn't been long since I was among the English. They will have to join us. The German threat will force them to it. Blinded by their own narrow teachings the generals at Berlin and Vienna cannot see the storm they've let loose. Ah, Madame Crocheville, it's more than two hundred years since any of your people have lived in France, but you are as true a Frenchwoman as if your feet had never pressed any but French soil!"

"There is truth in that wild head of yours."

"And the time of France and the French is coming. The republic has restored us. The terrible year of 1870 will be avenged. French valor and skill will bloom again!"

John had stood on one side, while they talked or rather allowed their emotions to shoot forth in words. But he was watching them intently, bent slightly forward, and, like Parsifal, he had never moved by the breadth of a single hair. The woman now glanced toward him.

"He can be trusted?" she asked Lannes.

"Absolutely. His head is in the German noose. He must do as we bid or that noose will close."

The gay ring had returned to Lannes' voice and a faint smile crossed the face of Madame Crocheville.

"It's the best of securities," she said, and John, compelled to acknowledge its truth, bowed.

"Who are pursuing you," she asked.

"Nobody at present," replied Lannes. "I'd have passed the border safely, but a pig of an Austrian officer happened to know the man whose passport I have. It was one chance in a thousand, and it went against me. My friend here is an American, and, as he was dragged into it, we must save him."

"It's likely that you need both food and rest as well as concealment."

"We do, and thank you for what we know we are going to receive."

She smiled again faintly. John surmised that she had a warm place in her heart for Lannes. Who would not? He was as light-hearted now as if he had come to a ball and not to a refuge. His eyes moved about the room and he seemed pleased with all he saw.

"Food and a little of the good wine that I've found here before would be indeed most welcome," he said, "and I speak for my new American friend as well as myself."

"Come!" she said briefly, and the two followed, as she led the way into a passage not more than wide enough for one, and then up a stone stairway into a room ventilated by only a single narrow window.

"Wait here," she said. She closed the door and John heard the huge German key turning in the lock. But the slit of a window was open, and he saw in the room two beds, a table, two chairs and some other furniture. The ceiling was low and sloping and John knew that they were directly under the eaves.

Lannes threw himself into one of the chairs and drew several mighty breaths.

"We're locked in, John," he said, "but it's for our good. Nobody can get at us, while Madame Crocheville holds the key, and she'll hold it. More than two hundred years on German soil, and still French, heart and soul. There must be something great and true in France, when she can inspire such far-flung devotion. That isn't a bad place, John. As the French general said in the Crimea, *'J'y suis, j'y reste'* and I'm resting now."

"She knows all about you, I take it?"

"Of course. I've been here before, often. That little window looks out into a tiny court, and you'd probably be amazed at the amount of luxury to be found in this place. This old Europe of ours is often far better than it looks."

"I didn't see the man of the house."

"Oh, yes you did. Frau Krochburg or Madame Crocheville, if you wish secretly to call her so, is very much the man of the house. There is a Herr Krochburg, but he won't come in our way now. Madame will do everything for us at present. I've touched a spark of fire to her soul, and it has blazed up. Those Huguenots of long ago were really republicans, and it's republican France now, for the success of which she prays with every breath she draws."

"She's locked us in pretty securely. I heard that big German key turn."

"To keep others from getting at us. Not to keep us from getting out. Now, I hear it turning again, and I'll wager that she's coming back with something that will rejoice us to the core."

The door opened and Madame Crocheville walked into the room, bearing a large tray which she placed upon a chair until she could close and lock the door again. Then she bore it to the table and John looked at it with great longing. He was young, he was healthy and he had a digestion beyond criticism.

"I told you so," exclaimed Lannes triumphantly, "and look, Madame Crocheville has brought us her best – a bottle of the light, white wine made in this very district, and good! You can dismiss your American scruples – it's very mild – filet of beef, tender, too, baked potatoes, salad, bread and butter and cheese. It is truly fit for a king. Madame Crocheville, two young and starving souls, thank you."

A smile lighted up her stern, almost masculine features. Then her face, in truth, looked feminine and tender.

"You're wild and reckless, but you're a good boy, Philip Lannes," she said, "and I know that you'd willingly lay down your life for the France that I've never seen, but which I love. You say again that the great war is at hand."

"It has come. In a few days four hundred million people will be in it, and I know that France will come out of it with all her ancient glory and estate."

"I hope and pray so," she said fervently, and then she left them.

The two ate and drank with wonderfully keen appetites, but they did not forget their manners. John noticed that Philip was extremely fastidious at the table, and he liked him the better for it. And the food was wonderfully good. John felt new life and strength flowing into his veins.

"I suppose we stay here tonight," he said.

"Yes it would be dangerous for us to leave so soon. Madame Crocheville will take good care of us tonight and tomorrow, and tomorrow night we'll leave."

"I don't see just how we'll go," said John. "There are German troops in this town, as we know, and even if we could get out of it, where then would we be. I want to go to Munich, and you, I take it, want to reach France. We can't go by land and we can't go by water. How then can we go?"

"No, we can't go by either land or water, but we'll go in another way. Yes, we'll surely do it. This filet is certainly good. Take another piece. You haven't tasted the tomato salad yet, and it's fine. No, I won't tell you how we're going, because in every affair of life there's always a possible slip. You just wait upon the event, and learn patience. Patience is a wonderful quality to have, I ought to know. I've seen how much it does for others, and how often I've suffered from the lack of it."

"I'll wait, because I have to. You're right about the filet. It's good. I think I'll take some more of it."

"You can't have it. Pig of an American, it would be your third piece."

"But it would be your third, too!"

"I know it, but I saw its merits first. So, I get a discoverer's third as a reward. Feel a lot better, don't you, John?"

"I feel like a general now. Where did you learn such good, every-day English."

"Studied it ten years at school, and then I lived two years in that great, splendid unkempt country of yours. Mind your step! Good-by, little girl, good-by! We must get the men higher up! Tariff for Revenue only! Hurrah for the Goddess of Liberty! Our glorious American eagle bathes one wing in Lake Superior and the other in the Gulf of Mexico! Our foreign commerce would be larger if it were not for our grape-juice diplomacy! Now for the Maxixe and the Hesitation all at the same time!"

He sprang from his chair and whirled and jerked about the room in a kind of wild Apache dance. John laughed until his eyes grew wet.

"You've been there," he said, as Lannes sat down again, panting. "You've proved it, and I no longer wonder at your fine colloquial English."

"I like your country and I like you Americans," said Lannes seriously. "You are the favorite children of the world, and I say children purposely, because you are children. You think you are terribly wicked, but you're not wicked at all. You're mere amateurs in vice compared with the hoary and sinful nations of Europe. We're more quiet about it, but we practice tricks that you never dream of. We've made you think you're dollar-worshipers, but while the dollars are dropping through your fingers, John, we're hanging on to the francs, and marks, and shillings, and rubles and gulden and pesos and kronen with a grasp that death itself often fails to break."

John did not know whether to be pleased or displeased, but finally concluded to be pleased.

"Perhaps you're telling the truth," he said.

"I know I am. But here comes Madame Crocheville for the dishes. She will also say: 'Good night my wild and reckless but gallant Philip, and the same to you young American stranger.'"

"How do you know?"

"Never mind how I know. I know."

Madame Crocheville came in and she looked at the two with satisfaction. Their appearance had improved greatly under the ministrations of her good food and drink. She put the dishes on her tray and went to the door. When she had turned the key she looked back and said:

"Good night, my wild and reckless but gallant Philip, and the same to you, young American stranger."

Then she went out, closed the door, and the two heard the big key turning again in the lock. The young Frenchman looked at the young American and smiled in content.

"How did you know so exactly?" asked John.

"Just call it an uncommonly accurate guess. Now, I think I'll put out the lamp. The light from the window is sufficient for us, and we don't want to take any unnecessary risk."

He blew out the light, but John went to the window, and looked out on the tiny court or place, on the far side of which ran a street so narrow that it would have been called an alley at home.

He could not see much owing to the thick darkness, and it had begun to rain also. The air was chill and heavy with damp. John shivered. Fate had played him a weird trick by causing him to lose his train, but she had atoned for it partly by giving him this brave young Frenchman as a comrade. It was wonderfully snug and comfortable in the house of Madame Crocheville, called by her fellow townsmen and townswomen Frau Krochburg.

"I'm glad it's not a part of your plan for us to escape tonight, Philip," he said.

"And what's the cause of your gladness."

"It's raining, and it's as cold as winter. I like this place, and I think I'll go to bed."

"A good plan. Everything is ready for us."

There was a little adjoining room, in which they found water, towels and could make all the other preparations for the night, and John, feeling a sudden great weariness, made ready. When he was in bed he saw Lannes still at the window.

"Better crawl in, too, Philip," he called. "This is a fine bed, and I fancy the other is just as good."

"I'll join you in slumber land soon. Good night."

John closed his eyes, and in a few minutes he was sleeping soundly. He was first to awake the next morning, and he saw that it was a gray day. The rain had ceased, but there was no one in the little court or street beyond. Philip slept soundly, and, as it was early, John did not awake him. But he rose and dressed shortly before Madame Crocheville came with breakfast.

"You have slept well, I hope," she said.

"Never better," replied Lannes for them both.

"I hear from others that which you told me last night. Germany has declared war upon Russia, and the mightiest of the German armies marches today against France. Philip! Philip! Poor France will be crushed!"

"Not so, Madame! France is not ready and the German armies will go far toward Paris, but France, the republic, will not fall. I am young, but I have heard, and I have seen. French valor is French valor still, and Germany is creating for herself a ring of foes."

"You make me believe! You make me believe, Philip, in spite of myself," she said.

"We shall see what we shall see," said Lannes with confidence.

The day passed and they did not seek to stir from the room. Madame Crocheville brought them food, but talked little. Time was very heavy. John did not dare to go much to the window, for fear of being seen. The night at last came again, and to their great joy it was dark without either moon or stars.

"Now we'll go," said Lannes.

"I'm ready," said John, although he did not have the remotest idea how they were going.

CHAPTER IV
THE THRILLING ESCAPE

Madame Crocheville brought them supper, and they ate with strong appetites. John was all courage and anticipation. He was chafing over his compulsory day and night in one room, despite its comfort and safety, and he was ready for any risk. He wanted to reach his uncle and Mr. Anson, knowing how great must be their anxiety. Lannes was as eager to be away, for other reasons.

"Don't make the risks too great," said Madame Crocheville, as she paused with the tray of empty dishes.

"We will not," replied Lannes earnestly. "It is not a time for folly."

He went out with Madame, leaving John alone in the room, but he returned in two or three minutes, and thrust an automatic pistol in the young American's hand.

"Put this in your pocket," he said, "and here's a little bag of cartridges that you can drop into another pocket."

"But it's not my war," said John, "I don't want to shoot at anybody."

"No, it's not your war, but it's forcing itself upon you, and you may have to shoot. You'll be wise to take what I offer you."

Then John took them, and an hour later they stole out of the house, carrying with them the earnest hopes of Madame Crocheville. The house, doubtless, had other inmates, but she was the only one whom John had seen, and her competency gave the impression that no other was needed.

"We're going out into the country," said Lannes.

"Show the way."

"Don't you feel any curiosity about it?"

"A lot, but, remember I promised to ask no questions." Lannes laughed.

"So you did," he said, "and I knew that you were a man who'd keep your word, as you're doing. We're going to leave this town and the country about it, but I'll say nothing about the way it's to be done. There's some danger, though, and I'm armed just as you are."

"I'm not afraid of a little danger."

"I knew you were not. Here we are in the passage again, and it's as dark as a well. Mind your step, and, when we come out into the broader street, walk as if you had lived here all your life. But the town is half deserted. All the younger men have gone away to the war."

They came into the street and walked carelessly along, passing only an occasional old man or woman. The wonderful German mobilization, like a net, through which nothing slipped, was going on, and the youthful strength of the town was already departing toward the French border.

"No notice of us will be taken until we come to the outskirts," said Lannes, "but there they have sentinels whom we must pass."

It was on the tip of John's tongue to ask how, but he refrained. He was willing to put his trust in this young Frenchman who was proving himself so trustworthy, and he continued in silence by his side. It did not take them long to reach the area of scattered houses. Walking swiftly among them they entered a vegetable garden, and John saw beyond the metals of a railway track, a bridge, and two soldiers, gun on shoulder, guarding it.

"We're going to pass under that bridge," said Lannes.

Now John could not refrain from asking how.

"It crosses a canal and not a river," said Lannes. "It's an old disused canal, with but little water in it, and we'll go down its bed. Come on, John."

The canal flowed at the foot of the garden, and they lowered themselves into the bed, where they found a muddy footing, between the water and the bank, which rose four or five feet.

"We'll bend over and hug the bank," said Lannes. "In the darkness we may be able to go under the bridge, unseen by the two sentinels. At any rate we must chance it. If they fire on us the odds are at least twenty to one against our being hit. So, don't use the automatic unless the need is desperate."

A chill ran along John's spine. He had never fired at anybody, and nobody had ever fired at him. A week ago he was a peaceful tourist, never dreaming of bullets, and now he was fairly hurled into the middle of a gigantic war. But he was one who accepted facts, and, steadying himself for anything, he followed Lannes who, bent almost double, was walking rapidly.

They were within twenty yards of the bridge now, and John distinctly saw the two sentinels. They were stout Bavarian lads, with heavy, unthinking faces, but he knew that, taught in the stern German school, they would fire without hesitation on Lannes and himself. He devoutly hoped they would not be seen, and it was not alone their own safety of which he was thinking, but he did not want to use the automatic on those kindly Bavarian boys.

As they came within the shadow of the bridge they bent lower and went much more slowly. Strange thrills, the product of excitement and not of fear, ran down John's back. This was no play, no game of make-believe, he was running for his life, and a world which had been all peace a few days ago was now all war. It was impossible, but it was happening and it was true. He could not comprehend it all at once, and he was angry at himself because he could not. These emotions went fleeting by, even at the moment, when they passed under the bridge.

They paused directly beneath the superstructure, and hugged the bank. John could see the two sentinels above, one at either end. Lannes and he had come thus far in safety, but beyond the bridge the shadows were not so deep, and the banks of the canal were lower.

"I think that luck has favored us," whispered Lannes.

"I hope it will continue to do so."

"It will. It usually goes one way for a little while. Come!"

They passed from the shelter of the bridge and ran down the old canal. Luck favored them for forty or fifty yards, and then one of the sentinels caught a glimpse of John's figure. Hastily raising his gun he fired.

John felt a rush of air past his face, and heard the thud of the bullet as it buried itself in the soft bank. A cold chill ran down his spine, but he said nothing. Lannes and he increased their speed. The sentinels did not fire again. Perhaps they thought imagination had been tricked by a shadow.

A hundred yards farther on, and the canal passed through woods, where it was so dark that one could not see far. Lannes climbed the bank and threw himself down among the trees. John imitated him.

"Are you hit?" asked Lannes.

"No, but I felt the wind from the bullet."

"Then you've had your baptism of war, and as it was a German bullet that was seeking you you're one of us now."

John was silent.

Both lay a while on the grass in the dense shadow of the trees, until their panting passed into regular breathing. The darkness did not decrease, and no sound came from the fields. It was evident that they had not been followed. John felt that all his strength had returned, but he waited patiently for Lannes to lead the way.

The Frenchman rose presently and went to the edge of the grove.

"The coast is clear," he said, "and we might as well depart. Come, Monsieur John. You've shown great power over your curiosity, and I'll ask you to show it a little longer. But I'll say this much. You can barely make out a line of hills across those fields. Well, they are five or six miles away and we're going toward them at a leisurely but fairly rapid pace."

"All right. Show the way. I think I'm in good shape for a canter of several miles."

They walked steadily more than an hour, and the night lightened somewhat. As they approached the hills John saw that they were high, rough, and covered with dark green foliage. It was possible that Lannes was seeking a refuge among them, but reflection indicated that it was not probable. There could be no secure hiding place in a country so thickly populated, and in a region so far away from France. Lannes must have something else in view.

When they came to the first slope Lannes led boldly upward, although he followed no path. The trees were larger than one usually sees in Europe, and there was some undergrowth. At a point two or three hundred feet up they stopped and looked back. They saw nothing. The town was completely hidden by the night. John had a strong feeling of silence, loneliness and awe. He would have insisted upon knowing where Lannes was leading him, but the young Frenchman had shown himself wholly trustworthy.

The way continued upward. Lannes was following no path, but he advanced with certainty. The night lightened somewhat. A few stars came out, and an edge of the moon showed, but the town was now shut off from sight by the foliage on the hills, and they seemed absolutely alone in the world.

John knew that they were not likely to see houses, owing to the habit the rural people had on the continent of living in villages, but they might pass the hut of a stray woodcutter or charcoal burner. He had no mind to be taken back to the town and his hand slipped down to the butt of the automatic.

"You've plenty of courage, John," said Lannes, "and you've a very steady nerve, too. Courage and steady nerve don't always go together. You'll need both."

"For our escape?"

"Yes. It's scarcely possible to walk out of Germany because the borders are guarded everywhere. The land is closed to us, nor can we go by water either. As an American they might have passed you on, if you had not become so strongly identified with me, but borrowing one of your English expressions we are now tarred with the same brush. But, as I told you before, we shall leave Germany nevertheless."

John's curiosity was intense, but pride still kept him from asking any questions. In silence he followed Lannes, who was traveling upward. The region now became utterly dreary, steep, stony and rain-washed.

Not even the thrifty European peasant could have drawn any part of a living from those blasted rocks.

They came at last to the crest of the hills, or rather low mountains, and passed into a depression which looked to John like some age-old crater. Then he heard Lannes draw a deep breath, almost a sigh, and he knew it was caused by relief of the mind rather than of the body.

"Well, we're here," said Lannes, sitting down at the stony edge of the crater.

"Yes, we're here," said John, also sitting down, "and being here, where are we?"

Lannes laughed. It was a pleased and friendly laugh, and John recognized it as such.

"Wait until we draw about a hundred long breaths apiece," said Lannes, "and then we'll have action."

"Suits me. That was a big climb."

As they rested, John looked down with renewed interest at the crater. He saw that the center of it was quite level, and evidently the soil on that spot was rich, as it was covered with thick long grass. Nearer by, among the stones, lay faggots, and also smaller pieces of wood.

"John," said Lannes, at the end of a few minutes, "you'll help me with these billets, won't you?"

"Of course. What do you want to do?"

"To build a fire. Aren't you cold?"

"I hadn't thought about it. I'm not likely to notice either heat or cold at such a time."

Lannes laughed. It was a low laugh of satisfaction, but wholly without irony.

"You're not cold," he said, "nor am I, and if we were we wouldn't build a fire to keep us warm. But we're going to build one."

They laid the faggots and smaller pieces together, and then cut off dry splinters with their clasp knives. Lannes set fire to the splinters with a match, and the two stood away. The blaze spread rapidly, and soon crackled and burned at a merry rate, sending up high flames.

"Aren't you afraid the fire will warn some one?" asked John.

"I hope so," was the startling reply.

Lannes threw on more wood. He seemed anxious that the flames should rise higher. They obeyed his wish, shooting upward, and sending streams of sparks far above. Then he stepped back, and, sitting down on a stone, began to look into the skies, not a stray glance, but a long, unbroken anxious gaze.

The heavens were yet brightening. More stars sprang out, the segment of the moon broadened and shone like burnished silver. The last cloud was gone, leaving the skies a vast vault of dusky blue. And Lannes never took his eyes from the great arch, although they traveled from horizon to horizon, searching, searching, searching everywhere.

The young Frenchman's action and manner had an indescribable effect upon John. A warning thrill ran down his back, and there was a strange, creeping sensation at the roots of his hair. Without knowing why, he, too, began to gaze steadily into the skies. The little town from which they had escaped and the possibility of the wandering wood-cutter or charcoal burner passed from his mind. His whole soul was in his eyes as he stared into the heavens, looking for he knew not what.

The gaze of Lannes turned chiefly toward a range of mountains, to the south, visible only because of the height on which they stood. Anxiety, hope, belief and disbelief appeared on his face, but he never moved from his seat, nor spoke a word. Meanwhile the flames leaped high and crackled, making the only sound heard in all that desolation and loneliness.

How long they sat there, watching the skies John never knew, but the time seemed hours, and throughout it Lannes did not once take his gaze from above. Now and then, he drew a sharp breath, as if a hope had failed, but, in a moment or two, hope came back to his eyes, and they still searched.

John suddenly felt a great thrill again run down his spine, and the roots of his hair quivered. He was looking toward the mountains in the south, and he believed that he saw a black dot hanging in the air above them. Then another dot seemed to hang beside it. So much looking could make one see things that were not, and he rubbed his eyes. But there hung the dots, and they were growing larger.

John looked long and he could not now doubt. The black dots grew steadily. They were apparently side by side, and they came fast toward the hill on which Lannes and he stood. He glanced at his comrade. He had never before seen a face express so much relief and exultation.

"They come! they come!" said Lannes, "I knew they would!"

John looked back. The black dots were much nearer, and he began to make out dim shapes. Now, he knew. The full truth burst upon him. They were aeroplanes, and he knew that Lannes had summoned them out of the black ether with his fire. He felt the great thrill along his spine again. It was magic; nothing less. Flights in the air were yet too novel to allow of any other feeling.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.