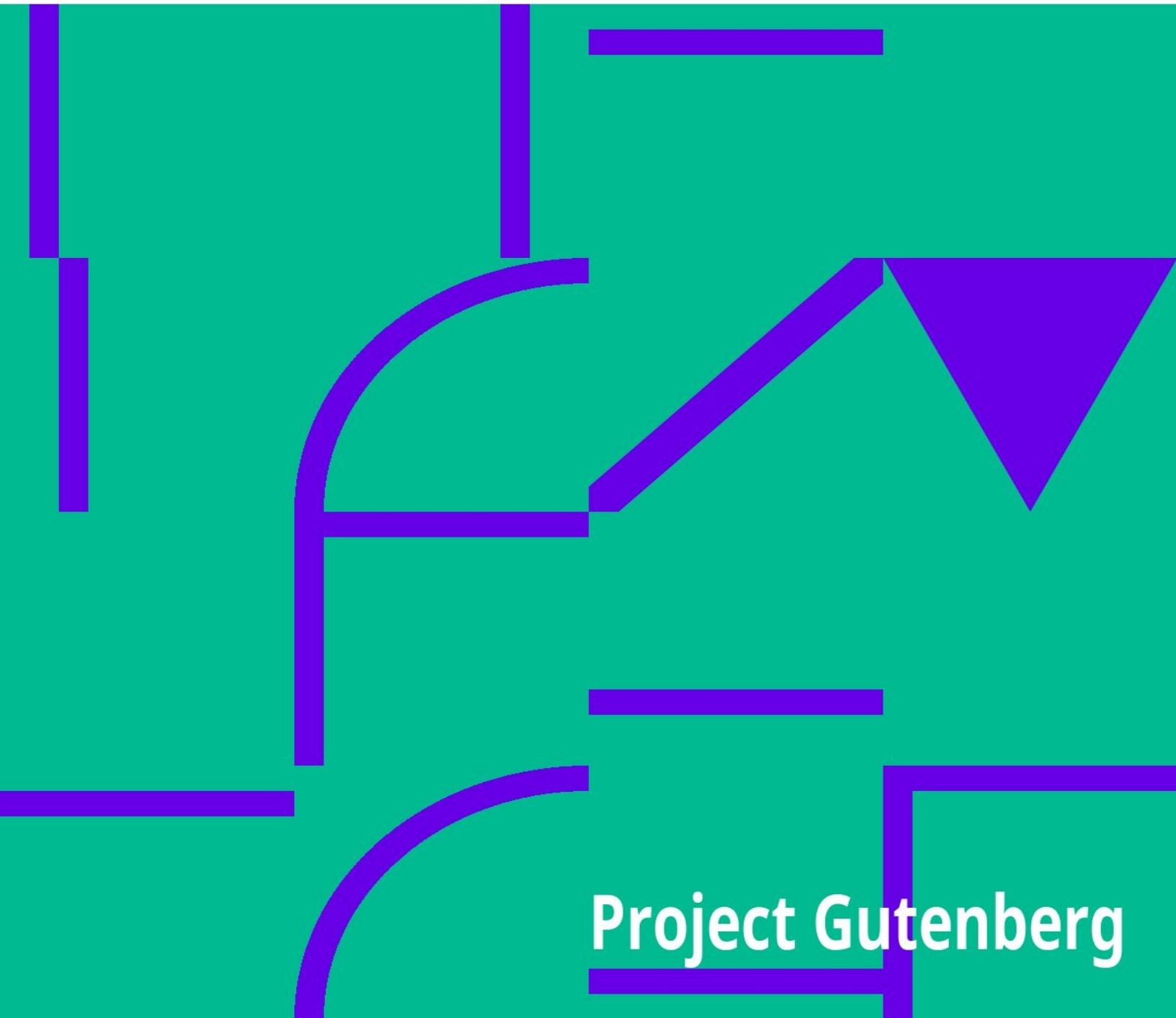
The Guns of Europe

Joseph A. Altsheler



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World War Series

THE GUNS OF EUROPE

By

JOSEPH A. ALTSHELER

Author of "The Guns of Bull Run", "The Texan Triumph", etc.

Illustrated by Charles Wrenn

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THE CIVIL WAR SERIES

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The Guns of Bull Run
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A Soldier of Manhattan
The Quest of the Four
The Sun of Saratoga
The Last of the Chiefs
A Herald of the West
In Circling Camps
The Wilderness Road
My Captive

Their careering machine made but a single target while they could fire into the pursuing mass.

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.

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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.

"They're coming to us!" said John.

"Yes," said Lannes, pride showing in his tone. "I called them and they came. I

told you, John, that we'd escape, neither by land, nor by water, but that we would escape. And so we will. We go by air, John. The heavens open and receive us."

He rose and stretched out his arms, as if to meet the coming black shapes. The dramatic instinct in him was strong, and John could well pardon it as he saw that his emotion was extraordinary.

"The heavens open a path for us!" he cried.

The two aeroplanes were now circling over their own hill, and John could discern human shapes in them. They began to descend gently, as the operators skillfully handled the steering rudders.

"Well done! well done!" said Lannes to himself rather than to John. "They couldn't be managed better."

Presently the machines began to loop and make spirals, and then both sank gently upon the grassy turf in the center of the glade. A man stepped forth from the seat in each machine and saluted Lannes, as if he were a commander. Lannes returned the salute promptly and gracefully.

"We saw the fiery signal, lieutenant," said one of the men in French, as he took off his great glasses, "and we came as fast as we could."

"I knew that you would do so, Castelneau," said Lannes, "and I knew that Méry would be as prompt."

The two aviators bowed with evident gratification, and Castelneau said:

"We are proud of praise that comes from the most daring and skillful airman in France, which means in this case the world. We thank you, Lieutenant Lannes."

Lannes blushed and said: "You overrate me, Castelneau."

John glanced at him. And, so this youth with the easy manner and the wonderful eyes was the greatest of all flying men! John's own mind was not mechanical, but his glance became a gaze of admiration. What a mighty achievement it was to cleave the air like a bird, and leave the whole solid earth beneath. One, in fact, did leave the world and hang in space. For the moment, he thought more of the wonder than of its bearing upon his own fortunes.

He glanced down at the machines resting on the grass. Their motors were still throbbing, and in the dimness they looked like the rocs of Arabian mythology,

resting after a gigantic flight. In truth, everything had taken on for John an aspect of unreality. These men were unreal, Lannes and he were unreal, and it was an unreal world, in which nothing but unrealities moved.

"My new friend is an American," said Lannes, "and he's to be trusted, since his own life as well as ours is at stake. Monsieur John Scott, Messieurs Gaston Castelneau and August Méry. John, these are two skillful and valued members of the French flying corps. I want you to shake hands with brave men."

John gladly shook their gloved hands.

"Castelneau, and you, Méry, listen," said Lannes, and again his voice took on that dramatic ring, while his figure seemed to swell in both size and stature. "It is here! It has come, and the whole world will shake beneath its tread!"

"The war!" they exclaimed with one voice.

"Aye the war! The great war! the world war! The planet-shaking war! Germany declared war today on Russia and tomorrow she declares war on France! Never mind how I know! I know, and that's enough! The strength and weight of a Germany that has devoted its best mind and energy for nearly half a century to preparation for war will be hurled at once upon our poor France! We are to be the first and chief victim!"

"It will not be so!" said Castelneau and Méry together.

"No, I think not. Republican France of 1914 is not Imperial France of 1870. There I think Imperial Germany has made her great mistake. And we have friends, as Imperial France had not! But every son of France must be prepared to shed his blood in her defense!"

Castelneau and Méry bowed gravely. John could tell little about them, except they were short, thick men, apparently very strong. They wore caps, resembling those of a naval officer, heavy, powerful glasses, and baggy clothing, thick and warm. John saw that they paid Lannes great deference, and he remembered the words of Castelneau that the young Frenchman was the greatest airman in France. And he had a vague impression, too, that France led in flying.

"Can France win against Germany, my lieutenant?" asked Méry, who had not spoken hitherto. "The Germans outnumber us now in the proportion of seven to four, and from a time long before we were born they've thought war, dreamed war, and planned war."

"We'll not have to fight Germany, single handed, my good Méry," replied Lannes. "We'll have friends, good friends, powerful friends. And, now, I suppose that you have extra clothing with you?"

"Enough for two, sir. Your friend goes with you?"

"He does unless he wishes to remain here and be shot as a spy by the Germans."

Lannes did not glance at John as he spoke, but it was a calculated remark, and it met with an instant response.

"I'll go with you in the machine," he said.

And yet it took great courage to make the resolve. The three Frenchmen were practised aviators. They traveled in the air as John would have traveled on the water. He had never been in a flying machine in his life, and his mind did not turn to mechanics.

"We must not waste time in delay," said Lannes. "Mr. Scott and I will go in the first machine, and we will start straight for France. John, I promised to take you to Munich, but I can't do it now. I'll carry you to France. Then you may cross over to Switzerland, and communicate with your people in Munich. It's the best that can be done."

"I know," said John, "and I appreciate the effort you're making for me. Nor would I be in your way at a time when you may be able to do so much for your country."

"Then we go at once. Castelneau, we take the *Arrow*."

He pointed to the smaller of the machines.

"Yes, my lieutenant," said Castelneau, "it is the better for a long flight."

"I thought so. Now, Castelneau, you and Méry return to the hidden station in the mountains, while Mr. Scott and I take flight for France. John, here are your clothes."

John hastily put on the heavy garments, which seemed to him to be made of some kind of oilskin, thrust his hands into heavy gloves, and put on the protecting glasses. But as he did it his pulses were beating hard. The earth on which he now stood looked very good and very solid, and the moonlit ether above him was nothing but air, thin, impalpable air, through which his body

would cleave, if he fell, with lightning speed. For a moment or two he was afraid, horribly afraid, but he resolutely put the feeling down.

Lannes was also clothed anew, looking like a great baggy animal, but he was rapid and skillful. John saw at once that the praise of Castelneau was justified.

"Here is your seat, John," said Lannes, "and mine is here. All you'll have to do is to sit still, watch the road and enjoy the scenery. We'll give her a shove, and then you jump in."

There was some room on the grass for the preliminary maneuver, and the four shoved the machine forward and upward. Then Philip and John, quickly releasing their grasp, sprang into their seats.

Lannes' eyes behind the heavy glasses were flashing, and the blood was flying through his veins. The daring strain, the utter defiance of death which appears so often in French blood was up and leaping. He was like a medieval knight, riding to a tournament, confident of victory, only Philip Lannes was not any conqueror of narrow lists, the vast space in which the whole universe swings was his field of triumph. His hand sought the steering rudder, and the machine, under the impulse of the strong push it had received, rose into the air.

John's sensation as he left the earth for the very first time in his life was akin to seasickness. The machine seemed to him to be dipping and gliding, and the throbbing of the motor was like the hum of a ship's machinery in his ear. For a few moments he would have given anything he had to be back on that glorious solid earth. But again he put down the feeling of fear.

He turned his head for a last look at Castelneau and Méry, and, to his amazement, he could barely make them out standing by the other machine, which looked like some great, vague bird poised on the grass. Directly below him he saw the tops of trees, and at that moment they looked to his excited fancy like rows of glittering spear points, poised to receive him.

"Look up! Look up!" said the sharp voice of Lannes in his ear. "It's always the fault of beginners to look down and see what they've left."

His tone was more than sharp, it was peremptory, commanding. John glanced at him and saw his steady hand on the rudder, and his figure loose and swinging easily like that of a sailor poised on a rolling deck. He knew that Lannes' manner was for his own good, and now he looked straight up at those heavens, into

which they were ascending.

The motor throbbed, and John knew that the machine was ascending, rising, but not at a sharp angle. The dizzy feeling began to depart, and he longed to look down again, but did not do so. Instead he kept his eyes upward, his gaze fixed on the dusky blue heavens, which now looked so wide and chill. He knew that the little distance they had come from the earth was nothing to the infinity of the void, but by some mental change the stars seemed to have come much nearer, and to have grown hugely in size. There they danced in space, vast and cold.

The machine dipped a little and rose again. John dared another glance at Lannes, who was swaying easily in his seat, feeling all the exaltation of a confident rider who has a swift horse beneath him.

"I'm better now," said John above the purring of the motor.

Lannes laughed deep down in his throat, and with unction.

"Getting your air-legs, so to speak," he said. "You're learning fast. But don't look down at the ground, at least not yet. By and by you'll feel the thrill, which to me is like nothing else on earth—or rather above it. You've noticed, haven't you, that it's growing colder?"

"Not yet. I suppose the excitement has made my blood flow faster than usual, and that keeps me warm."

"It won't much longer. We're up pretty high now, and we're flying fast toward that beautiful country of mine. Can't you feel the wind rushing like a hurricane past your ears?"

"Yes, I do, and in the last minute or two it's acquired an edge of ice."

"And that edge will soon grow sharper. We're going higher."

John felt the upward swoop of the plane. The sensation that a ship gives a passenger when it dips after a swell returned, but it quickly passed. With it went all fear, and instead came a sort of unreasoning exhilaration, born of a strange new tincture in his blood. His ears were pounding and his heart had a more rapid beat. He hoped that Lannes would go yet higher. Yes, his comrade was right. He did feel the wind rushing past, and heard it, too. It was a pleasant sound, telling of trackless miles through the ether, falling fast behind them.

Those moments were filled for him with a new kind of exaltation. Despite the cold heights the blood still flowed, warm, in his veins. The intangible sky was coming nearer and its dusky blue of the night was deepening. The great, friendly stars looked down, meeting his upturned gaze, and still danced before him.

Now, he dared to stare down for the second time, and his heart took a great leap. Far beneath him, somber and dark, rolled the planet on which he had once lived. He had left war and the hate of nations behind. Here was peace, the steady throb of the motor in his ear was soothing music.

"I see that you've got your air-balance, John," said Philip, "you learn fast. I think that Castelneau and Méry would approve of you. Since you've learned to look down now with steady eyes take these glasses."

He handed him a pair of powerful glasses that he took from under the seat, and John, putting them to his eyes turned them downward. It gave him a strange tingling sensation that he from some unknown point in space should look at the earth as a distant and foreign planet.

But the effect of the glasses was wonderful. The earth sprang forth in the moonlight. He saw forests, fields, villages, and the silver ribbon of a river. But all were racing by, and that, even more than the wind rushing past, gave him an idea of the speed at which they were going. He took a long, long look and then returned the glasses.

"It's tremendous," he said. "I confess that at first I felt both fear and physical ill. But I am getting over it, and I feel instead the thrill of swift motion."

"It's because we have a perfect piece of track."

"There's no track in the air!"

"Oh, yes, there is. If you'd thought a moment you'd have known it, though I'll admit it's a shifting one. When you stand on the ground and turn your eyes upward all the sky looks alike. But it's far from it. It's full of all kinds of winds, currents and strata, pockets, of which all aviators stand in deadly fear, mists, vapors, clouds of every degree of thickness and complexion, and then you have thunder and lightning, just as you do on land and sea. It's these shifting elements that make the navigation of the air so dangerous, John. The whole question would be solved, if there was nothing but stationary air, growing thinner in exact proportion as we rise. But such a condition of aerial peace could not be reached

unless we could go up fifty miles, where there is no air, and that we'll never be able to do."

"How high are we now?"

"About three thousand feet. Draw that collar more closely about your neck. You may not feel cold, because of the new fire in your blood, but you are cold, nevertheless. Now, see those whitish streams below us. They're little clouds, vapor mostly, they don't contain rain. You've read the 'Arabian Nights,' haven't you, John?"

"Yes, and I know just the comparison you're thinking of."

"What is it, then? See if you're right."

"The roc, great, fabled bird, flying through the air with those old Arabs perched on its back."

"Right! He guessed right the very first time. That's one of your Americanisms, isn't it? Oh, I know a lot of your choicest expressions. Hit it up lively! That's what we're doing. He's full of pep! That's what we are; aren't we, John? Come across with a double play! And we're doing that, too."

"I don't know that your baseball metaphor is exactly right, Philip, but your heart is certainly in the proper place. When do we get to France?"

"Don't talk about that yet, because it's impossible to approximate. This smooth track will not go on forever. It's lasted longer than usual already. Then, we'll have to eat, later on. There's food here in a tiny locker that you can't see, but it may be better for us to drop down to the earth when we eat. Besides, while we're sailing through the sky, I'd like to observe as much as I can of this German mobilization and take the news of it to France. That, of course, leaves you out of consideration, John, but I'm bound to do it."

"Don't regard me. I've no right to ask anything of you. I'm a guest or a prisoner, and in either capacity it behooves me to take what comes to me."

"But I got you into it, and so I feel obligations, but, heavy as they are, they're not heavy enough to keep me from seeing what I can see. I told you that we were going toward France, but we're not taking the direct course. I mean to fly over the ancient city of Nuremburg, and then over Frankfort-on-the-Main. Look out, now, John, we're going to drop fast!"

The machine descended rapidly in a series of wide spirals, until it was within seven or eight hundred feet of the earth.

"Look down now," said Lannes, "and without the glasses you can see a town."

But he had taken the glasses himself, and while he held one hand on the steering rudder he made a long and attentive examination of the place, and of low works about it, which he knew contained emplacements for cannon.

"It's a fortified town and a center for mobilization," he said. "All day long the recruits have been pouring in here, responding to the call. They receive their uniforms, arms and ammunition at that big barracks on the hill, and tomorrow they take the trains to join the giant army which will be hurled on my France."

John heard a sigh. Lannes was afraid after all that the mighty German war machine, the like of which the world had never seen before would crush everything.

"It will be hard to stop that army," he could not keep from saying.

"So it will. The Germans have prepared for war. The French have not. John, John, I wish I knew the secrets of our foes! For more than forty years they've been using their best minds and best energies for this. We don't even know their weapons. I've heard strange tales of monster cannon that the Krupps have sent out of Essen, and of new explosives of unimagined power, I don't know whether to believe these tales or not. But I do know that the Germans will be ready to the last cartridge."

"But something in the machine may go wrong, Phil."

"That's our hope. We've got to smash some of the wheels, or rods or levers. If we compel them to change their plan they won't have time to organize a perfect new one."

"The old simile of the watch, I suppose. It'll run a hundred years if all the works are kept right. But if a single one of them goes wrong it's done forever."

"It's as you say. Sit steady, now. We're going to take another upward swoop. I've seen enough of that town and its forts, and I don't want to linger so close to the earth that they'll see us."

The machine rose like a mighty bird, but shortly after it reached the top of its

flight John felt a slight jerk. It was a sudden movement of Lannes' hand on the steering rudder that had caused it.

"John," he said, and the voice shook a little, "take the glasses. Look off there in the northwest, and see if you can't make out a black object hanging in the sky?"

John took the glasses and put them to his eyes.

CHAPTER V

THE FIGHT IN THE BLUE

John turned his glasses toward the northwest, where cloud wrack hung. At first he could see nothing, as the dark blue sky was obscured by the darker mists and vapors, but he presently discovered in the very midst of them an object that looked jet black. It was moving, and slowly it took the shape of an aeroplane. He wondered at the keenness of Lannes' vision, when he was able to pick out so distant an object with the naked eye.

"What do you make of it?" asked Lannes.

"It's an aeroplane, or some other kind of flying machine."

"And which way do you think it's going?"

"The same way that we are. No, it seems to be nearer now."

"Likely it's running parallel with us in a sense; that is we two are moving down the sides of a triangle, and if we continue long enough we'd meet at the point."

"Perhaps it's Castelneau and Méry in the other plane?"

"Impossible! They would certainly stay on the mountains far behind us. They would never disobey orders. We're back into a bank of fine air now and the machine almost sails itself. Let me have the glasses a moment."

But he looked many moments. Then he calmly put the glasses away in the tiny locker and said:

"It's not a French machine, John, and it's not a friend's. It's a German Taube, and it's flying very fast. I think the man in it has seen us, which is unfortunate."

"And there's another!" exclaimed John in excitement. "Look! He's been hidden by that long, trailing sheet of vapor off toward the north. See it's close to the other one."

"Aye, so it is! And they are friends, twin foes of ours! Two Taubes, but only one man in each, while there are two in this tight little machine! They have certainly seen us, because they're bending in rapidly toward us now!"

"What do you intend to do? Meet them and fight?"

"Not unless we have to do it. I've news for France which is worth more than my life, or yours either for that matter—or more than my honor or yours. No, John, we'll run for it with all our might, and the *Arrow* is one of the prettiest and sweetest little racers in all the heavens!"

Lannes' hand pressed upon the steering rudder, and the machine, curving from its western course, turned toward the south. The motor throbbed faster and louder and John became conscious almost at once that their speed was increasing. Although the heavy cap was drawn down over his ears he heard the wind whistling as it rushed past, and it was growing much colder. In spite of himself he shivered, and he was sure it was the cold, not fear.

John's nature was sensitive and highly intellectual, but his heart was brave and his will powerful. He remembered that while two planes were in pursuit only one man was in each pursuer while there were two in the pursued. His gloved hand slipped down to the butt of the automatic.

He had no idea how fast they were going, but he knew the speed must be terrific. He grew colder and colder. He wondered how Lannes, taut and strained, bent over the steering rudder, could stand it, but he recalled the words of Castelneau that he was the best flying man in the world.

Lannes, in truth, felt neither stiffness nor cold, then. The strain of daring in the French nature which the Anglo-Saxon would call recklessness responded fully and joyfully to the situation. Not in vain, while yet so young, was he a king of the air. Every pulse in him thrilled with the keen and extraordinary delight that comes only from danger, and the belief in victory over it. His hand touched the rudder as the fingers of a pianist touches the keys of a piano, and in either case it was the soul of an artist at work.

Oh, it was a beautiful machine, the *Arrow*, strong, sinuous, graceful! Sure like the darting bird! It answered the lightest pressure of his hand upon the rudder, and he drew from it harmonies of motion that were true music to him.

But while the hand on the rudder did its work his eyes swept the heavens with a questing gaze. Had he been alone in the *Arrow* he could have left the German Taubes far behind, but the extra weight of the passenger was a terrible burden for so light and delicate a machine. Yet he was glad John was with him. Already Lannes had a deep liking for the young American whose nature was so unlike his

own.

That questing gaze lingered longest on the southern heavens. One who flees on the land must pick his way and so must one who flees through the skies. Now, the mind of the flying man was keyed to the finest pitch. He thought of the currents of air, the mists, the vapors, and, above all, of those deadly pockets which could send them in an instant crashing to the earth far below. No engineer with his hand at the throttle of a locomotive was ever more watchful and cautious.

John, too, was looking into the south, where he saw a loom of cloud and haze. It appeared that the heavens had drawn a barrier across their way, and he saw that Lannes was turning the *Arrow* again toward the west, as if he were seeking a way around that barrier.

Then he looked back. The Taubes, beyond a doubt, were nearer, and were flying in a swift true line.

"Are they gaining?" asked Lannes, who kept his eyes on the "country" ahead, seeking to choose a way.

"Considerably. They have been flying close together, but now they're separating somewhat; at least it seems so, although my eyes are tricky in an element so new to me."

"They're probably right in this instance. It's their obvious course. It's impossible for us to fly perfectly straight, and whenever we curve one or the other of their machines will gain on us. I've heard that a troop of lions will adopt this method in pursuing an antelope, and that it's infallible."

"Which means that we can't escape?"

"There's a difference. The antelope can't fight back, but we can. Don't forget the automatic I gave you."

"I haven't. Not for a second."

"But it won't come to that yet, and may not at all. See, how those clouds and vapors are stretching. They hem us in on the south, and now they're curving around in our front on the west, too. We can't lose the Taubes, John, here on this lower level, as we're not more than two thousand, perhaps not more than fifteen hundred feet above the earth, but we may be able to do it higher up. Steady, now!

We're going to rise fast!"

The machine tilted up at an angle that made John gasp, but he quickly recovered himself and resisted a desperate inclination to grasp anything he could reach and hold on with all his might. He knew that the strap passed about his body held him so firmly that he could not fall out. Still, it shortened his breath and made his pulses bound, rather than beat.

Up! up they went into the thinner air, the nose of the *Arrow* again turned toward the south. Lannes did not look back. His mind and soul were absorbed in the flight of his machine, and his heart throbbed with exaltation as he knew that it was flying beautifully. But he called upon John to note the pursuers.

"They're curving up, too," said John. "They're very steady, and I think they're still gaining."

"Daring men! Yes, the Germans have good flyers, and we'll have a hard time in shaking them off. Still, we may lose them among the clouds."

"I think they're rising at a sharper angle than we are."

"Trying to get above us! Ah, I know what that means! Why did I not think of it at first? We must not permit it! Never for a moment!"

"Why not?"

But Lannes did not reply. Apparently he had not heard him, and John did not repeat the question.

"Watch! John! Watch!" said Lannes, "and tell me every movement of theirs!"

"You can depend on me!"

The nose of the *Arrow* was still tilted upward, and John knew that they had come to a great height, as the cold struck to his very bones. The air also was darker and damper, and he saw that they were in the region of mists of vapors. Mentally he already used terms of land as terms of the air. Before them lay banks of cloud which were the same as mountains.

"One Taube is directly behind us and it seems to me a little higher," he announced. "The other has cut off to the right and also a little higher, if I see right."

"Then we must rise fast! We can't let them get above us!"

The nose of the *Arrow* tilted up yet farther, and shot into colder and darker regions. John saw mists and vapors below, but the earth was invisible. He was truly hanging between a planet and the stars, and this was the void, dark and thin, cold and infinite.

"Steady again!" said Lannes. "We're going to descend for a while."

The nose of the *Arrow*dropped down many degrees, and then they seemed to John to slide through space, although they slid like lightning. The air felt damper and thicker, and the area of vision contracted fast. They had plunged into a bank of vapor, and search as he would with both eye and glass he could see no sign of the Taubes.

"We've lost them for the time at least," he said.

"I hoped for it," said Lannes. "That's why I made for this area of vapor. It's exactly like a ship escaping in a fog from a fleet—only we haven't escaped yet."

"Why not?"

"We can't hang in here. If we do they'll explore for us, and if we go on and through it they'll follow. Yet we can hope for a gain. Isn't it a beautiful machine, John, and hasn't it behaved nobly?"

He patted the *Arrow* as a man would a horse that had saved his life with its speed.

"We'll go slowly here, John. Have you got good ears?"

"Yes. Why?"

"Then uncover them and listen. In case one of the Taubes draws near you can hear its humming and throbbing. My hearing may be deadened a little for the time by my tension in sailing the *Arrow*, so you're our reliance."

John listened intently, and in a few minutes the sound they feared came to his ears.

"I hear it," he said suddenly, "and as sure as we live it's directly over our heads!"

"Then we must mount at once!"

Up shot the *Arrow*, and passing through the vapor it flew again with nothing above it but the clear, cold stars. John looked down, but his vision was lost in the mass of floating mist. He exulted. They had lost the Taubes! But joy lasted only a moment. Out from the bank shot a dark shape. It was one of the machines, and in two minutes the other appeared.

"They've come through the mist, too, and they see us," he said to Lannes. "They seem to be trying to rise above us."

"I thought it would be their plan, if we didn't lose 'em. We've got to make another dash. We're pointing toward Switzerland, now, John, and maybe if we have luck we can descend in a neutral country. But I don't want to do it! I tell you I don't want to do it!"

He spoke with uncommon energy, but relapsed afterward into complete silence. The humming of the motor increased, and the icy wind rushed past John's ears in a perfect hurricane. He drew his cap down further and sank his neck and ears deeper in his collar. Nevertheless he thought he would freeze. The fingers that still clasped the butt of the automatic felt stiff and bloodless.

"What are they doing now, John?"

"They are gaining again—Ah, and there's a change!"

"What's that change?"

"One machine seems to have dropped a little lower than we are, while the other is rising higher."

"And that has come, too! I expected it. This, John, is what you might call an attempt to surround us. I'm surprised that they didn't attempt it sooner. Watch the Taube that's rising. Watch it all the time, and tell me everything it does!"

He spoke with the most intense energy and earnestness, and John knew that he had some great fear in regard to the upper Taube. So, he never took his eyes from it, and he noted that it was not only rising fast, but that its gain was perceptible. As it was his first flight it did not occur to him in those moments of excitement that his own weight was holding back the *Arrow*, and Lannes had been willing to risk death rather than tell him.

"They're coming very fast," he said to Lannes, "and the upper machine seems to be the swifter of the two."

"Naturally. That's the reason why it's now the upper one. Is it above us yet?"

"No, but in fifteen minutes more it will be, at the present rate of speed."

"About how much higher above us do you think it is?"

"A thousand feet maybe, but I never calculated distances of this kind before."

"Likely it's near enough. Let me know when it's about to come directly over us, and on your life don't fail!"

John watched with all his eyes. He saw the hovering shape, and he caught a glimpse of the arm of the man who steered. But it became to his fancy a great bird which, with its comrade below, pursued them. That name, Taube, the dove, called so from its shape, was very unfitting.

While he was watching he saw the Taube swoop down at least five hundred feet, and at the same time make a burst of speed forward.

"It will be over us! almost directly! within a minute!" he shouted to Lannes.

The *Arrow* swerved to on side with such suddenness that John reeled hard against his seat, despite the strap that held him. At the same moment he caught a glimpse of some small object shooting past the *Arrow*.

"What was it? what was it?" he cried.

"A bomb," replied Lannes. "That was the reason why I didn't want either of the Taubes to get above us. I was sure they had bombs, and if one of them fell upon us, well, nobody would ever find our pieces. Hold hard now, we're going to do a lot of zigzagging, because that fellow probably has more bombs, where the one he just dropped came from."

John's interest in what followed was, in a measure, scientific. He realized afterward that he should have been terribly frightened. In fact, he felt more fear later on, but at that moment the emotions that produce fear were atrophied. The extraordinary nature of his situation caused instead wonder and keen anticipation.

The *Arrow* shot to the right and then to the left. It dipped, and it rose, and then it darted on a level line toward the south.

John wondered afterwards that the delicate fabric was not torn to pieces, but

Lannes was not a supreme flying man for nothing. Every movement was part of a plan, executed with skill and precision. Once more his hand played upon the rudder, as the fingers of a great pianist play upon the keys.

"Is the fellow directly above us yet, John?" he asked.

"Not at this moment, but I think he must have been several times. He has dropped at least three more bombs."

"Then his supply is probably getting small, and he'll be extremely careful with what's left. It's no easy task, John, to drop a bomb from a height, and hit a small target, moving as swiftly as the *Arrow*. Let him alone for the present, and look out for the fellow below. See what he is doing."

John looked down quickly. He had almost forgotten the existence of the second Taube, and he was surprised to find it beneath them and close at hand. The dark, hooded face of the man in the seat looked up at them. As well as John could judge he was using the superior speed of his Taube to keep up with the *Arrow*, and, at the same time, to rise slowly until they approached the point of contact. His apprehensions were quickly transferred from the upper to the lower Taube.

"The second machine is under us and rising," he said.

"And the second attack is likely to come from that point. Well, he can't drop bombs on us. That's sure, and we can meet him on his own ground or rather in his air. John, did you ever shoot at a man?"

"Never!"

"You're going to do it very soon. The automatic I gave you is a powerful weapon, and when the fellow rises enough you must shoot over the side at him. Take good aim and have no compunction, because he'll be shooting at us. But you've the advantage. You're free, while he has to steer his Taube and fire at the same time."

John drew the big automatic. He felt a shiver of reluctance, but only one. He and Lannes were in desperate case, and he would be fighting for the lives of both.

Clutching the powerful weapon in a firm hand he looked down again. The Taube had come much nearer, and he heard suddenly a crack sharp and clear in the thin air of the heights. A bullet sang by his ear. The man in the lower machine had a pistol or perhaps a rifle—John had not seen him raise any weapon.

Lannes glanced at John, whose face had hardened, but he said nothing. John pulled the trigger of the big automatic, and he saw the Taube waver for a moment, and then come on as steadily as ever.

"I don't think I hit him," he said, "but I believe the bullet flattened on his machine."

"You're getting close. Give him another. There went his second. I felt its wind past my face."

John pulled the trigger again, but marksmanship at such an immense height, between two small machines, flying at great speed was almost impossible. Bullet after bullet flew, but nobody was hit, although several bullets struck upon the *Arrow* and the Taube, doing no serious harm, however.

"I'm doing my best," said John.

"I know it," said Lannes. "I notice that your hand is steady. You'll get him."

John looked down, seeking aim for his fifth bullet, when he suddenly heard an appalling crash, and the Taube, a flying mass of splinters, disappeared in a flash from view. It had happened so quickly that he was stunned. The machine had been and then it was not. He looked at Lannes.

"The fellow above us dropped another bomb," said Lannes in a voice that shook a little. "It missed us and hit his comrade, who was almost beneath."

"What a death!" said John, aghast for a little while. Then he pulled himself together and looked up at the other Taube. It was hovering almost over them like a sinister shadow. As John looked something flashed from it, and a heavy bullet sang past.

"He has a rifle! Give him what's left in the automatic!" shouted Lannes.

John fired and he knew that his bullet had struck one of the exposed arms, because a moment later a drop of blood fell almost on his face.

"You've winged him," said Lannes. "Look how the Taube wobbles! You must have given him a bad wound in the arm. He'll have all he can do now to save himself. Good-bye to the pursuit. Luck and your skill, John, have saved us."

John, feeling faint, leaned against the seat.

"I think I'm air-sick," he said.

"It'll pass soon, but you're tremendously lucky. It's not often a fellow gets into a battle in the air the first time he goes up. See what's become of the Taube."

"It's descending fast. I can see the man struggling with it. I hope he'll reach the ground all right."

"He did his best to kill us both."

"I know, but I hope he'll get down, anyway."

"He will. He's regained control of his machine, but he can use only one arm. The other hangs limp. And now for a glorious flight in this brave little *Arrow* of ours."

"Will you return to our original course?"

"I think we'd better not. The German flying men are out, and we might have another fight, from which we would not emerge as well as we have from this. No one must ever underestimate the Germans. They're organized to the last detail in every department. I, a Frenchman, willingly say this. I'll make our flight more southerly. We'll come down in Switzerland. I'd like to go on to France, but we must make a descent soon. We're both cold and overstrained, and it won't be a real violation of neutrality just to touch Switzerland once."

The *Arrow* now sank to a much lower level, and that planet, which they had left came again into view. It was not much more than a dark shadow, save for the sheen of high mountains in the south, but John was glad to see it again. It was like the return of an old friend. It was the fine Earth, not one of the great planets, but the only planet he knew.

He felt a great weakness, but they had descended so much that the intense cold was going away. The thicker and warmer air lulled him, and he sank into a sort of stupor from which he soon roused himself with anger. He considered it a disgrace to him that he should sleep, while Lannes still picked their way through the currents, and pockets and flaws of the heavens.

"You might sleep if you feel like it," said Lannes. "You did all the fighting, and I ought to do all the flying, especially as it's my business and I've had lots of experience. Go ahead, old man. It'll be all the better for us if you get back your strength."

Under Lannes' urging John leaned back a little more in his seat, and closed his eyes. It was true that he was horribly tired, and his will seemed to have weakened, too. Flying was new to him, and now the collapse after so much tension and excitement had come. In a few minutes he slept, but the *Arrow* sailed swiftly on, mile after mile.

John's sleep was sound, but not long. When he awoke it was still night, although the dark bore a suspicious tint of silver in the east. The physical and mental weakness had departed, but he was singularly cold and stiff. When he sought to move, something firm and unyielding about his waist restrained him.

His eyes opened slowly and he looked around. On three sides space met his vision, just dusky blue sky with floating banks and wisps of vapor. But far off to the south, rising like mighty battlements, he saw a dim line of mountains clad in snow. Then it all came back to him. He was aloft in the *Arrow*, the first time that he had ever awakened in the void between the stars and his own planet.

There was Lannes at the rudder, looking a little bent and shrunken now, but his hand was as delicate and true as ever. The machine hummed softly and steadily in his ears, like the string of a violin.

"Philip!" he cried in strong self-reproach, "show me how, and I'll sail the *Arrow* for a while and you can rest."

Lannes shook his head and smiled.

"You're an apt student," he said, "but you couldn't learn enough in one lesson, at least not for our purpose. Besides, I'll have plenty of rest soon. We're going to land in an hour. Behold your first sunrise, seen from a point a mile above the earth!"

He swept his free hand toward the east, where the suspicion of silver had become a certainty. In the infinity of space a mile was nothing, but all the changes were swift and amazingly vivid to John. The silver deepened, turned to blue, and then orange, gold and red sprang out, terrace after terrace, intense and glowing.

Then the sun came up, so burning bright that John was forced to turn his eyes away.

"Fine, isn't it?" said Lannes appreciatively. "It's good to see the sunrise from a new point, and we're up pretty high now, John. We must be, as I said, nearly a

mile above the earth."

"Why do we keep so high?"

"Partly to escape observation, and partly because we're making for a cleft in the mountain straight ahead of us, and about on our own level. In that cleft, which is not really a cleft, but a valley, we'll make our landing. It's practically inaccessible, except by the road we're taking, and our road isn't crowded yet with tourists. Look how the light is growing! See, the new sun is gilding all the mountains now with gold! Even the snow is turned to gold!"

His own wonderful eyes were shining at the tremendous prospect, outspread before them, peak on peak, ridge on ridge, vast masses of green on the lower slopes, and now and then the silver glitter of a lake. The eyes of him who had been so stark and terrible in the battle were now like those of a painter before the greatest picture of the greatest master.

"The Alps!" exclaimed John.

"Aye, the Alps! Hundreds of thousands of you Americans have come all the way across the sea to see them, but few of you have ever looked down on them in the glow of the morning from such a height as this, and you are probably the only one who has ever done so, after an all-night fight and flight for life."

"Which makes them look all the better, Philip. It's been a wonderful night and flight as you call it, but I'll be glad to feel the solid mountain under my feet. Besides, you need rest, and you need it badly. Don't try to deny it."

"I won't, because what you say is true, John. My eyes are blurred, and my arms grow unsteady. In that valley to which we are going nobody can reach us but by way of the air, but, as you and I know, the air has our enemies. Do you see any black specks, John?"

"Not one. I never saw a more beautiful morning. It's all silver, and rose and gold, and it's not desecrated anywhere by a single German flying machine."

"Try the glasses for a longer look."

John swept the whole horizon with the glasses, save where the mountains cut in, and reported the same result.

"The heavens are clear of enemies," he said.

"Then in fifteen minutes the *Arrow* will be resting on the grass, and we'll be resting with it. Slowly, now! slowly! Doesn't the machine obey beautifully?"

They sailed over a river, a precipice of stone, rising a sheer two thousand feet, above pines and waterfalls, and then the *Arrow* came softly to rest in a lovely valley, which birds alone could reach before man took wings unto himself.

The humming of the motor ceased, and the machine itself seemed fairly to snuggle in the grass, as if it relaxed completely after long and arduous toil. It was in truth a live thing to John for the time, a third human being in that tremendous flight. He pulled off his gloves and with his stiffened fingers stroked the smooth sides of the *Arrow*.

"Good old boy," he said, "you certainly did all that any plane could do."

"I'm glad you've decided the sex of flying machines," said Lannes, smiling faintly. "Boats are ladies, but the *Arrow* must be a gentleman since you call it 'old boy.'"

"Yes, it's a gentleman, and of the first class, too. It's earned its rest just as you have, Philip."

"Don't talk nonsense, John. Why, flying has become my trade, and I've had a tremendously interesting time."

John in common with other Americans had heard much about the "degenerate French" and the "decadent Latins." But Lannes certainly gave the lie to the charge. If he had looked for a simile for him in the animal kingdom he would have compared him with the smooth and sinuous tiger, all grace, and all power. Danger was the breath of life to him, and a mile above the earth, with only a delicate frame work holding him in the air he was as easy and confident as one who treads solid land.

John unbuckled the strap which had held him in the *Arrow*, stepped out and fell full length upon the grass. His knees, stiff from such a long position in one attitude, had given way beneath him. Lannes, laughing, climbed out gingerly and began to stretch his muscles.

"You've something to learn yet about dismounting from your airy steed," he said. "You're not hurt, are you?"

"Not a bit," replied John, sitting up and rubbing his knees. "The grass saved me.

Ah, now I can stand! And now I can move the rusty hinges that used to be knees! And as sure as you and I live, Philip, I can walk too!"

He flexed and tensed his muscles. It was a strange sight, that of the young American and the young Frenchman capering and dancing about in a cleft of the Alps, a mile above the valley below. Soon they ceased, lay down on the grass and luxuriated. The heavy suits for flying that they had worn over their ordinary clothing kept them warm even at that height.

"We'll rest until our nerves relax," said Lannes, "and then we'll eat."

"Eat! Eat what?"

"What people usually eat. Good food. You don't suppose I embark in the ship of the air like the Arrow for a long flight without provisioning for it. Look at me."

John did look and saw him take from that tiny locker in the *Arrow* a small bottle, two tin cups, and two packages, one containing crackers, and the other thin strips of dried beef.

"Here," he said, shaking the bottle, "is the light red wine of France. We'd both rather have coffee, but it's impossible, so we'll take the wine which is absolutely harmless. We'll get other good food elsewhere."

He put the food on a little mound of turf between them, and they ate with hunger, but reserve. Neither, although they were on the point of starvation would show the ways of an animal in the presence of the other. So, their breakfast lasted some time, and John had never known food to taste better. When they finished Lannes went back to the locker in the Arrow.

"John," he said, "here are more cartridges. Reload your automatic, and keep watch, though nothing more formidable than the lammergeyer is ever likely to come here. Now, I'll sleep."

He rolled under the lee of a bank, and in two minutes was sleeping soundly.

CHAPTER VI

ABOVE THE STORM

John had slept well in the Arrow, and that fact coupled with his extraordinary situation kept him wide-awake. It was true that he had returned from the dizzy heights of the air, but he was still on the dizzy side of a mountain.

He stood up and tensed and flexed his muscles until he was sure of his physical self. He remembered the weakness in his knees that had sent him down like a little child, and he was so ashamed of himself that he was resolved it should not happen again.

Then he walked to the edge of the little valley which in the far distance had looked like a cleft in the side of the mountain. It was rimmed in by a line of stunted pines, and holding to a pine with each hand he looked over. He saw that sheer stone wall which he had beheld first from above when he was in the Arrow, and far below was the ripple of silvery white that he knew to be the river. To the north lay rolling hills and green country melting under the horizon, the old Europe that men had cultivated for twenty centuries and that was now about to be trodden to pieces by the iron heel of tremendous war.

John understood it. It seemed at the moment that his mind expanding to such an extent could comprehend the vastness of it all, the kingdoms and republics, the famous and beautiful old cities, and the millions of men who did not hate one another involved in a huge whirlpool of destruction. And yet, expand as his mind did, it could not fully comprehend the crime of those who had launched such a thunderbolt of death.

His eyes turned toward the south. It was perhaps not correct to call that little nest in which the Arrow lay a valley. It was a pocket rather, since the cliffs, unscalable by man rose a full half mile above it, and far beyond glimmering faintly in the sunshine he saw the crest of peaks clad in eternal snow.

Truly his view of the Alps was one of which he had never dreamed, and Lannes was right in saying that no man had ever before come into that valley or pocket, unless he had taken wings unto himself as they had done. They were secure where they were, except from danger that could come through the air.

He took the glasses, an uncommonly powerful pair from the locker and

examined every corner of the heavens that he could reach. But he saw none of those ominous, black dots, only little white clouds shot with gold from the morning sun, floating peacefully under the blue arch, and now and then some wide-winged bird floating, aslant, from peak to peak. There was peace, peace everywhere, and he went back from the dizzy edge of the precipice to the side of the Arrow. Lannes still slept heavily, and John appreciated his great need of it, knowing how frightful his strain must have been during that long night.

He felt that he was wholly in Lannes' hands, and he did not know the young Frenchman's plans. He might wish to get away early, but John resolved to let him sleep. Whatever they undertook and wherever they went strength and steadiness must be of the utmost importance, and Lannes alone could take them on their flight.

John leaned against a little hillock and watched the country that rolled northward. For the first time in hours he thought of his uncle and Mr. Anson. And yet he was so filled with wonder at his own translation into another element that he did not worry greatly about them. They would hear of him soon, he felt sure, and in a time of such vast anxiety and fear for half a world brief apprehension about a single person amounted to but little.

He dozed a short while, and then awoke with a start and an effort of the will. Lannes still slept like one dead. He felt that the young Frenchman and the *Arrow* were in his care, and he must fail in nothing. He stood up and walked about in the pocket, shaking the dregs of sleep from his brain. The sun doubled in size from that height, was sweeping toward the zenith. The radiant sky contained nothing but those tiny clouds floating like white sails on a sea of perfect blue. The gold on the snow of the far peaks deepened. He was suffused with the beauty of it, and, for a little space the world war and the frightful calamities it would bring fled quite away.

Lannes awoke about noon, stood up, stretched his limbs and sighed with deep content. He cast a questing glance at the heavens, and then turned a satisfied look on John.

"No enemy in sight," he said, "and I have slept well. Yea, more, I tell you, Yankee that you are, that I have slept magnificently. It was a glorious bed on that grass under the edge of the cliff, and since I may return some day I'll remember it as one of the finest inns in Europe. Have you seen anything while I slept, Monsieur Jean the Scott?"

"Only the peaks, the hills, the blue sky and three or four big birds which I was unable to classify."

"Let their classification go. When we classify now we classify nothing less than armies. Do you think the *Arrow* has had sufficient rest?"

"A plenty. It's a staunch little flying machine."

"Then we'll start again, and I think we'll have an easy trip, save for the currents which are numerous and varied in high mountains."

"What country are we in now?"

"A corner of Switzerland, and I mean for us to descend at a neat little hamlet I've visited before. They don't know war has begun yet, and we can get there provisions and everything else we need."

They launched the Arrow, and once more took flight, now into the maze of mountains. Their good craft frequently rocked and swayed like a ship at sea and John remembered Lannes' words about the currents. Reason told him that intervening peaks and ridges would make them break into all forms of irregularity, and he was glad when they hovered over a valley and began to descend.

He saw about half a mile below them a small Swiss village, built on both sides of a foaming little river, and, using the glasses as they dropped down, he also saw the whole population standing in the streets, their heads craned back, staring into the skies. The effect was curious, that of the world turned upside down.

"The place has four or five hundred inhabitants, and it is a good village," said Lannes. "I have been here four times before, and they know me. Also they trust me, though through no merit of mine. They have seen flying machines often enough to know that they are not demons or monsters, but not often enough to lose their curiosity concerning them. We shall descend in the midst of an audience, inquisitive but friendly."

"Which you like."

Lannes laughed.

"You judge me right," he said. "I do love the dramatic. Maybe that's one reason why I'm so fond of flying. What could appeal to the soul more than swimming

through the air, held up on nothing, with a planet revolving at your feet? Why a man who is not thrilled by it has no soul at all! And how grand it is to swoop over a village, and then settle down in it softly and peacefully like some magnificent bird, folding its wings and dropping to the ground! Isn't it far more poetical than the arrival of a train which comes in with a clang, a rattle, and smoke and soot?"

John laughed in his turn.

"You do put it well for yourself, Philip," he said, "but suppose our machine broke a wing or something else vital. A mile or a half mile would be a long drop."

"But you'd have such a nice clean death. There would never be a doubt about its completeness."

"No, never a doubt. Have you picked your port?"

"'Port' is a good enough place. We'll land on that little park, squarely in the center of the population."

"You're truly in love with the dramatic. You want an audience whenever it's safe."

"I admit it. There is something about the old Roman triumph that would have made a mighty appeal to me. Think of a general, young, brilliant, garlanded, coming into Rome along the Appian Way, with the chariots before him, the captive princes behind him, miles of beautiful young girls covered with roses, on either side, and then the noble villas, and the patricians looking down from the porticoes, the roar of Rome's thunderous million acclaiming him, and then the Capitoline with the grave and reverend senators, and the vestals and the pontifex maximus, and all the honors for the victory which his brain and courage have won for the state."

"I'm not so sure that I'd like it, Philip."

"'De gustibus non disputandum,' as somebody wrote, John. Well, here we are, settling down gently in the place something or other, and just as I told you all the people are around it, with their eyes and mouths wide open."

The aeroplane settled softly upon the grass amid great and sincere cheers, and John looked about curiously. He had returned to the world from space, a space

inhabited only by Lannes, himself and the two Germans, one of whom was now dead. That pocket in the mountain had not counted. It was like a bird's nest in a tree, and this was the solid, planetary world, upon which he had once dwelled.

An elderly man of fine appearance, and with a long brown beard, reaching almost to his waist, stepped forward. Lannes lifted the cap and glasses that hid his head and face and greeted him in French.

"It is I, Philip Victor Auguste Lannes, Heir Schankhorst," he said politely. "You will remember me because I've dropped out of the skies into your village before. The young gentleman with me is one of those strange creatures called Yankees, who come from far across the ocean, and who earn money by the sweat of their brows in order that we may take it from them."

There was such a mellow tone in his voice, and the friendly gleam in his eyes was so wonderful that neither Herr Schankhorst nor his people could resist him. It seemed that most of them understood French as they raised another cheer, and crowded around the two men of the sky, plainly showing their admiration. None mentioned the war, and it was clear that the news of it had not yet penetrated to that remote valley in the high mountains. Lannes introduced John by his right name and description to Herr Schankhorst who was the burgomaster and then, still followed by the admiring crowd, they hurried away to the little inn, two stalwart youths being first detailed to keep watch over the Arrow.

"They're proud of their trust and they'll guard it as they would their lives," said Lannes in English to John. "Meanwhile we'll have dinner in this inn, which I know from experience to be the best, and we'll have the burgomaster and the Protestant clergyman to dine with us. This is German-speaking Switzerland, but these people fear the Germans and they don't fear us. So, we're welcome."

The inn was small, but the food and drink were of the best. John was well supplied with gold, and he did not hesitate to spend it for the burgomaster, the Lutheran clergyman, Lannes and himself.

"No you can't pay your share," he said to Lannes, "because you haven't any share. Remember, I've been a free passenger in the Arrow, which belongs to you, and it's my time to settle the bill."

"Have your way," said Lannes.

They had been speaking in English, and Lannes politely explained to their guests

that his comrade was an obstinate Yankee, a member of a nation, noted for its stubborness, but the most delightful of people when you let them have their way, which after all was a way that generally harmed nobody.

The burgomaster and the clergyman smiled benevolently upon John and John smiled back. He had noticed already that Americans were popular among the great masses of the people in Europe. It was only those interested in the upholding of the classes who frowned upon them and who tried to write or talk them down. He was keen enough too, despite his youth, to deduce the reasons for it.

Here in this little town he was looked upon with favor because he was from America, and soon he was busy answering questions by the burgomaster and clergyman about his own land.

They made no reference to any war or approaching war, and he surmised that they had no thought of such a tremendous catastrophe—Lannes informed him later that they had neither telegraph nor telephone—and John following the cue of his comrade made no reference to it. They ate with sharp appetites, but an end had to come at last. Then Lannes went out into the town to buy his supplies, leaving John to entertain the guests.

John felt deeply that little period of rest and kindly simplicity and the time was soon to come, when he would look back upon it as the greenest of green spots in the desert.

Lannes returned in an hour and announced that they were ready for another flight. They went back to the *Arrow* which the stalwart youths were still guarding, proud of their trust.

"Must you really go?" said the burgomaster to Lannes. "Why not stay with us until tomorrow? Look, the clouds are gathering on the mountains. There may be a storm. Better bide with us till the morrow."

"We thank you from the bottom of our hearts for your kindness," said Lannes, as he and John took their seats, "and under any other circumstances we would stay, but Herr Schankhorst there is a call for us, a call that is sounding all over Europe, a call louder than any that was ever heard before on this old continent."

Lannes raising his voice spoke in clear, loud tones, and he had the impressive manner that he knew so well how to assume. The crowd, eager and expectant,

pressed nearer, all about the Arrow. John saw that the dramatic instinct, always alive within his partner, had sparkled into flame.

"And there is reason for this call," continued Lannes, raising his voice yet further, until the most distant were sure to hear every syllable. "The trumpet is sounding throughout Europe. You may well thank the good God that you dwell here in your little valley, and that all around you the mountains rise a mile above you. There were many trumpets when the great Napoleon rode forth to war, but there are more now."

A gasp arose from the crowd, and John saw faces whiten.

"All Europe is at war," continued Lannes. "The nations march forth against one another and the continent shakes with the tread of twenty million soldiers. But stay here behind your mountain walls, and the storm will pass you by. Now push!"

Twenty youths shoved the *Arrow* with all their might and the plane rising gracefully in the air, soared far above the village. John looked down and again he saw the whole population with heads craned back and eyes turned upward, but he knew now that they were swayed by new and powerful emotions.

"Lannes," he said, "I never saw such an actor as you are."

"But think of the opportunity! How could I overlook such a chance! They knew absolutely nothing of the war, did not dream of it, and here was I with the chance to tell them the whole tremendous truth, and then to shoot suddenly up into the air far beyond their hearing. It was the artistic finish that appealed to me as much as the announcement. Tell your great news and then disappear or become silent. Don't linger over it, or you will mar the effect."

"We're leaving the valley out of sight, and I judge by the sun that our course is northwesterly."

"Right my brave aviator, but I don't think you'll be able to use the sun much longer for reckoning. The worthy burgomaster was right. Look behind you and see how the clouds are gathering!"

John gazed at the vast mass of the Alps, stretching their tremendous rampart across the very heart of Europe. The *Arrow* had gone higher, and deep down in the south he saw the ridges and sharp peaks stretching on apparently to infinity. But it was a wild and desolate world. Even as he looked the far edges dropped

away in the gloom of advancing clouds. The gray of the horizon became black and sinister.

But he looked on, his gaze held by the sublimity of the mountains and the powerful spell, cast by an historic imagination. He was not only gazing upon the heart of Europe, but upon the heart of great history. There, where that long black line led through the clefts the army of Hannibal was passing. He shut his eyes and he saw the dark Carthaginian with his deep eyes, his curly perfumed beard, a scarlet robe wrapped around him, its ends dropping upon his horse, his brothers and the captains riding just behind him, and behind them the Carthaginian sacred band, the Spaniards, the Gauls, the Celts, the wild Numidians shivering on their barebacked horses, the monstrous elephants, the women, and all the strange and heterogeneous elements which the fire and genius of the great leader fused into an army unconquerable by the bravest and best soldiers of antiquity, a great man holding a great nation at bay for half a life time.

Mind and eye ran down the long line of the ages. He saw Goths and Vandals, Germans and Gauls pouring through the passes upon Italy, and then almost in his own time he saw that other, the equal of Hannibal, almost exactly the same age, leading another army over the mighty mountains into the rich plains below. He watched the short figure of Napoleon, and behind him the invincible French youth, born of the republic, dragging their cannon through the snow to victory.

"Open your eyes, John, are you going to sleep?"

"I was never further from sleep, and my eyes were so wide open that I saw more than I ever did before in my life."

"And what did you see, my wise John?"

"I saw generals and nations crossing the mountains down there. I saw through a space of many centuries, and the last I saw was your Napoleon leading his troops over the Great St. Bernard to Marengo."

Lannes' eyes flamed like stars.

"And the great marshal whose name I bear was there with him," he said. "It was near Marengo that he won his Dukedom of Montebello. Napoleon cannot come back, but victory may perch again on the banners of France."

John understood him. He knew how Frenchmen must have writhed through all the years over Gravelotte and Sedan and Metz. He knew how deeply they must

have felt the taunt that they were degenerate, and the prediction of their enemies that they would soon sink to the state of a second class power. He knew how Americans would have felt in their place, and, while he had never believed the sneers, he knew they had been made so often that some Frenchmen themselves had begun to believe them. He understood fully, and the ties that were knitting him so strongly to Lannes increased and strengthened.

"They were really republicans who won the victories of Napoleon," he said, "and you have been a republic again for forty-four years. Republics give life and strength."

"I think they do, and so does a liberal monarchy like that of England. Freedom makes the mind grow. Well, I hope we've grown so much that with help we'll be able to whip Germany. What's become of the Alps, John?"

"The clouds have taken 'em."

There was nothing now in the south but a vast bank of gray, and presently John felt drops of rain on his face. Besides, it was growing much colder. He did not know much about flying, but he was quite sure that in the midst of a great storm of wind and rain they would be in acute danger. He looked anxiously at Lannes, who said reassuringly:

"We'll go above it, John. It's one of the advantages of flying. On earth you can't escape a storm, but here we mount so high that it passes beneath us. After you get used to flying you'll wonder why people trust themselves on such a dangerous place as the earth."

John caught the twinkle in his eye, but he was learning fast, and his own heart thrilled too as they swung upward, rising higher and higher, until the thin air made the blood beat heavily in his temples. At last he looked down again. The earth had vanished. Vast clouds of gray and black floated between, and to John's startled eyes they took on all the aspects of the sea. Here the great swells rolled and tumbled, and off far in the north stretched a vast smooth surface of tranquility. But beneath him he saw flashes of light, and heard the heavy mutter as of giant guns. High above, the air was thin, cold and motionless.

A troubled world rolled directly under them, and the scene that he beheld was indescribably grand and awful. The clouds were in conjunction, and thunder and lightning played as if monstrous armies had crashed together. But here they sailed steadily on a motionless sea of air. He shared the keen pleasure that

Lannes so often felt. The *Arrow* suddenly became a haven of safety, a peaceful haven away from strife.

"Aren't you glad you're not down there?" asked Lannes.

"Aye, truly."

"The winds that blow about the world, and the clouds that float where the winds take them appear to be having a terrible commotion, but we are safe spectators. Monsieur Jean the Scott, I wonder if the time will ever come when we'll have a flying machine that can manufacture its own air to sail in. Then it could rise to any height."

"Phil, you're dreaming!"

"I know I am but I'm not dreaming any more than you were just now when you saw Napoleon and his army crossing the Alps. Besides who can forecast the achievements of science? Why, man who was nothing but a savage yesterday is just getting a start in the world! Who can tell what he'll be doing a million years from now? Think of going on, and on in the void, and maybe arriving on Venus or Mars!"

"In that case we'll find out whether that Mars canal story is true or not."

Lannes laughed.

"I come back to earth," he said, "or rather I come back to a point a safe distance above it. How's our storm making out?"

"It seems to be moving westward."

"And we're flying fast toward the north. We'll soon part company with the storm, and then we'll drop lower. But John, you must take the glasses and watch the skies all the time."

"Which means that we'll fly near the French border, and that I've got to be on the lookout for the Taubes and the dirigibles."

"And he guessed right the very first time. That's more of your American slang. Yes, John, the hosts of the air are abroad, and we must not have another encounter with the Germans. Before night we'll be approaching the battle lines, and the air will be full of scouts. Perhaps it will be better to do the rest of our traveling at night. We might drop down in a wood somewhere, and wait for the

twilight."

"That's true Philip, but there's one question I'd like to ask you."

"Go ahead."

"Just how do you classify me? I belong to America, which has nothing to do with your gigantic war, and yet here I am scouting through the air with you, and exposed to just as much danger as you are."

"I don't think I could have answered that question about classification yesterday, John, but I can without hesitation today. You're an Ally. And you're an Ally because you can't help it. Germany represents autocracy and France democracy. So does England who is going to help us. You've risked your life over and over again with me, a Frenchman, one who would look upon the defeat of the German empire as almost the millennium. You may like the German people, but all your principles, all your heart-beats are on our side. When we get to some convenient place you'll write to your uncle and friend at Munich that you've joined England and France in the fight against German militarism. Oh, you needn't protest! It's true. I know you. You're quiet and scholarly, but your soul is the soul of adventure. I've seen how you responded to the thrill of the Arrow, how you're responding at this very moment I know with absolute certainty, Monsieur Jean the Scott, that you'll be fighting on the side of England and France. So you'd better make up your mind to stick to me, until we reach the French army."

John was silent a moment or two. Then he reached out and grasped Lannes' free hand.

"I was thinking of doing the things you predict," he said, "and to keep you from being a false prophet, Phil, old man, I'll do them."

Lannes returned his strong grasp.

"But if the English come into the war on your side," continued John, "I think I'll join them. Not that I'm overwhelmingly in love with the English, but they speak our American language, or at least variations of it. In the heat of battle I might forget the French word for, retreat, but never the English."

Lannes smiled.

"You won't be running, old fellow," he said. "You're right of course to join the English since they're close kin to you, but I have a feeling, John Scott, that you

and I will see much of each other before this war is over."

"It may be so. I'm beginning to think, Phil, that lots of things we don't dream about happen to us. I certainly never expected a week ago to be in the middle of a great war."

"And you expected least of all, Monsieur Jean the Scott, to be sailing smoothly along in the air far above the clouds, and with a terrific storm raging below."

"No, I didn't. If a man had predicted that for me I should have said he was insane. But I think, Phil, the storm is leaving us or we've left it. That big ball of darkness giving out thunder and fire is moving fast toward the west."

"So it is, and there's clear air beneath us. And the Alps are reappearing in the south."

"Right you are, Philip. I can see a half dozen peaks, and there is another, and now another. See, their white heads coming out of the mists and vapors, whole groups of them now!"

"Don't they look from here like a friendly lot of old fellows, John, standing there and nodding their snowy pates to one another, just as they've done for the last million years or more!"

"You hit the nail on the head, Phil. Understand that? It's one of our phrases meaning that you've told the exact truth. There goes that wicked storm, farther and farther to the west. Soon the horizon will swallow it up."

"And then it will go on toward Central France. I hope it won't damage the vineyards. But what a fool I am to be talking about storms of weather, when the German storm of steel is about to sweep over us!"

"You don't talk very hopefully, when you speak of a German invasion at once."

"But I am hopeful. I expect the invasion because we are not ready. They accuse us French of planning a surprise attack upon Germany. What nonsense, when we're not even prepared to defend ourselves! The first sound of this war will show who was getting ready to attack. But John we'll drive back that invasion, we and our allies. I repeat to you that the French of 1914 are not the French of 1870. The Third Republic will command the same valor and devotion that served the First. But here I am talking like an old politician. Get the glasses, John, and look at our field of battle, the heavens. It's all in the light now, and we

can't afford another encounter with the Taubes."

John took a long look. The passage of the storm had purified the air which was now of dazzling clearness, a deep, silky blue, with a sun of pure red gold that seemed to hang wonderfully near. Lannes permitted the *Arrow* to drop lower and lower, until the earth itself sprang up into the light.

John saw again the green hills, the blue lakes and the streams, neat villages and splendid country houses. It was his planet, and he was glad to come once more where he could see it.

"It was fine up there above the clouds," he said to Lannes, "but after all I've got a very kindly feeling for the earth. It's like meeting an old friend again."

"Comes of use and habit, I suppose if we lived on Venus or Mars we'd have the same kind of attachment. But like you, John, I'm glad to see the earth again. The scenery is more varied than it is up in the heavens. What do you see through the glasses, John? Don't miss anything if it's there. It's too important."

"I see in the north just under the horizon four black specks. It's too far away for me to tell anything about 'em, but they move just as those two Taubes did before their shape became clear."

"More Taubes. That's certain. And it's time for us to get away. We're almost on the border John and the German aeroplanes and dirigibles are sure to have gathered."

"There's a forest a little to the right of us. Suppose we go down there."

Lannes examined the forest.

"It seems fairly large," he said, "and I think it will make a good covert. But whether good or bad we must drop into it. The German airships are abroad and we can take no chances."

The *Arrow* descended with increased speed. John still used the glasses, and he searched every nook of the forest, which like most of those of Europe had little undergrowth. It contained no houses at all, but he picked out an open space near the center, large enough for the landing of the Arrow, which he pointed out to Lannes.

"I suppose you'd call it a respectable forest," said John. "I see some trees which

are at least a foot through, near the ground. Luckily it's summer yet and the foliage is thick. If I were one of you Europeans I'd never boast about my trees."

"Some day I'm going to run over to that America of yours, and see whether all you tell me about it is true. Steady now, John, I'm about to make the landing, and it's my pride to land more gently every time than I did the time before."

They slid down softly and alighted on the grass. Lannes' triumph was complete, and his wonderful eyes sparkled.

"The best I've done yet," he said, "but not the best I will do. John, what time is it?"

"Half-past five."

"With our long evenings that makes considerable daylight yet. Suppose you take your automatic, and examine the woods a little. I'd go with you, but I'm afraid to leave the *Arrow* here alone. Leave the glasses with me though."

John, after regaining his land legs, walked away among the woods, which evidently had been tended with care like a park, bearing little resemblance, as he somewhat scornfully reminded himself to the mighty forests of his own country. Still, these Europeans, he reflected were doing the best they could.

The region was hilly and he soon lost sight of Lannes, but he threshed up the wood, thoroughly. There was no sign of occupancy. He did not know whether it lay in Germany or France, but it was evident that all the foresters were gone. A clear brook ran through a corner of it, and he knelt and drank. Then he went back to Lannes who was sitting placidly beside the Arrow.

"Nothing doing," said John in the terse phrase of his own country. "At imminent risk from the huge wild animals that inhabit it I've searched all this vast forest of yours. I've forded a river three feet wide, and six inches deep, I've climbed steep mountains, twenty feet high, I've gone to the uttermost rim of the forest, a full half-mile away on every side, and I beg to report to you, General, that the wilderness contains no human being, not a sign of any save ourselves. Strain my eyes as I would I could not find man anywhere."

Lannes smiled.

"You've done well as far as you've gone," he said.

"I could go no farther."

"You said you saw no sign of man."

"None whatever."

"But I do."

"Impossible!"

"Not impossible at all. Why don't you look up?"

John instantly gazed into the heavens, and he was startled at the sight he beheld. The population of the air had increased suddenly and to a wonderful extent. A score of aeroplanes were outlined clearly against the sky, and as he looked the distant drumming noise that he had heard in Dresden came again to his ears. A monstrous black figure cut across his vision and soon sailed directly overhead.

"A Zeppelin!" he said.

"A huge fellow," said Lannes. "The aeroplanes are German too, or there would soon be trouble between them and the Zeppelin."

"Should we take to flight?"

"No, it's too late. Besides, I think we're safe here. The foliage is so dense that they're not likely to see us. This forest must lie in Germany, and I judge that the heads of their armies have already passed to the west of us. The planes may be scouting to see whether French cavalry is in their rear. Do you hear that? I say, John, do you hear that?"

From a far point in the west came a low sound which swelled gradually into a crash like thunder. In a few moments came another, and then another and then many. They could see no smoke, no fire, and the very distance lent majesty to the sound.

John knew well what it was, the thudding of great guns, greater than any that had been fired before by man on land. Lannes turned ashy-pale.

"It's the cannon, the German cannon!" he said, "and that sound comes from France. The Kaiser's armies are already over the border, marching on Paris. Oh, John! John! all the time that I was predicting it I was hoping that it wouldn't come true, couldn't come true! You Americans can't understand! In your new

country you don't have age-old passions and hates and wrongs and revenges burning you up!"

"I do understand. It must be a serious battle though. All the planes are now flying westward, and there goes the Zeppelin too."

"Which leaves us safe for the present. Besides, the twilight is coming."

CHAPTER VII

THE ZEPPELIN

The brilliant sunlight faded into gray, but the European twilight lingers, and it was long before night came. John and Lannes stood beside the Arrow, and for a while neither spoke. They were listening to the thunder of the great guns and they were trying to imagine how the battle was swaying over the distant and darkening fields. The last of the air scouts had disappeared in the dusk.

"The sound doesn't seem to move," said Lannes, "and our men must be holding their own for the present. Still, it's hard to tell about the location of sound."

"How far away do you think it is?"

"Many miles. We only hear the giant cannon. Beneath it there must be a terrible crash of guns and rifles. I've heard, John, that the Germans have seventeen-inch howitzers, firing shells weighing more than two thousand pounds, and France furnishes the finest roads in the world for them to move on."

He spoke with bitterness, but in an instant or two he changed his tone and said:

"At any rate we haven't made a god out of war, and that's why we haven't seventeen-inch cannon. Perhaps by not setting up such a god we've gained something else—republican fire and spirit that nothing can overcome."

The twilight now deepened and the darkness increased fast in the wood, but the deep thunder on the western horizon did not cease. John thought he saw flashes of fire from the giant cannon, but he was not sure. It might be sheaves of rays shot off by the sunken sun, or, again, it might be his imagination, always vivid, but stimulated to the last degree by the amazing scenes through which he was passing.

After a while, although the throb of the great guns still came complete darkness enveloped the grove. It seemed now to John that the sound had moved farther westward, but Lannes had just shown such keen emotion that he would not say the Germans were pushing their way farther into France. However, Lannes himself noticed it. Presently he said:

"The battle goes against us, but you may be sure of one thing, Monsieur Jean the Scott, we were heavily outnumbered and the German artillery must have been in

caliber as four to our one."

"I've no doubt it's so," said John with abundant sympathy.

"The fire seems to be dying. Probably the night is too dark for the combat to go on. What do you think we ought to do, John?"

"You're the airman, Phil. I'm only a raw beginner."

"But a beginner who has learned fast. I think the sound of that battle in France has weakened my nerve for the moment, and I want your advice. I ask for it again."

"Then suppose we stay where we are. This isn't a bad little forest, as forests go in Europe, and in the night, at least, it's pretty dark. The enemy is all around us, and in the air over our heads. Suppose we sleep here beside the Arrow."

"That's a good sound Yankee head of yours, John. Just as you think, it would be dangerous for us to run either on land or in the air, and so we'll stay here and take the chances. I secured two blankets at the village, and each will have one. You go to sleep, John, and I'll take the first watch."

"No, I'll take the first. You need rest more than I do. You've been sailing the Arrow, and, besides, your nerves have been tried harder by the echo of that battle. Just for a little while I mean to boss. 'Boss,' I'll explain to you, means in our American idiom a commander, a Napoleon. Now, stop talking, wrap yourself in your blanket and go to sleep."

"I obey. But keep your automatic handy."

He fell asleep almost instantly, and John, lying near with his own blanket about him, kept watch over him and the Arrow. He did not feel sleepy at all. His nerves had been keyed to too high a pitch for rest to come yet. His situation and the scenes through which he had passed were so extraordinary that certain faculties seemed to have become blunted. Although surrounded by many dangers all sensation of fear was gone.

The blanket was sufficient protection even against the cool European night, and he had found a soft and comfortable place on the turf. The wood was silent, save for the rustle of a stray breeze among the leaves. Far in the night he heard twice the faint boom of the giant cannon deep down on the western horizon. For all he knew the sounds may have come from a point twenty miles away.

He walked a little distance from the Arrow, and listened intently. But after the two shots the west was silent. The earth settled back into gloom and darkness. He returned to the *Arrow* and found that Lannes was still sleeping heavily, his face pale from exertion and from the painful emotions that he had felt.

John was sorry for him, sorry from the bottom of his heart. Love of country was almost universal, and it must be almost death to a man, whose native land, having been trodden deep once, was about to be trodden again by the same foe.

He went once more to the little stream and took another drink. He sat by its banks a few minutes, and listened to its faint trickle, a pleasant soothing sound, like the almost unheard sigh of the wind. Then he returned to his usual place near the Arrow.

Dead stillness reigned in the grove. There was no wind and the leaves ceased to rustle. Not another note came from the battle of the nations beyond the western horizon. The *Arrow* and its master both lay at peace on the turf. The stillness, the heavy quiet oppressed John. He had been in the woods at night many times at home, but there one heard the croaking of frogs at the water's edge, the buzzing of insects, and now and then the cry of night birds, but here in this degenerate forest nothing stirred, and the air was absolutely pulseless.

Time began to lengthen. He looked at his watch, but it was not yet midnight, and Lannes was still motionless and sleeping. He had resolved, as most of the strain had fallen upon his comrade, to let him sleep far beyond his allotted half, and he walked about again, but soundlessly, in order to keep his faculties awake and keen.

The night had been dark. Many clouds were floating between him and the moon. He looked up at them, and it seemed incredible now that beyond them human beings could float above the thunder and lightning, and look up at the peaceful moon and stars. Yet he had been there, not in any wild dash of a few minutes, but in a great flight which swept over nights and days.

His early thoughts were true. A long era had ended, and now one, charged with wonders and marvels, had begun. This mighty war was the signal of the change, and it would not be confined to the physical world. The mind and soul would undergo like changes. People would never look at things in the same way. There had been such mental revolutions in the long past, and it was not against nature for another to come now.

John was thoughtful, perhaps beyond his years, but he had been subjected to tremendous emotions. The unparalleled convulsion of the old world was enough to make even the foolish think. Event and surmise passed and repassed through his mind, while he walked up and down in the wood. Hours crept slowly by, the clouds drifted away, and the moon came out in a gush of silver. The stars, great and small, danced in a sky that was always blue, beyond the veil.

He came back for the third time to the brook. He was thirsty that night, but before he knelt down to drink he paused and every muscle suddenly became rigid. He was like one of those early borderers in his own land who had heard a sinister sound in the thicket. It was little, a slight ring of steel, but every nerve in John was alive on the instant.

Still obeying the instincts of ancestors, he knelt down among the trees. His vivid fancy might be at work once more! And then it might not! The ringing of steel on steel came again, then a second time and nearer. He slid noiselessly forward, and lay with his ear to the earth. Now he heard other sounds, and among them one clear note, the steady tread of hoofs.

Cavalry were approaching the grove, but which? German or French? John knew that he ought to go and awake Lannes at once, but old inherited instincts, suddenly leaping into power, held him. By some marvelous mental process he reverted to a period generations ago. His curiosity was great, and his confidence in his powers absolute.

He dragged himself twenty or thirty yards along the edge of the brook toward the tread of hoofs, and soon he heard them with great distinctness. Mingled with the sound was the jingling of bits and the occasional impact of a steel lance-head upon another. John believed now that they were Germans and he began to creep away from the brook, toward which the troop was coming directly. It was not possible to estimate well from sound, but he thought they numbered at least five hundred.

He was back thirty yards from the brook, lying flat in the grass, when the heads of horses and men emerged from the shadows. The helmets showed him at once that they were the Uhlans, and without the helmets the face of the leader alone was sufficient to tell him that the Prussian horsemen had ridden into the wood.

The one who rode first with his helmet thrown back a little was Rudolf von Boehlen, the man with whom John had talked at Dresden, and who had made such an impression upon him. He had known the scholarly Prussian, the

industrial Prussian, and the simple good-natured Prussian of the soil, but here was the Prussian to whom the first god was Mars, with the Kaiser as his prophet. It was he, and such as he, who ruled the industrious and kindly German people, teaching them that might was right, and that they always possessed both.

John saw through the eyes of both fact and fancy. Von Boehlen was a figure of power. Mind and body were now at the work for which they had been trained, and to which the nature of their owner turned them.

Despite his size and weight he sat his horse with lightness and grace, and his cold blue eyes searched the forest for victims rather than foes. John saw in him the product of ceaseless and ruthless training, helped by nature.

But von Boehlen, keen as his eyes were, did not see the figure of the watcher prone in the grass. He let his horse drink at the brook, and others rode up by his side, until there was a long line of horses with their heads bent down to the stream. It occurred to John then that their only purpose in entering the wood was to water their animals. He saw von Boehlen take a map from his pocket, and study it while the horse drank. He was not surprised at the act. He had no doubt that the brook, tiny though it might be, was marked on the map. He had heard that the Germans foresaw everything, attended to the last detail, and now he was seeing a proof of it. How was it possible to beat them!

He did not consider the danger great, as he listened to the long lapping and gurgling sound, made by so many horses drinking. It was likely that the whole troop would ride away in a few minutes, and only a possible chance would take them in the direction where the *Arrow* and Lannes lay. But the trees grew thickly in the circle about them, and that chance was infinitely small.

The Uhlans, under the lead of von Boehlen, turned presently, and rode back through the edge of the wood into a field, but they went no farther. John, following a safe distance, saw them unsaddle on the grass and make their camp. Then he hurried back to Lannes and awoke him gently.

"What! what is it?" exclaimed Lannes. "The Germans in Paris! The capital fallen, you say!"

"No! No! Not so loud! Come out of your dreams! Paris is all right, but there are Uhlans just beyond the edge of the wood, and some scouts of theirs may come tramping here."

Lannes was thoroughly awake in another instant.

"You did not wake me when my time came, John," he said.

"I didn't because you needed the rest more than I did."

"Where did you say the Uhlans were?"

"In a field at the eastern edge of the wood. They are Prussians led by an officer, von Boehlen, whom I saw at Dresden before the war began. They rode into the wood to water their horses, but now they've gone back to make a camp."

"You've certainly watched well, John, and now I suppose we must run again. They follow us in the air and they follow us on the ground. This is a bad trap, John. Suppose you go to von Boehlen, tell him who you are, how you were kidnapped in a way, and throw yourself on his mercy. You'll be safe. The Germans want the friendship of the Americans."

"And desert you at such a time? Philip Lannes, you're not worthy to bear the name of the great Marshal!"

Lannes laughed in an embarrassed manner.

"It was merely an offer," he said. "I didn't expect you to accept it."

"You knew I wouldn't. Come, think quick, and tell us what we're going to do!"

"You fit fast into your new role of what you call boss, Monsieur Jean the Scott!"

"And I mean to be boss for the next five minutes. Then you will have decided how we're going to escape and you'll resume your place."

"As I said we won't abandon the Arrow, so our passage will be through the air. John, I mean that we shall run the gantlet. We'll pass their air fleet and reach our own."

He spoke in low tones, but they contained the ring of daring. John responded. With the ending of the era, the changing of the world, he had changed, too. Shy and sensitive the spirit of adventure flamed up in him. Those flights in the air had touched him with the magic of achievements, impossible, but which yet had been done.

"Suppose we launch the *Arrow* at once," he said. "I'm ready to try anything with you."

"I knew that, too. One thing in our favor is the number of clouds hanging low in the west, where their air fleet is. It's likely that most of the planes and dirigibles have gone to the ground, but they'll keep enough above to watch. The clouds may enable us to slip by."

"If I had my way I'd wrap myself in the thickest and blackest of the clouds and float westward with it."

"We'll have to go slowly to keep down the drumming of the motor. Now a big push and a long push. So! There! Now we're rising!"

The Arrow, the strength and delicacy of which justified all of Lannes' pride, rose like a feather, and floated gracefully above the trees, where it hung poised for a few minutes. Then, as they were not able to see anything, Lannes took it a few hundred yards higher. There they caught the gleam of steel beyond the wood, and looked down on the camp of Uhlans.

With the aid of the glasses they saw most of the men asleep on the ground, but twenty on horseback kept watch about the field.

"One look is enough," said Lannes. "I hope I'll never see 'em again."

"Maybe not, but there are millions of Germans."

"That's the worst of it. Millions of 'em and all armed and ready. John, I've chosen our road. We'll go north by west, and I think we'd better rise high. During the night the German machines are likely to hang low, and we may be able to pass over 'em without detection. What do you think of those clouds?"

"They're not drifting much. They may hide us as a fog hides a ship at sea."

The *Arrow* began to soar. The Uhlans and the grove soon faded away, and they rode among the clouds. John's watch showed that it was about three o'clock in the morning. He no longer felt the chill of the air in those upper regions. Excitement and suspense made his blood leap, warm, through his veins.

Lannes, after his long sleep, was stronger and keener than ever. His hand on the steering rudder knew no uncertainty, and always he peered through the clouds for a sign of the foe, who, he knew well, was to be dreaded so much. John, glasses at eye, sought the same enemy.

But they heard and saw nothing, save the sights and sounds of the elements. A

cold, wet wind flew across their faces, and the planet below once more turned in space, invisible to eye.

"One could almost think," said John, "that we don't turn with it, that we hang here in the void, while it whirls about, independent of us."

"I wish that were so," said Lannes with a laugh. "Then we could stay where we are, while it turned around enough beneath us to take the Germans far away. But don't you hear a faint buzzing there to the west, John?"

"Yes, I was just about to speak of it, and I know the sound, too. It's one of the big Zeppelins."

"Then it's likely to be much below. I judge from the presence of the trees that, we must be somewhere near the German outposts."

"I wish that we dared to descend enough to see."

"But we don't dare, Monsieur Jean the Scott. We'd drop into a nest of hornets."

"Better slow down then. Their scouting planes must be somewhere near."

"Good advice again. Oh, you're learning fast. And meanwhile you're committing yourself more and more deeply to our cause."

"I've already committed myself deeply enough. I've told you that your prediction about my joining a British force is true."

"But you'll have to stay with us French until the British come. John, is it my imagination or do I hear that buzzing below us again?"

"You really hear it, and I do, too. It's a big Zeppelin beyond a doubt, and therefore we must not be far from a German base. You know they have to build huge sheds in which to keep the Zeppelins."

"No doubt they have such a station near enough on their side of the border. But, John, I'm going to have a look at that air-elephant. In all this thick darkness they'd never know what we are. Are you ready for it?"

"Ready and anxious."

The *Arrow* dropped down toward the buzzing sound, which rapidly grew louder. John had heard that a silencer had been invented for Zeppelins, but either it was a mistake or they apprehended a hostile presence so little that they did not care

to use it.

He was rapidly becoming inured to extreme danger, but his heart throbbed nevertheless, and he felt the chill of the high damp air. At the suggestion of Lannes, who called him the eyes of the ship, he retained the glasses, and, with them, sought continually to pierce the heavy masses of cloud. He could not yet see anything, but the heavy buzzing noise, much like the rattling of a train, increased steadily. The Zeppelin could not be very far beneath them now.

John felt a sudden rush of wind near him and a dark object swung by. Lannes swiftly changed their own course, and darted almost at a right angle in the darkness.

"A Taube?" whispered John.

"Yes, one of the armored kind. Two men were in it, and most likely they carried rifles. They're on watch despite the night. Maybe they fear some of our own planes, which must be not many miles in front. Oh, France, is not sleeping, John! Don't think that! We are not prepared as the Germans were, but we've the tools, and we know how to use them."

He corrected the course of the *Arrow* and again dropped down slowly toward the Zeppelin. John's eyes, used to the darkness, caught a glimpse of Lannes' face, and he was surprised. He had never before seen one express such terrible resolution. Some dim idea of his purpose entered the American's mind, but he did not yet realize it fully.

But his sense of the weird, of acting in elements, hitherto unknown to man, grew. The Arrow, smooth, sleek and dangerous as death, was feeling its way in the darkness among a swarm of enemies. Its very safety lay in the fact that it was one among many, and, wrapped in the dark, the others could not tell its real character, fifty feet away.

John could truthfully say to himself afterwards that he did not feel fear at that time. He was so absorbed, so much overwhelmed by the excitement, the novelty and the cloud of darkness hiding all these actors in the heavens that no room was left in him for fear.

Lower and lower they dropped. The Zeppelin, evidently not far above the earth, was moving slowly.

John was reminded irresistibly of an enormous whale lounging in the depths of

the ocean, which here was made up of heavy clouds. In another minute by the aid of the powerful glasses he made out two captive balloons, and a little farther westward three aeroplanes flying about like sentinels pacing their beats. He also saw beneath them lights which he knew to be the fires of a great camp, but he could not see the men and the cannon.

"The German camp is beneath us," he said.

"I thought you'd find it there," returned Lannes bitterly. "It's where our own camp ought to be, but our men were defeated in that battle which we heard, and here the Germans are."

John did not see him this time, but the look of pitiless resolve in the eyes of the young Frenchman deepened. That the Germans should come upon the soil of France and drive the French before them overwhelmed him with an agony that left no room for mercy.

"There goes another of the Taubes," he whispered, as a shadow flitted to the right "They're cruising about in lively fashion. If anybody hails us don't answer. I'll turn away in the darkness, pretending that we haven't heard."

The hail came almost as he spoke, but the Arrow veered to one side again at an angle, and then, after a few minutes, came back to a point, where it hovered directly over the Zeppelin and not far away. John saw beneath them now the huge shape, ploughing along slowly through the heavy bank of air. It loomed, in the darkness, a form, monstrous and incredible.

"Are we just over the thing, John?" asked Lannes.

"Exactly. Look down and you can see."

"I see."

Then his arm flashed out, and he hurled something downward with all the concentrated force of hate. There came a stunning crash mingled with rending and tearing sounds and frightened cries, and then the monstrous shape was gone. The place where it had hung in the heavens was empty and silent.

John's heart missed a dozen beats. His jaw fell and he stared at Lannes.

"Yes, I intended it from the first," said Lannes, "and I haven't a single compunction. I got that bomb, and three others in the Swiss village when I left

you at the inn. I did not tell you of them because—well, because, I thought it better to keep the secret to myself. It's war. The men in that Zeppelin came to destroy our towns and to kill our men."

"I'm not accusing you. I suppose, as you say, it's war. But hadn't we better get away from here as fast as we can?"

"We're doing it now. While we were talking I was steering the *Arrow* westward. Hark, do you hear those shots!"

"I hear them. It can't be that they're firing at random in the air, as they would be more likely to hit one another than a slim and single little shape like the Arrow."

"They're signaling. Of course they're organized, and they're probably trying to draw all the planes to one spot, after which they'll spread out and seek us. But they won't find us. Ah, my sleek Arrow! my lovely little Arrow, so fast and true! You've done your duty tonight and more! We've run the gantlet, John! We're through their air fleet, and we've left a trail of fire! They won't forget this night!"

John sat silent, while Lannes exulted. Meanwhile the Arrow, piercing the low clouds, rushed westward, unpursued.

CHAPTER VIII

THE FRENCH DEFENSE

They flew on in the darkness, and both remained silent. John at first had felt resentment against Lannes, but he reflected that this was war, and it was no worse to kill with a bomb in the air than with a shell on land. It was hard, however, to convince oneself that destruction and death were sovereigns in Europe.

After a long time Lannes pointed to the east, where a thin gray was showing.

"The sun will soon be up," he said, "and it will drive the last cloud before it. We're going to have a fine day. Look down at this, our France, Monsieur Jean the Scott, and see what a beautiful land it is! Can you wonder that we don't want the armed feet of the Germans to tread it down?"

The darkness was shredding away so fast that John got a clear view. He was surprised, too, to find how low they were flying. They were not more than a hundred yards above the tops of the trees, and the glorious country was all that Lannes had claimed for it.

He saw woods heavy in foliage, fields checkered in green and brown, white roads, neat villages and farm houses, and the spires of churches. It seemed impossible that war should come upon such a land. This word "impossible" was often recurring to John. It was impossible that all Europe should go to war and yet the impossible was happening. The world would not allow twenty million men to spring at one another's throats, and yet they were doing it.

Lannes suddenly uttered a deep "Ah!" and pointed with a long forefinger.

"Our camp," he said. "On the hill about five miles to the left. The planes have seen us. Three are coming to meet us."

John saw the camp distinctly through the glasses, a long intrenched position on a low, broad hill, many guns in front and many horses in the rear, with the banners of France floating over the works.

"We'll be there soon," said Lannes joyfully. "Here, John, wave this!"

He took a small French flag from the locker and John waved it with vigor. The

fastest of the planes was soon beside them and Lannes called out gayly:

"The Arrow, Philip Lannes at the rudder, and John Scott, an American, who is going to fight with us, as passenger and comrade!"

Thus they flew into the republican camp, and a great crowd came forward to meet them. Lannes stepped out of the Arrow, saluted an officer in the uniform of a captain, and asked:

"What corps is this?"

"That of General Avillon."

"Then, sir, would you be so good as to conduct me to his headquarters? I have been in both Berlin and Vienna in disguise, and on service for our government. I have information and minute maps."

"Come with me at once," said the officer eagerly.

"I ask you to make my comrade comfortable while I am gone. He is an American, John Scott, whom an accident threw with me. He is the bravest of the brave and he's going to serve with us."

Lannes was dramatic and impressive. Again he was the center of a scene that he loved, and, as always, he made the most of it. John reddened at his high praise, and would have withdrawn farther into the crowd, but enthusiastic young officers about him would not let him. "Vive l'Américain!" they shouted and patted him on the shoulders.

Lannes went at once with the captain, and John was left with his new friends. Friends, in truth they were, and their enthusiasm grew as he told of their extraordinary flight, their battle with the Taubes, and the destruction of the Zeppelin by Lannes. Then their applause became thunder, and, seeing it in the distance and the perspective, John became more reconciled to the throwing of the bomb. War was killing and one could not change it.

While they heard his story and cheered him the French did not neglect his comfort. Young officers, many of whom were mere boys, insisted upon entertaining this guest from the air. It was so early that they had not yet had their own breakfasts, and while different groups fought for him he finally sat down beside a fire with a dozen lieutenants of about his own age.

The food was abundant and good, and, as he ate and drank, he was compelled to tell their story over again.

"I'm glad Lannes got that monster, the Zeppelin," said one of the young lieutenants. "God knows we've had little enough success so far. They say we were ready for war, and had planned to strike. But it was the Germans who struck. That proves who had done the planning. They say that our officers were in Belgium, making ready for the French army to march through that country, and yet when the Germans pushed into Belgium they found no French. The accusation refutes itself."

"Are the Germans in Belgium?" asked John, astonished.

"With a great army, and England has declared herself. She is sending a force to our help. You will not lack for comrades who speak your own tongue."

"We thought we heard last night the sounds of a battle."

"You thought right. It was we who were fighting it, and we were defeated. We were driven back many miles, but we were not beaten, man to man. With even numbers we could have held them, but they were three or four to one, and they have monster cannon which far outrange ours."

"It was one of those giant guns I heard, because we heard nothing else. Are the Germans coming forward for another attack?"

"We don't know. Our aeroplanes report no movement in their camp, but the sun has scarcely risen yet. Still we all think they'll come. We know it's their plan to make a gigantic rush on Paris. Our spies report that their most frequent boast is: 'Ten days to France and twenty days to Paris.' Well, the first part of it is more than fulfilled."

Silence and sadness fell over the group of brave young men. John's heart was filled with sympathy for them. His nature was one that invariably took the part of invaded against invaders, and the invaders had already struck a mighty blow. But it was he, as yet a stranger among them, who restored cheerfulness.

"I've been with one Frenchman through adventures and dangers, of which I never dreamed," he said. "Never once did his hand or eye waver. I know that there are hundreds of thousands of Frenchmen like him, and such men can't fail."

"Thank you," one of them said simply. "We Frenchmen of the Third Republic

shall try to fight as well as the Frenchmen of the First Republic, and we'll pray that our allies, the English, may come soon."

John was silent. He knew even better than they how necessary was the arrival of the English. He had been in Germany and he had seen something of the mobilization. He knew that the planet had never before borne anything comparable to the German war machine which was already rolling forward upon France and Belgium. Would the invaded, even with the help of England, be able to stop it?

The breakfast finished, he lay down in one of the tents on a blanket, and, despite the noises of the camp, soon slept. But he was awakened by Lannes two or three hours later.

"I've found a way for you to send telegrams through Switzerland, and then to Munich, telling your people where you are and what you are going to do," he said, "and now I'm going to leave you for a while. I'm going on another scout in the Arrow, but I go alone. You, I take it, will do your fighting now on land. But, John Scott, I've been proud to know you and to have had such a flight with you. I don't suppose that any other beginner has ever had such a lively start as yours, but you've gone through it like a veteran. I want to shake your hand."

He pulled off his aviator's glove, and the two hands met in a powerful clasp. Then his dramatic instinct keenly alive he turned and sprang into the waiting Arrow. The young officers gave it a long push, and, rising lightly and gracefully, it soared over the army, far up into the blazing sunlight. Its strange navigator waved one hand to those below, and then the Arrow, true to its name, shot away toward the north.

"There goes the bravest man I ever saw," said John. "Give him air to float in, and I believe he'd try for the sun."

"All those flying men are brave," said a young officer, "but Lannes is the bravest of them all, as he is also the most skillful. As a scout he is worth ten thousand men to us."

"I must look for those English of whom he spoke," said John, "I have trespassed upon your courtesy here long enough. I wish to join them and serve with you."

"They're not all English by any means. Fully half of them are your own countrymen, Americans. The English and Americans quarrel much among

themselves, but they unite against any foe. My own name is Creville, Louis Creville, and I'll take you to this company, The Strangers, as with pride they call themselves."

Creville led the way, and John followed toward another wing of the French force. The young American observed the French soldiers closely. They did not look either so stalwart or so trim as the Germans. Their long blue coats, and baggy red trousers had a curious effect. The color scheme seemed to John more fitted to a circus than to an army, but they were lively, active men, their faces gay and their eyes full of intelligence. He knew from his history that they had looked just the same way and had acted just the same way when they followed the victorious banners of Napoleon into nearly every capital of Europe.

"We're almost at the camp of the Strangers," said Captain Creville. "None could ever mistake it, because their debate this morning upon their respective merits is uncommonly spirited. Listen!"

"I tell you, Wharton, you Yankees have no discipline. By Gad, sir, your lack of it is startling."

"We don't need it, Carstairs, because we were always able to lick you English without it."

"Lick us, you boasters! Where did you ever lick us?"

"Wherever we were able to find you."

"My histories tell me that you never looked for us much."

"But those histories were written by Englishmen. I'll lay you a good five-dollar bill against one of your shilling-short pounds that I beat you into Berlin."

"As a prisoner, yes. I've no doubt of it."

"Gentlemen," said Creville, as he took a step forward, and looked into a little dip, "I bring you a new comrade."

Within the dip lay at least two hundred youths and young men. Nearly all were fair, and they were unmistakably Americans and English. The two who had been carrying on the violent controversy were stretched flat on the grass almost at the feet of Creville. But they sat up, when they heard him, and John saw that they were uncommonly handsome and athletic, their age about his own. They stepped

forward at once, and extended to John the hand of fellowship. Captain Creville made the introductions.

"He wishes to enlist with you," he said.

"He'll be welcome, I know," said the Englishman, Carstairs. "Our commander, Captain Colton, is not here at this moment, but we expect him in a half hour. How did you arrive, Mr. Scott?"

"He dropped down," replied Creville for John. "Dropped down. I don't understand you, Captain?"

Creville pointed straight up into the heavens.

"He came like the bird," he said. "He sailed through the air, seeking his nest. As soon as he saw us he said: 'Here is the perfect place; here I can dwell with the kindest and best people in the world; and down he swooped at once.'"

"I suppose you mean that he's an airman and that he came in a flying machine," said the American, Wharton. "Carstairs will arrive at that conclusion, too, if you give him time, but being an Englishman, time he must have."

"But when I arrive at the conclusion it will be right," said Carstairs.

"It's true that Mr. Scott came by machine," said Captain Creville, who was now speaking in excellent English. "He arrived with our great young aviator, Philip Lannes, and he has had many and thrilling adventures, of which he will tell you later. I suppose you will take your part in these English and American controversies, Mr. Scott, but your new captain will have nothing to do with them."

"Is he an Englishman or an American?"

"You can decide that for yourself. He was born in England. His mother was American and his father English. He was taken to America when he was three years old, and was educated there, but, after finishing at Harvard, he spent a year at Oxford. It seemed to all of us that his appointment as captain of this troop was most happy. The English are sure that he's English, the American know that he's American, he himself says nothing, and so all are happy. Ah, here he comes now, ahead of time!"

Daniel Coulton, a tall fair young man with a fine, open face, entered the dip, and

Captain Creville at once turned John over to him.

"We're glad to have you, Mr. Scott," said Colton, "but the service will be hard and full of danger."

"I expect it, sir."

"These young men are serving France for love, and nearly all of them are privates. Carstairs and Wharton are in the ranks and you'll have to take a place with them."

"I accept gladly, sir."

"The right spirit. Wharton, you and Carstairs get him a uniform and arms, and he'll stay with you until further orders."

Then Captain Coulton hurried away. Captain Creville bowed and also withdrew.

"Come on, Scott," said Carstairs. "We've an extra uniform, and it'll just about fit you. A rifle, cartridges and all your other arms are ready, too."

John was equipped promptly, and then many introductions followed. It was a little Anglo-American island in the midst of a French sea, and they gave a joyous welcome to a new face. John noticed that many of them bore slight wounds, and he soon learned that several others, hurt badly, lay in an improvised hospital at the rear.

"The Germans are pressing us hard," said Wharton. "They whipped us yesterday afternoon, and they're sure to come for us again today. There's Captain Colton now standing on the earthwork, watching through his glasses. In my opinion something's doing."

Nearly all the Strangers went forward. From a hillock, John with his two new friends looked toward the forest, miles in their front. The forest itself was merely a blind mass of green, but overhead swung aeroplanes and captive balloons.

"Look up!" said Carstairs.

John saw a half dozen aeroplanes hovering some distance in front of their own lines.

"I think they're signaling," said Carstairs. "One of those monster guns must be getting ready to disgorge itself."

"The forty-two centimeter?" said John.

"Yes, and I'm right, too. I saw a flash in the forest, and here comes the little messenger!"

There was a roar and a crash so tremendous that John was almost shaken from his feet. An enormous shell burst near the earthworks, sending forth a perfect cloud of shrapnel and steel fragments. It resembled the explosion of a volcano, and as his ears recovered their power after the shock John heard the cries of many wounded.

"I think this force carries only one such gun with it," said Carstairs, "and it will be some time before they can fire it again. We have nothing to equal it, but the French seventy-five millimeter is an awful weapon. The gunners can time them so the shells burst only fifteen or twenty feet from the ground, and then they rain death. I think it likely that we have out now a flanking force that will get within range."

"There's cover to the right," said Warton, "if the French batteries advance at all, it will be that way."

They were ordered to stand to their arms, but it did not keep them from watching, as at present there was nothing for them to do. A second shot came presently from the forty-two centimeter, but the shell burst too far away to do any harm. John and his comrades turned their attention back to the right, where a line of woods ran.

Ten minutes more of waiting and they saw a succession of flashes among the trees. The French field guns far in advance of the main force were at work.

"Well done," said Carstairs. "The French artillery is fine, Scott. I believe their medium guns can beat any others of the same class in the world. Look how those woods flame with their fire! It scares me to go up in the air, but I'd like to be in one of those aeroplanes, where I could see the effect of the cannonade."

"There goes 'Busy Bertha' again," said Wharton.

"What's 'Busy Bertha'?" asked John.

"Oh, it's merely a nickname we've given to the Krupp monster. The French started it, I believe, but it's spread to the Strangers. It's aimed at our field guns this time! There the shell has burst in the forest! I wish I knew what it had

done!"

"Not much, I judge," said Carstairs, "because the French guns are replying with as much fervor as ever. The woods are fairly blazing with their fire!"

A second shot came presently from the forty-two centimeter.

"And yonder," said John, "are the Uhlans. Look at that mass of steel on the far edge of the plain!"

An immense force of German cavalry was issuing from the forest directly in their front, and was forming in a long line. The distance was great, but the August sunshine was so clear that all objects were magnified and made more vivid. The three clearly saw the great mass of German horsemen defiling toward the French right. Captain Colton of the Strangers reappeared and stood near them, watching through a pair of powerful glasses. John knew that he was anxious, and, although his experience of war was only three or four days old, he well knew the reason why.

"I've glasses myself," said Carstairs, who was holding a pair to his eyes. "Take a look, Scott."

John accepted them eagerly. They were strong, and the German cavalry seemed to come very near. Then he saw how numerous they were. They must be thousands and thousands, and the front files, which had wheeled, were already disappearing in the forest on the French right. In America most forests would have been impracticable for cavalry, but it was not likely to be so here, where there was little or no undergrowth.

John turned the glasses back to the point in the woods where the French field guns were posted. There he saw rapid flashes and the steady rolling crash continued. Evidently the seventy-five millimeter French cannon were all that was claimed for them. But he knew that the German cavalry must now be protected largely by the forest, and his heart beat heavily with apprehension for the French guns and their gunners.

"There goes 'Busy Bertha' again!" exclaimed Wharton.

John remembered nothing clearly for the next minute or two. There was a vast rushing sound, a crash of thunder, and, although he was not touched, he was thrown from his feet. He sprang up, dazed, cleared his eyes and looked around. The monstrous shell, weighing more than a ton, had burst almost in the heart of

the French army, killing or wounding at least three hundred men, and spreading awe among the others. Nothing so capable of destruction and made by man had ever before been seen in the history of the world. And the shot had come from a point at least ten miles away, where the giant lay invisible.

The glasses had not been hurt in the fall and he handed them back to Carstairs. No harm had been done among the Strangers, although he was not the only one who had been thrown to the ground. But they were bold hearts and they jested among themselves.

"I hope they won't aim that pop-gun so well again," said Wharton.

"After all, Scott," said Carstairs, "you were perhaps safer with Lannes a half mile up in the air. The forty-two centimeter couldn't reach you there."

"Maybe not," said John, "but I'm one of the Strangers now, and I'll take my chances with them. I'm most alarmed about the Uhlans who have gone into the woods on our right."

"To cut off our field guns, of course. And look! Here comes the German army in our front to support their flanking movement!"

The fire in the wood increased in intensity, and John saw a great body of French troops advancing to the support of their artillery. Evidently the French leader meant to maintain his fire there and also to protect his field guns against capture.

"I told you, Wharton," said Carstairs, "that the Germans would give us no rest, that they would advance at once to a new battle."

"You didn't have to tell it to me. I knew it as well as any Englishman could possibly know it, perhaps better, but I'm modest, and I didn't talk about it."

"If you only kept your ignorance as well as your knowledge to yourself, Wharton, you'd have a greater reputation for wisdom. Look out!"

A shell that failed to explode in the air struck near. Carstairs threw himself upon Wharton, and, at the imminent risk of his own life, dragged him down just in time, as the shell burst and threw fragments over their heads.

"Thanks, Carstairs," said Wharton. "Your first name is Percy, but you don't act like a Percy."

"Expect the same from you, old fellow, when the time comes."

"I'll do my best."

John was absorbed now in the tremendous panorama of war, carried on with all the mighty machines of death that man had invented. A heavy German force appeared on their left also. It was yet distant, but it was nearer than the great mass in the center. Untrained as he was he knew nevertheless that the Germans, with their greatly superior numbers, were seeking to envelop the French. But the defensive guns on the right in the wood were maintaining a swift and terrible fire. They were pouring showers of shrapnel not only on the Uhlans, but upon the gray masses of infantry crossed the wide intervening fields.

The Strangers were now drawn up by one of the earthworks, but it would be a long time before they went into action. That heaving gray sea of Germans could not come within range of the rifles for an hour yet. Meantime the artillery would carry on the battle over a space of miles. While he waited he could look on and see it all.

More and more guns were coming into action. Batteries were sent off to the left to meet the second German flanking force there, and soon the heaviest of the French cannon in the center were able to reach the advancing enemy directly in their front.

The scene became tremendous and full of awe. There was little smoke, but along two vast semi-circles, one convex, and the other concave, flashes ran like continuous lightning, while the whole earth grumbled and roared. The air seemed surcharged with death, and John suddenly found it hot in his lungs as he breathed.

Through the roar of the guns he heard all the time the malicious shrieking of the shrapnel. It was falling among the defenders, killing and wounding hundreds, and John knew that the storm beat also on the great gray circle that was ever coming nearer. Now and then a crash, louder than all the rest, came from the forty-two centimeter, and whenever the shell struck true it tore everything about it to pieces, no matter how strong.

The thunder of the guns was so steady and so near one note that the Strangers could talk almost in an ordinary tone.

"It's our guns on the right that are in the most danger," said John.

"Correct," said Wharton. "The Uhlans are trying to cut them off, because those

guns are doing great damage. Take the glasses again, and you can see their shells tearing through the German lines."

"I don't know that I want to see."

"Oh, look! This is war, and you'll have to get used to it!"

Then John looked and he saw that the German lines were not unbroken, as they had seemed to the naked eye. The shrapnel were tearing through them, making great holes, but the massive German columns never faltered for an instant. The gaps in their ranks were filled up, and they came on at an even pace, resolved to capture or destroy the French force. And they carried with them the memories of Gravelotte, Sedan and Metz. They would do as well as the men of old von Moltke had done.

John felt a thrill of admiration. The great military monarchy had built its machine well. It seemed at the moment resistless. It was made of steel rather than human flesh and blood, and it would roll over everything. Nothing had yet stopped that mighty concave curve of gray, although more and more French cannon were coming into action, and from right to left, and from left to right, they showered it with unceasing death.

But the German artillery, far more numerous and powerful than the French, were supporting their infantry. Shells were poured fast upon the hasty earthworks. Hundreds and hundreds of the defenders fell. The roar was now so stupendous that John could scarcely hear, and the air, before golden in the sunshine, turned a livid fiery hue.

All the Strangers were now formed in one of the trenches, and then wisely knelt low. John heard the shrieking, whining noise incessantly over his head, and it made his blood run cold. Instinctively he pressed hard against the side of his trench, but his curiosity was so keen that from time to time he raised his head above the edge to see how the battle fared directly in front. The gray Germans were much nearer, marching with the solid tread that seemed able to carry them across the world, while their gigantic artillery on the flanks and in the intervals flamed and roared without ceasing.

John knew that the loss among the French must be great, and he knew, too, that when the huge machine struck them they would be shattered. He wondered that the French leader did not order the retreat, but while he was wondering a trumpet suddenly sounded a shrill clear note audible amid the roar of the great guns, and

he saw Captain Colton beckon to the Strangers.

John knew they were going into battle, but he felt relief because their long waiting was over. His senses had become dulled to danger. He felt the surge and sweep of tremendous conflict, and relief came with action.

As they stood up he obtained a better view of the field. The Germans were yet nearer now, and, seen through the blazing light of the cannon, they were magnified and increased. Although yet too distant in the center, the flanks were near enough to open fire with the rifles, and their crash in scores of thousands was added to the tremendous roar of the cannon fire.

Captain Colton beckoned again to the Strangers, and joining a heavy infantry force they crept out toward the right, and then among the trees. John divined at once their mission. They were to support and save the French field batteries which had gone into the wood and which had done so much damage to the German army.

They could not mistake their destination. The flash and crash came from a point directly in front of them, and the whole forest was lighted up by the blaze of the guns. Farther to their right John heard the heavy tramp of horsemen in thousands. There he knew were the Uhlans, circling to cut off the French guns.

The wood opened out, leaving wide clear spaces, and then John saw the countless helmets of the Uhlans, as they charged with a deep-throated German roar. It seemed that they were to be ridden into the earth, but he found himself kneeling with the others and firing his rifle as fast as he could pull trigger into the charging mass.

John felt like a man sending bullet after bullet into some huge wild beast, seeking to devour. For the moment the Uhlans were blended into one mass, a single entity. He had a vision of the wild faces of men, of the huge red eyes of horse, and of their open slavering mouths, disclosing rows of cruel white teeth. It was those white teeth that he saw clearest, and often he fired at the horses rather than their riders.

Nearer came the Uhlans. The earth resounded with their tread. The cruel white teeth of the horses flashed almost in John's face. He began to have a horrible fear that they could not stop these ruthless horsemen, but the French relieving force had brought with it light guns, which were now pushed up, opening almost point blank on the Uhlans.

The hail of steel drove directly in the faces of horses and men, and they reeled back. Men might stand such a fire, but horses could not. They bolted from it by hundreds, knocked down and trampled upon one another, creating a vast turmoil and confusion among the Germans.

John was conscious that he had sprung to his feet, and was advancing again with his comrades directly upon the Uhlans. They were still reloading and firing as fast as they could, and the light artillery, between the spaces, was cutting a perfect harvest of death. As the Uhlans were driven back out of the open and among the trees their difficulties increased. It was impossible to fall into any kind of formation and charge such a formidable infantry defended by guns.

The riflemen pressed closer and closer and poured upon them such a deadly fire that after many vain efforts to hold their ground the trumpets sounded the recall, and all those who were able to ride retreated.

The French set up a tremendous cheer and swept forward to meet their field guns which were slowly retiring, sending heavy volleys into the German masses as they withdrew. Yet their escape was a narrow one. Without the sortie from the fort they would certainly have been cut off by the Uhlans.

John found himself shouting in triumph with the French. He shared their feelings now because their danger had been his danger, and he was fast becoming the same in spirit.

"Just in time!" shouted Wharton in his ear. "See how the Germans come on, and come without ending!"

The great German mass in the open was now almost abreast of them. Their numbers seemed endless. Their huge cannon filled the air with projectiles which poured upon the French earthworks, and, captive balloons and aeroplanes hanging over them, directed their fire. The sight, magnificent in some aspects, was terrible nevertheless, and for a moment or two John was appalled.

"We've got to get back quick as we can," shouted Carstairs, "or they'll be on us, too!"

"Right! old man!" shouted Wharton, agreeing with him for once.

They were already retiring, and the field artillery was going with them. But the deadly seventy-five millimeter guns were not idle, although they were withdrawing. They sent shell after shell, which hung low over the German ranks,

and then burst in a whirlwind of steel fragments and splinters. Death was showered upon the gray masses, but they never flinched, coming on steadily, with the deep German cheer, swelling now and then into thunder.

The battle was so near that the Strangers could no longer hear one another, although they shouted. Their company luckily had suffered little, but now the bullets began to search their ranks, and brave young Americans and brave young Englishmen gave up their lives under an alien flag.

John was conscious of neither elation nor despair. The excitement was too great. His heart hammered heavily against its walls, and the red mist before him deepened until it became a blazing glare. Then the rush of hoofs came again. The Uhlans had reformed and made a second charge. The riflemen beat it off, and, still protecting the guns, joined the main French force.

But it was evident there that the French must retreat again. The powerful artillery of the Germans had cut their defenses to pieces. The earth was torn by the great shells as if mining machinery had been at work, and the ground was covered with dead and wounded. Valor against numbers and long preparation was unavailing.

"If we don't go we're lost," shouted Carstairs.

"And if we go today we can come back and fight another day!" said Wharton.

The French leader gathered together his army, beaten for a second time, and slowly retired across the hills. The French character here showed itself entirely different from what popular belief had made it. John saw no signs of panic. The battered brigades closed up and withdrew, turning a steady and resolute face to the enemy. Their deadly artillery continually swept the front of the advancing Germans, and at intervals their riflemen sent back withering volleys.

John's excitement did not abate. Again he loaded and fired his rifle, until its barrel grew hot in his hand. The tumult was fierce and deafening beyond all description. He shouted to his comrades and his comrades shouted to him, but none could hear the sound of a human voice. The roar of the explosions was mingled without ceasing with the whining and shrieking of shrapnel and bullets.

Yet the retreating army defeated every attempt to close with it. The rifles and cannon mowed down the flankers to both right and left, and their powerful guns drove the pursuing center to a respectful distance. Toward night they came to a

higher range of hills spreading to such a distance that they could not be flanked, and, turning there, they sat down, and waited, confident of their position.

CHAPTER IX

THE RIDE OF THREE

The battle, including the fighting retreat, had lasted a long time and it had proved even to inexperienced John that the French force could not stand before the superior numbers of the Germans, and their tremendous equipment. And yet the French officers had shown much skill. They had inflicted great losses, they had drawn off all their artillery, and they had defeated every effort of their enemy to surround and destroy them.

John felt that not everything was lost as they sat down on the hills and began to fortify anew. There was no time for him to rest. He was only a private soldier, and, armed with a spade, he worked at a trench with all the strength and energy he could command. But his immediate friends of the Strangers were of no higher rank than himself and they were beside him engaged in the same task. "I'm only a new soldier," he said, "but it seems to me we did pretty well to get off with our army and our guns."

"So we did," said Carstairs. "I fancy the chief part of our occupation will be retreating until the British come up."

"There it goes," said Wharton. "Every Englishman has a fatal disease. You can never cure him of being an Englishman. If a million French and a hundred thousand English were to win a battle Carstairs would give all the credit of it to the hundred thousand English."

"I'd give it to 'em, because it belonged to 'em. Keep your fool Yankee head down, Wharton. Didn't you hear that shell whistle?"

"I heard it, and I heard a dozen others too," said John, who could not keep from shivering a little. "Why do they keep on bothering us, when we're now in too strong a position to be attacked, and the night too is at hand?"

"Oh, you'll get used to it," said Wharton. "They won't attack tonight, but they want to keep us disturbed, to create terror among us, and then we'll be easier, when they do come again."

"I don't hear the giant any more."

"You mean the forty-two centimeter. I fancy it's far in the rear. They have to have

roads on which to drag it, and then, so they say, it has to be placed in a concrete bed before they can fire it."

"At any rate their fire is dying," said Carstairs, "and I'm jolly glad of it. I didn't get any sleep last night, and I want some tonight. I need it, after this back-breaking work."

Fortunately the trench was soon finished, and the long range firing ceased entirely. The night came on, hiding the two armies from each other, and fires sprang up in the French camp. Their light was ruddy and cheerful. Then came the glorious aroma of food, and, the Strangers called from their labors to the banquet, sat down and ate.

John had heard all his life what cooks the French were, but nothing that he had ever tasted before was like the food he ate and the coffee he drank that night. Incessant marching and fighting gave a savor that nothing else could impart.

While they still sat around the cooking fires they saw dim shapes in the heavens, and John, out of the depths of his experience, knew that they were the flying machines. Carstairs and Wharton saw him looking up.

"You may want to be there," said Wharton, "but I don't. I'd grow so giddy I'd jump right out of the machine. This sound and rolling earth suits me. I like its green grass, its rivers, its lakes and its mountains, and I don't want to go off, prospecting for other planets."

"It's lucky," said John, "that this army has flying machines of its own. If it didn't the Germans would be raining bombs upon us."

Carstairs shuddered.

"There's something heathenish and uncanny about it," he said. "Soldiers, by Jove, have to watch nowadays. If you're on the ship looking for an enemy of your size the little submarine down under the water may blow you to pieces, and if you're on the land holding your own against another army a little aeroplane away up in the sky may drop a bomb that will shatter you into seven million pieces."

"It's a hard world, Carstairs," said Wharton, "but I think discomfort rather than danger will come out of the sky tonight. The clouds are piling up and there'll be heavy rain. John, you little old flying man, won't that stop the Taubes?"

"They wouldn't venture much in a heavy rain, and I think we're safe from them, but you know that what their fliers can do ours can do too."

"That being the case I'll settle myself for rest and sleep. The French show us a lot of consideration as we've volunteered to fight for them, and there are tents for the Strangers. You're to have a place in ours."

John was grateful and said so. The strain of the last few days would have overpowered him, but luckily he was exceedingly strong and tenacious. Yet he was so tired that he could scarcely walk, and he was very very glad to go into the tent with Carstairs and Wharton. He received two blankets, and, putting one under him and the other over him, he lay near the open flap, where he could get a good view of much that was going on outside.

He soon saw that it was to be no storm of thunder and lightning, but a heavy soaking rain. The air too had turned colder, and he was grateful for the blankets. He was becoming inured to hardship so fast that they and the tent were as luxurious to him as a modern hotel would have seemed two weeks before.

Carstairs and Wharton, after a short combat in words, fell sound asleep, but John lingered a little. He saw the fires burning smokily, and French soldiers passing before the blaze. From where he lay he could also see far out upon the plain that lay before them. But everything there was veiled in heavy mists and low clouds. Although an army of perhaps a hundred thousand men was only a short distance away the night disclosed no trace of it.

The rain began to fall soon, coming down as John had foreseen in a strong, steady pour. The sound on the heavy canvas was so soothing that his nerves relaxed and he slept. He was awakened at an unearthly hour by the strong hand of Captain Colton pulling at his shoulder.

As soon as John realized that it was his commanding officer he sprang to his feet and saluted, although his eyes were yet heavy with sleep. It was still raining and the water poured from a heavy cape coat that Captain Colton wore over his uniform. Carstairs and Wharton were already on their feet.

"You three are chosen for a mission," said Captain Colton, "and I'll tell it to you as briefly as I can. We've received news tonight that another German force is coming from the northeast. If it gets upon our flank we're lost, but there is a French army, and perhaps an English force with it or near it to the west. If they can be brought up in time they will protect our flank and save us—and also

themselves. But we must have trusty messengers. The flying machines can do little in the storm. So we fall back on the ancient agencies. Can you ride, Mr. Scott?"

"Yes sir."

"Then you three are to go at once. Other messengers will ride forth, but I should feel very proud, if it were the Strangers who brought help."

The little appeal was not lost on the three. He rapidly gave them instructions about the point, at which the second French force was supposed to be, and told them to ride for it as hard as they could, giving to them sealed despatches also. Their own army would be falling back meanwhile.

"Both Carstairs and Wharton know this region and the roads," he said to John, "and you keep with them. Are you ready?"

"Yes sir," answered the three together.

They stepped out into the rain, but forgetful of it. An orderly was holding three horses. In an instant, they were in the saddle and away. They passed through the lines and came out upon one of the splendid French roads, the three abreast. The rain was beating in their faces, but the orderly had tied cloaks to their saddles, and now they wrapped them about their bodies.

But John minded neither darkness, cold nor rain. Sensitive and quiet there was some quality in him that always responded to the call of high adventure. His mind was never keener, never more alert, and all his strength of body had returned. Wharton and Carstairs rode on either side of him, and he felt already as if they had been friends of years, knitted to him by a thousand dangers shared.

He looked back once at the intrenched camp, but the descent and curve of the road already hid it in the darkness. He saw nothing but the black outline of the hills, and low clouds floating across the whole horizon. Ahead was a blank. He was in one of the most thickly populated regions of the world, crowded with cities, but in the darkness and storm it looked like a wilderness.

Neither of his comrades spoke for a long time. He stole a look at his watch, and saw that it was three o'clock in the morning. They crossed two small rivers, foaming like torrents, and at the bridges reined into a walk, lest the hoof-beats be heard too far. But they did not meet any human being. Save for the road and the bridges the aspect of a wilderness was complete. John knew that numerous

villages lay near, but in such a world war the people would put out their lights and keep close in their houses.

They turned after a while into a smaller road, leading more toward the north.

"The Uhlans may be in our rear," said Carstairs. "They seem to be everywhere, and we don't want to be cut off just at the beginning of our ride."

"Rein in," said Wharton. "I hear cavalry passing on the road we've just left."

"Speak of Uhlans, and they appear," whispered John.

They were Uhlans, no doubt. John recognized the helmets, but the men were riding back toward the armies. He and his two comrades kept their horses in the shadow of the bushes, and were in dread lest some movement of their animals betray them, but the droning of the rain was the only sound made. The Uhlans, about forty in number, rode on and the darkness swallowed them up.

"Since they've gone about their business we'd better go about ours," said Wharton.

"Those are the first wise words I've heard you speak in a half hour," said Carstairs.

"It's the first time I've spoken at all in a half hour," said Wharton.

"Which way do we go now?" asked John.

"Over a hill and far away," replied Carstairs. "To be more explicit we're coming to the hill now, and about daylight we'll reach a little village, where I think we'd better get food and news. You'll like the country, John, when it stops raining and the sunlight comes. Oh, it's a fair land, this land of France."

"I've seen enough of it to know that," said John. "Lead on, and I'll be glad to reach the next village. A wind has set up, and this rain cuts cruelly."

Carstairs rode in front, and for more than an hour they breasted the storm almost in silence. They climbed the hill, passed down the other side, crossed numerous brooks, and then saw reluctant daylight appearing through the rain.

John with the new caution that he had learned looked up. But the clouds were so heavy that he saw nothing there, not a dirigible, not a Taube, nor any form of aeroplane. Traveling, even on the business of an army, was still better on land.

"There's our village," said Wharton, pointing to a pleasant valley in which tiled roofs and the spire of a church showed.

"And there we'll be in fifteen minutes," said Carstairs. "I'm full of enthusiasm for the mission on which we ride as you two are also of course, but it will fairly overflow after I have a good warm breakfast."

Despite the earliness of the hour peasants were up and they watched with curiosity the three horsemen who approached. But enough of the uniform of the strangers showed, despite their cloaks, to indicate that they belonged to the French army, and they were welcome. An old man with a scythe, pointed toward an inn, and the three, increasing their speed, rode straight for it.

"I hope they'll have good coffee," said John.

"And fine bread," said Carstairs.

"And choice bacon," said Wharton.

"And plenty of eggs to go with the bacon," said John.

It was but a little village, forty or fifty houses, set among the hills, but in times of peace many people must have gone that way, because it had one of the best road inns that John had ever entered. They were early but the landlord soon had the flames going in a wide fire-place, before which the three stood, warming themselves and drying their clothes. And the heavy aromas arising promised that the coffee, bacon and all the rest would be everything they wished.

A boy held their horses near the main door which stood open that they might see. The three were a unit on this precaution. If by any possible chance their horses were lost their mission in all likelihood would be lost too. John, new recruit, nevertheless felt the full importance of watching. He stood with his back to the fire, where he could see the sturdy French boy, the reins of the three horses in his hands.

But he did not forget how good that fire felt. The great cape had not been able to protect him wholly from the rain, and, despite the excitement of their ride, he had become conscious that he was cold and wet. Now the grateful warmth penetrated to his bones, and vitality returned.

As he remained there, turning about a little before the fire but always keeping his eyes on the door, he saw the villagers come down in the rain and look in, some at the open door and some at the windows. None of them spoke, but all gazed intently at the three in French uniform who stood before the fire.

John knew why they had come and he was singularly moved by their silent, pathetic stare. They were hoping to hear good news, at least one little bit of it—these good French villagers whose soil was trodden again by an enemy who seemed invincible. Just as the breakfast was being laid upon the table the landlord said to them:

"Have you nothing for these brave people of ours, who, as you see, wait at the windows? They are the old men, the very young and the women. All the others are gone to the war. Yesterday we heard the sound of guns for a long time. Have you no success to report for France?"

The three shook their heads sadly and Wharton replied for them.

"Not yet," he said. "We belong to the French army engaged in the battle that you heard yesterday. But it was driven back again. The Germans come in overwhelming force, and we cannot withstand their numbers, but we were able to draw off with all our guns and leave them no prisoners."

The landlord said nothing in reply, but presently all those wistful and waiting faces disappeared. Then the breakfast was ready, and a fourth traveler, wet and cold as they had been, arrived. John saw him give the reins of his horse to the waiting boy before he came to the door, where he stood a moment, awaiting the landlord's welcome.

The stranger was in a French uniform, faded and dripping so much water that he must have been in the rain a long time. He was about thirty, medium in height, his face covered with much black beard, and John saw that he was staggering from weakness. But Monsieur Gaussin, the landlord, a man of kindly heart, had perceived that fact also, and he stepped forward quickly.

"Thank you for your arm, good host," said the stranger. "I am weak, but if I am so it is because I've ridden all night in the rain for France."

"A French soldier," said Monsieur Gaussin, opening wide his heart, "and you ride for France! Then you are not alone on such errands. Behold the three young men who are about to honor me by eating a breakfast, for which I shall take no pay."

Gaussin too was not without a touch of the dramatic instinct, and he proudly waved his arm, across which the white napkin lay, toward John, Carstairs and Wharton.

"When you have warmed and dried yourself a little and have drank a glass of this fine old liquor of mine," he said benignantly, "you shall join them."

"And we shall welcome you as a comrade," said Wharton. "We are not French—two Americans and one English—but we fight with the French and their cause is ours. My friends are Carstairs and Scott, and my own name is Wharton."

"And mine is Weber," said the man, "Fernand Weber, an Alsatian, hoping and praying that Alsace and all Alsatians may now be restored to France."

The good Monsieur Gaussin murmured sympathetically.

"But we must suffer and do much before we regain our lost provinces," Weber said.

"Will you not join us at the table?" asked Carstairs politely.

"Gladly, as soon as I have removed this wet coat," replied Weber.

As soon as he took off the outer garment they saw a stain of red across his left sleeve, and the good Monsieur Gaussin again murmured sympathetically.

"It's nothing," laughed Weber. "The Uhlans are abroad, as you may have discovered for yourself. They ride over the whole country, and in the night I was chased by them. The bullet creased my arm, but I carry the emergency bandage.

One, two, three, I made it fast, and here we are."

There was something attractive in his manner, his frankness, and the light way in which he dismissed his adventure. The hearts of the three warmed toward one who rode perilously for France as they were doing.

"Come," said John, "you must be starving to death. We certainly are, and if I'm kept any longer from this heavenly coffee there'll be a rebellion."

Annette, the neat maid who was serving them smiled, and Monsieur Gaussin smiled also. But Weber did not keep them waiting. He slid into the fourth chair that had been placed, and, for a little space, gastronomy of the most harmonious kind prevailed.

"From which direction do you come?" asked Carstairs.

"North," replied Weber flashing a smile from gray eyes.

John thought his eyes good, but all the lower part of his face was concealed by the beard.

"I hope you're doing better there than we are on the east," said Carstairs.

"Have you, then, had bad luck?" asked Weber.

"I'd scarcely blame any part of it on luck. Jove, but it's just a plain case of the other side being ready, while we are not."

"And you ride then for help?"

"Something of that kind, although of course we couldn't tell anybody where we are going."

"And I shall not dream of asking you. I know a soldier's duty too well. I ride on an errand myself, but I shall not refuse to tell you anything because you are not going to ask me."

All four laughed. John liked Weber better and better. He saw that he was a cheerful man, with a touch of humor, and he heartened the other three mightily.

Weber told that the French were now well ahead with their preparations, the English were beginning to stir and presently the Germans would find the armies before them much more powerful.

"On what road did you receive your wound?" asked John. "You won't mind telling us this, I hope, because that will be a good road for us to avoid."

"The Uhlans may have passed on," replied Weber, shrugging his shoulders, "but it was the road from the north. I encountered them about fifteen miles from here. It was so dark that I couldn't see very well, but I don't think they numbered more than half a dozen."

"We were going on that road," said Carstairs rising, "but perhaps we'd better take the western one for the present. We have to hurry. Good-by, Mr. Weber, we're glad we met you, and we hope that transfer of the title deeds of Alsace real estate will take place."

Weber's gray eyes beamed.

"It's good of another race to help us," he said. All three shook hands with him, said friendly farewells to the benignant Monsieur Gaussin and the neat Annette, and hurried to their horses.

"A good fellow that Weber," said Carstairs as they swung into their saddles. "I hope we'll swing Alsace and Lorraine too, back into France for him."

"If it's done," said Wharton, "England will claim that she did it."

"A perfectly justifiable claim."

Wharton turned upon John a look of despair.

"Can you ever change a single idea of theirs?" he asked. "They're quite sure they've done everything."

"There's one race," said John, "to whom they yield."

"I never heard of it."

"Oh yes, you have. When Sandy of the long red locks comes down from the high hills London capitulates at once. Don't you know, Wharton, that Great Britain and all her colonies are ruled by the Scotch?"

Carstairs broke into a hearty laugh.

"You have me there, Wharton," he said. "Certainly we're ruled by the Scotch. We have to let them do it or they'd make the country so disagreeable there'd be no living in it. Jove, but I wish I could hear the bagpipes now and see a hundred

thousand of their red heads coming over the hills. It's such fine country around here that they'd never let the Germans have it."

"I like them too," said John. "They're brave men and they speak a sort of English."

Carstairs laughed.

"Don't criticize their English unless you want a fight," he said. "A man is often proudest of what he lacks."

"Just so, Carstairs, and I've often wondered too why so few of the English can speak their own language."

"Shut up, Scott! You've joined Wharton and two against one is not fair. Confound this rain! I wish it would stop! I'm getting wet and cold again. Here the road forks, and Weber said he came down from the north."

"And since he got a bullet in the arm the northern road is bad for us," said Wharton. "If you two agree we'll turn to the west."

"The west for us," said John and Carstairs together.

The country was hillier and more wooded than usual, but they saw little of it, as it was enveloped in a cloud of rain and mist. Nor did they meet any other travelers on the road, a fact which did not surprise them, as the whole region was now almost deserted by everybody save soldiers.

The high spirits they had accumulated at the inn were soon dissipated. It was impossible to remain gay, when one was sodden through and through. The rain came down, as if it meant to do so forever, and all the valleys were filled with mists and vapors. But the road clean and well paved led straight on, and Wharton and Carstairs seemed to know it well.

"Another inn would suit me," said John who was the first to speak in more than an hour. "I shouldn't want to stop because I know we haven't time for it, but I'd like to look in at the window, as I rode by, and see the fire blazing."

"You'll see nothing of that kind before one o'clock in the afternoon," said Carstairs. "Then we come to another neat little village, and another good inn. We'll have to stop there for our horses to feed, as we gave them nothing this morning. So you can do more than look at the window and see the blazing fire."

The road led now between high hedges, and they heard a report some distance to their right. Wharton who was in front suddenly pulled back his horse.

"What's the matter?" the other two exclaimed together.

"A bee stung me," replied Wharton grimly.

He held up his left hand. The blood was flowing from a thin red line across the back of it.

"A bullet did that!" exclaimed Carstairs.

A second report came, and John felt a rush of air past his face.

"Gallop, boys, gallop!" exclaimed Wharton. "Somebody has ambushed us, Uhlans, I suppose, and we've got to run!"

"They must be in the fields!" said Carstairs, as the three urged their horses at once to their utmost speed. Luckily, they had been coming at a slow pace and their mounts were strong.

John thought rapidly. The modern high-powered rifle carried far, and he judged by the faintness of the reports that the bullets had been fired from a point several hundred yards away. They had done under impulse the very thing they ought to do, and their present speed would soon leave the raiders behind.

The three rode neck and neck and as they galloped on two more bullets whistled near them.

"An ambush," said Carstairs coolly, "but we've rushed through it."

"Anyway, our luck is better than Weber's," said Wharton. "He was pinked in the arm and we're unhurt. At least I think so. How are you, Scott?"

"Well but scared."

"I believe the first statement, but not the second And you Carstairs."

"Well but annoyed."

"I believe both your statements."

"Is it your recollection that these hedges continue far, Carstairs?" asked Wharton.

"Five or six miles at least."

"That's mine too, but I hoped I was wrong. It gives those bushwackers an advantage. With the hedges right beside us we can't see well over them, but they on the hills at a distance can look down on us."

"You Yankees are sometimes right, Wharton, and this is one of the times. Those fellows, whoever they are, will probably get a few more shots at us. I'll lay you two to one they don't hit us."

"I never bet against my sympathies. Ping! didn't you hear it! There was a bullet, five seconds after you offered to bet."

"Yes, I know it. Here's the lock of hair it cut from my head."

He took the hair from his coat, where it had fallen, and let it flutter away. He did not show any alarm. Already it had become the pride of the three never to betray apprehension. John's face was like a mask, although his heart was beating hard. A whistle over his head showed that a bullet had passed there and he heard its plunk as it buried itself in a tree on the other side of the road.

He remembered with some consolation that the modern, small, high-powered rifle bullet, unless it killed, did not do so very much harm. It went through one so fast that it did not tear flesh or break bones, and the wounds it made were quick to heal.

Ping! Ping! and once more ping! They reached the crest of the hill and went swiftly down the other slope.

"I think we'll leave them behind here," said Carstairs. "We gain, as we've the open road, while they're obstructed in fields."

"I hope you're a true prophet, Carstairs," said Wharton. "I'm growing reconciled to an army shooting at me, but I would hate to be picked off by an ambushed sharpshooter."

Carstairs was a true prophet in this case. No more shots came and as they entered flat country with open fields, in which they could see everything they slowed to a walk, and not too soon, for the horses were breathing heavily, their mouths covered with foam. Then in order to spare their tired animals the three dismounted and walked a mile, leading them by the bridles.

"I'd never have thought the Uhlans were in the rear of our army," said Carstairs.

"I'm not at all surprised," said John.

"Why not?"

"Because I shall never be surprised at anything the Germans do. You English have fallen into the bad habit of thinking that what you haven't done nobody else does."

"I see," said Carstairs with a laugh. "Hit the poor old Britisher. You Yankees are so used to it that you can't get out of the habit, even here and now, when you and I are allies."

"But it's the truth, the real vital truth," said John earnestly. "The Germans are ahead of you. They're like a medieval knight clad in steel and armed from head to foot, going out to fight a peasant in homespun. And you're the peasant in homespun, Carstairs."

"England is slow, I admit, but when she once takes hold she never lets go."

"Unless she takes hold, when there's something to take hold of it's no use."

"Stop quarreling with him, Scott," said Wharton. "That's my job, and you can't take it from me. I've set two tasks for myself, one to defeat the German army and one to change Carstairs, and I tell you confidentially, John, that I think the defeat of the German army will prove the easier of the two."

"Look how those banks of fog are rolling up," said Carstairs. "The rain is decreasing, but in a quarter of an hour we won't be able to see a thing twenty yards away."

"We shall welcome the fog," said John, who was beginning to feel now that he was on equal terms with the other two.

"So, we should," said Carstairs, "but does fog conduct sound well?"

"I don't know," replied John. "Why?"

"Because I think I hear a noise a long distance to the right. It has a rolling, grinding quality, but that doesn't help me to tell what makes it."

The three stopped, and with all their senses alert listened. Both John and Wharton heard the sound, but they were unable to tell its nature. The fog

meanwhile was closing in, heavy and almost impenetrable.

"I think," said John, "we ought to see what it is. The thing is projecting itself squarely across our path. We've got a mission, but the more news we take the better."

Wharton and Carstairs agreed with him, and finding a low place in the hedge that ran beside the road they forced their way through it. They were remounted now, and the rest had made the horses fit for either a fight or a race.

They rode across the field and then through a belt of open forest, but the fog was so dense they were compelled to keep close together lest they lose one another. The rolling sound increased and now other notes came with it. A little farther and they saw dim lights in the fog.

"An army," whispered Carstairs, "and the torch-bearers are showing the way through the fog. Now what kind of an army is it?"

"German of course," said Wharton. "We know well enough that no French force is near here. It's a part of the flood that's bearing down on France and Belgium."

"There are more trees here to the right," said John. "Let's enter them and get a better view. Even if we were seen we could escape anybody in this fog."

"Good idea," said Carstairs. "I'm as anxious as you to know more. This fair land of France is bearing strange fruit now."

Keeping a wary eye for Uhlans who must be somewhere near they rode with all the courage of youth into a clump of trees that grew upon a hillock close to the road. There, in the shelter of the foliage, they looked down upon what was passing.

"Busy Bertha!" said Wharton.

John beheld a giant cannon, one of the mighty howitzers which he had treated as a fable, a soldier's idle dream, until he had heard it booming in the night. But here was another drawn by a powerful motor. Its monster mouth was turned up at an angle toward the sky, and in the fog lighted only by the torches the thing became alive to John, huge and misshapen, dragging itself over the ground, devouring human beings as it went, like the storied dragons of old.

He glanced at his comrades and saw that the monster had taken hold of them in

the same way. They were regarding it with a kind of awe, and yet it was not alone. Its sinister shape merely predominated over everything else. It was preceded and followed by many other cannon, giants themselves, but overshadowed by the mammoth.

Motors drew most of the great guns, and there were thousands more carrying soldiers, arms and various kinds of equipment. Behind them came vast masses of gray infantry, marching with the steady German tread. The heavy fog, which the torches lighted but dimly, magnified and distorted everything, and the sight was uncanny and terrifying.

John had the deepest respect for German arms. He knew the strong and tenacious German nature, and he had had some insight into the mighty preparations of the empire. Now he saw them rolling down every road upon France, and, for a little while he did not see how they could be beaten, not though all the world combined against them. The mammoth cannon moving slowly on through the fog typified their irresistible advance.

"I think we've seen enough," said Wharton. "We'd better be up and away."

"Too much for me," said Carstairs. "My eye what a gun!"

"It looks more like a dragon to me," said John.

They wheeled and rode away over the wet ground, which gave back but little sound of hoofs, and soon they were again on their own road, bearing to the west. They were very thoughtful, but their own risks of the morning from the hidden bullets were forgotten. The mind of every one of the three turned forward.

CHAPTER X

THE DRAGONS OF THE AIR

About mid-morning the rain ceased, the fog rose, and was soon scattered by a powerful sun. The beautiful country, fresh and green, reappeared. It was the fair land of France again and John rejoiced. His uniform dried fast upon him, and his spirits rose steadily. He saw the ruddy glow return to the cheeks of his comrades, and the horses seemed to grow stronger. The sky, washed by the rain, was a solid blue, and the air was crisp with the wine of life.

"It's good to breathe and live!" exclaimed Wharton joyously.

"You Yankees talk too much," said Carstairs.

"And you English talk at the wrong time."

"Generally we let our deeds talk for us."

"Then you don't say much."

John laughed. The pleasant way in which they quarreled always amused him.

"I promised not to take the side of either of you at any time," he said. "You seem to be about evenly matched, and of course it wouldn't be fair for me in such a case to help my countryman."

"Two to one against us are about the odds we English like," said Carstairs.

"Boaster," said Wharton. "Position and army equal we could always whip you, man for man."

"Boaster yourself. Whenever we didn't whip you you'd always say that the position and arms were not equal."

"Stop long enough to look at those birds in the heavens," said John.

"Yes I see them," said Carstairs. "There are four but they're flying very high."

"No, they're five," said Wharton. "There's one on the left detached from the others."

"You're both wrong," said John, smiling from the depths of his superior

knowledge. "They're not birds at all."

"Then what under the sun can they be?"

"Aeroplanes. Flying machines."

"Well you ought to know your kind of carriage. You've been up in one of them. Whose are they, I wonder?"

"I can't tell, they're so high, but I'd judge from the shape that they're the German Taubes."

Carstairs and Wharton looked grave.

"They're far over French territory," said Carstairs.

"So they are," said John, "but you're likely to see them much farther."

"I should think that if they went on they'd meet the French flyers," said Wharton, "and then there'd be some lively scenes up in the shining blue."

"They're ready to take the risks," said John. "I believe the Germans are willing to dare anything in this war. They think the world is against them and has resolved to crush them because the other nations are jealous. Their men higher up, the princes and the big military leaders have made them think so, and nothing on earth can ever shake them in the belief."

"You're probably right," said Wharton, "but our German birds seem to be gathering for something. Look how close together they hover now."

"And they're almost directly over our heads!" said John, a thrill of alarm shooting through him. "And see they're dropping down fast!"

"Which means?"

"Which means that they've seen us, that they've noted our French uniforms through powerful glasses, and that they're getting ready to swoop."

"Let 'em come!" said Wharton defiantly. "I never thought to take part in this kind of dove hunting, but if the Taubes will attack they must take the consequences."

He eased his rifle across his saddle bow. All three of them carried the modern, high-powered rifle which could kill at a tremendous range. Neither Wharton nor Carstairs yet felt any apprehension, but John knew better.

"Those are armored machines," he said, "and unless our bullets are very lucky indeed they'll glance off their steel sides."

"Armored flying machines!" exclaimed Carstairs. "I never heard of such things!"

"No, but you're hearing now. These Germans will teach you a lot! Why they even have Taubes that carry light machine guns."

"What ought we to do?"

John by reason of his brief experience in the air had suddenly become the leader, and the others recognized it.

"We must leave the road and make for those trees. They'll give us some protection!"

He pointed to a little grove two hundred yards away. The three sent their horses crashing through the hedge and galloped for it. Overhead the aeroplanes swooped lower and lower, like gigantic birds, darting at their prey.

It was John who came nearest to a full realization of their danger. His experience with Lannes had shown him the power of the flying machines and the skill and daring of the flying men. In the brief gallop toward the wood a succession of terrifying emotions flowed through his mind.

He remembered reading in some old book of primeval man and his constant menace from vast reptilian monsters clad in huge scales, as thick and hard as steel. It had never made much impression upon him. It was too far away and vague, but now it all came back with amazing detail and vividness.

He and his comrades were primeval men, and these swooping planes, shod with steel, were the ancient monsters seeking their prey. The air too was filled then with gigantic birds, enormous of beak and claw, from which man could find refuge only in caves or thick, tangled woods, and just such birds were seeking them now.

Overhead the aeroplanes swooped lower and lower, like gigantic birds.

But two hundred yards to the grove and yet it seemed two miles! His powerful imagination could already hear over his head the rush of the aeroplanes, like the swoop of monster wings, and he felt himself bending low in the saddle, lest his head be struck by an iron beak.

A rifle cracked in the air, and a bullet struck the ground between two of the horses. Then came a sinister burr-r-r and shots rained near them. It was a machine gun in one of the aeroplanes, flying so low now that the angle at which it was fired was not acute.

John was brave and his will was so strong that it had great control over his sensitive and imaginative mind. Yet he was never in his life more terrified. That vivid picture of primeval man fleeing with all his might from monsters of the air, grew more vivid every moment. He was fairly drenched in terror, as his dim ancestor must have been in like case, nor was he ashamed of it. He had one look each at his comrades, and their faces were ghastly white. He knew that his emotions were theirs too.

The bullets flew thicker, but aim is uncertain, when one is flying from a moving machine in the air, at speeding targets, and most of the bullets flew wide. Carstairs was grazed on the shoulder, and Wharton's horse was touched lightly on the flank, but gasping, both horses and riders, they plunged into the wood, reckless alike of trees and undergrowth, desperately seeking safety from the winged terrors that pursued them.

It was fortunate for the three fugitives that it was not the ordinary European wood, trimmed and pruned like a park. It was heavy with foliage, and there was much undergrowth, in which the horse of Carstairs tripped and fell, throwing him. But he did not begrudge that, as the vines and bushes not only broke his fall, but meant safety.

"Since you're down Carstairs," said Wharton, "it's the duty of a comrade to join you."

He sprang off his own horse and stood, rifle in hand, among the bushes. John also dismounted, although in more leisurely fashion. His heart had ceased to beat so heavily when they entered the wood. The immediate anger of being snapped up by those giants of the air passed and the revulsion of feeling came. His pulses were still drumming in his ears, but he heard a louder throbbing above the trees. The angry and disappointed monsters were hovering there, still seeking their prey.

Bullets pattered on the leaves and twigs, but they went wide. The three horses shivered in terror, and the one that had been touched on the flank uttered a shrill neigh of distress. John took the lead.

"The undergrowth is thicker on our right," he said. "We must take our horse into it. They won't be able to get more than glimpses of us there."

"Right!" said Carstairs, "I think I can walk that far now. The strength is coming back into my knees, and I don't think they'll double under me. I don't mind telling you fellows that I was never before in my life so scared."

"Your confession is mine too," said Wharton.

They reached the new refuge without harm, although more shots were fired from the planes. The density of the bushes there was due to a small stream flowing through the wood, and while the horses were still exposed, in a measure, they found almost complete cover for themselves. The three lay down in the thicket and pointed upward the muzzles of their rifles.

The throbbing and droning over their heads had never ceased, and through the leaves they saw the armored planes hovering about not far above the tops of the trees. But the fugitives in their screen of leaf and thicket had become invisible.

"We'll have to chance it with our horses," whispered Wharton, "but for ourselves we may be able to give back as good as we send. Scott, are you a sharpshooter?"

"I'm a pretty good marksman, and I think I could hit one of those things if it should slow down."

"I suggest," said Carstairs, "that when one of us fires he immediately move away at least six or eight yards. Then they won't be able to locate us by the shots."

"Good for you old Britisher," said Wharton, "you do have moments of intelligence."

"Wharton, I'd like to say as much for you."

Both laughed but the laugh was uneasy and unnatural. It was merely the force of habit, compelling them to seek some sort of relief through words.

The planes had come together in a group for a few moments, but afterward they made a wide separation and flew about swiftly in irregular circles. John knew that it was meant to disturb the aim of those below, because the flying men had certainly seen that they carried rifles.

John crouched under a bush, and with the muzzle of his high-powered rifle turned upward, continually sought a target through the leaves. In those moments

of danger and fierce anger he did not have left a single scruple against taking the life of man. They had hunted him remorselessly in a strange and terrific way. His first illusion that they were gigantic birds of prey remained, and he would be doing a service to the world, if he slew them.

A rifle cracked almost in his ear and Wharton uttered a little cry of disappointment.

"I heard the bullet thud on the metal side of that Taube," he said. "It isn't fair fighting us this way."

Then he and John, following the suggestion of Carstairs, promptly moved to another point in the bushes. Three bullets from the Taubes struck near the place they had just left. But John still watching had caught sight of a head and body, the two hands grasping a rifle projecting over the side of a Taube. Quick as a flash he fired, and with an aim that was literally as sure as death.

The man in the Taube heaved up, as if wrenched by an electric shock, then plunged head-foremost over the side and fell clear, his rifle dropping before him. John caught a swift vision of a falling figure sprawled out hideously, and then he heard the rending crash of twigs and branches followed by a heavy thump. His heart thrilled with horror. Those were human beings after all, up there in the air, and not primeval birds of prey.

"That one!" said Wharton. "Good shot, Scott!"

John's horror passed. He was still fighting for his life, and it was the men in the air who had attacked. He moved away again and by chance he came to the tiny brook, on which the bushes were strung like a thread. Lying flat on his face he drank, and he was astonished to find that he was so thirsty. Rising to his knees he glanced at his comrades and at the hovering aeroplanes. They had flown high out of the reach of bullets, and had drawn together as if for council. One of the horses rearing and threshing with fright had been killed by shots from the aeroplanes, but John did not notice it, until this moment. The other two tethered by their bridles to bushes had tried to break loose, but had failed. Now they were trembling all over, and were covered with perspiration. John felt sorry for them.

But the water had refreshed him wonderfully. He had not known before how hot and dry his throat had become. He invited his comrades to drink too, and they followed his example. Then they lay on their backs, and watched the council in the air. They could even hear the distant drumming of their motors. The

machine, out of which John had shot the aviator, had carried two men, because there it was in the group with the others.

John's old and powerful feeling that he was at the end of one era and at the beginning of another, involving many new forces, returned with increased strength. To be besieged by enemies overhead was one of them, and, for the present at least, he saw no way of escape from the grove.

The sun was now in the zenith. The clouds, having gone away, made a clean sweep of it. There was not a fleck of dusk in the burning blue of the sky. The aeroplanes were outlined against it, as clearly as if they had been pictures in oil on canvas. The sun, great and golden, poured down fire, but it did not reach the three in the thicket.

"I wish I knew what those fellows were planning," said Carstairs. "At least they give us a rest, while they arrange for our destruction."

"But we're not destroyed yet, and you don't think it either, Carstairs," said Wharton. "Whatever I've said against you Britishers, I've never said you lacked courage."

"And if you had said it I'd have known that you didn't mean it."

Then the two shook hands in silence. Wharton closed his eyes and pretended to be asleep.

"What are they doing, John?" he asked presently.

"Still in council. A plane heavier than the others, evidently the one that has the machine gun is in the center. I judge therefore that it also carries the commander of the fleet."

"Acute reasoning. Wake me up when they seem to be starting anything. Meanwhile I can't be bothered, because a few aeroplanes choose to use our heavens."

He stretched himself, and breathed deeply and peacefully. But John knew well enough that he was not asleep. His rifle lay by his side, where it could be snatched up in a moment, and now and then his eyes opened to watch through the bushes the foe circling aloft. Carstairs also lay down bye and bye, but John remained sitting, the thick boughs of a bush covering him.

"Something has happened," he announced after awhile. "One of the planes, the smallest, I think is flying away toward the east."

The others sat up. The aeroplane, high in air, was going at tremendous speed. The others remained over the grove, swinging about lazily in circles, but too high for the rifles.

"Now, Carstairs," said Wharton, "you English pretend to omniscience. So, tell us at once what that means."

"If anybody had omniscience it would be we British of course, but I confess, Wharton, that this is beyond me. That aeroplane is certainly going fast. Now it's as big as my hand, now it's the size of an egg, now it's a dot and now it's gone."

"Perhaps it's seeking help," said John.

"I don't see why," said Wharton. "Enough are left to hold us in this grove. Their only difficulty is in getting at us. Even if they brought more the trees and the foliage would still be here to protect us."

"That's true," admitted John. "Then it may have been damaged by some of our bullets."

"But it left like a racer. I don't know how these machines are built, but I'd wager from the way it flew that not a wheel or spring or screw or rivet in it was damaged."

"The others are evidently waiting for it to come back."

"How do you make out that?"

"Because they merely float about beyond our reach and don't try anything against us. The day's passing, and if they didn't have some plan dependent on the machine that left, they'd be at work now trying to shoot us up."

Carstairs reached over and patted John on the head. "You talk sense, Scott," he said, "if it weren't for your accent you could pass for an Englishman."

"Then I'll see that he never changes his accent," said Wharton.

"I think I'll take a nap," said Carstairs, "and I really mean it. The grass and the bushes were heavy with rain when we came in here, although we didn't notice it, but the fine sun up there has dried everything now, and I've a good bed."

He lay very comfortably, with his head on a mound of turf, but he did not close his eyes. The lids were lowered but nevertheless he watched the heavens.

"Sorry for those poor horses of ours," he said. "One's killed and the other two, I suppose, will be scared to death before this thing's over."

"And then we'll have to walk," said Wharton.

"But we'll go on just the same."

"We can buy new horses, at the next village. No more walking for mine than I can help."

John was intently watching the eastern horizon. He was longing now for Lannes' powerful glasses. Nevertheless his eyesight was good, the best of the three, and presently the great pulse in his throat began to leap. But he did not say anything yet. He wanted to make sure. He waited a minute and then he said:

"A black dot has reappeared in the eastern sky. It's so tiny you couldn't see it unless you swept your eyes around the circle until they met it."

Carstairs sat up.

"Where?" he asked.

"Begin as I told you and sweep your eyes around the circle."

"Ah, I see it now! Or maybe it's just a mote in the dancing sunbeams."

"Oh no, it's not. Watch it grow. It's an aeroplane, and I'd wager everything against next to nothing that it's the one that left a little while ago. Whatever it went to do it's done."

"Upon my soul, I think you're right. It is growing as you say. Now the dot becomes a black spot as big as an egg, now it grows to the size of your hand, and now the shape of a flying machine, coming at terrific speed, emerges. The whole process of departure is reversed."

"And it's making straight for that overhanging group," said Wharton.

John watched the big birds of prey await the messenger, and again he longed intently for Lannes' powerful glasses. The returning machine was received by the others which formed a circle about it, and for some minutes they hung there in close company.

His nerves began to quiver again with excitement. He was sure that it was a menace. The small aeroplane would not have gone away on a mission without some excellent reason. Sure of his leafy covert he stood up, and watched the group which now circled almost exactly over their heads. Carstairs and Wharton stood beside him, and again they turned to him as the leader, now that it was an affair of the air.

"What do you make of it?" asked Carstairs, anxiously.

"It means harm, some new method of attack," said John, "but for the life of me I can't guess what it is."

"Then we've merely got to wait," said Wharton.

The three were standing close together, and a chill seemed to pass from one to another. That great danger threatened not one of the three doubted, and its mysterious character made it all the more formidable.

The aeroplanes drew apart a little and again circled about lazily. John began to have a hope that nothing would happen after all, when suddenly he saw a flash in the thickets and heard a stunning roar. A piece of metal whistled past his head, and leaves and twigs fell in a shower.

Acting partly from reason and partly from impulse he seized both Wharton and Carstairs and dragged them to the ground.

"A bomb!" he cried. "I had forgotten about bombs, although I've seen them used before. They had none with them and the little aeroplane went back to a hangar somewhere for a supply! They'll drop more and we'll be safer lying down!"

"You're right of course," said Wharton. "It's all as simple as day now. There goes the second!"

Came another flash and roar, but this time the bomb fell farther away, and the metal fragments flew high over their heads. A third followed with the same result, and they began to feel encouraged.

"Of course they have to drop them at random," said John, "and throwing down bombs from an aeroplane high in air is largely an affair of chance."

"Still," said Wharton, "I feel as if I would like to burrow in the earth, not merely for a foot or two, but for at least a hundred feet, where the biggest bomb ever

made by the Germans couldn't reach me."

Carstairs uttered a cry of joy.

"What can you find to be glad about in a situation like this?" asked Wharton.

"I've been poking through the bushes and I find just beside us a deep gully."

"A trench made and ready for us! Come, we'll be the boys in the trenches!"

They passed through the bushes and dropped down in the gully which was in truth a great natural help to them. It was certain that in time a bomb would strike near, but unless it dropped directly on them they would be protected by their earthen walls from its flying fragments. And the odds were greatly against a bomb falling where they lay. The revulsion of feeling was so great that they became jovial.

"You've never agreed with me more than once or twice, Carstairs," said Wharton, "but I don't think you'll dispute it, when I say this is a fine, friendly little ravine."

"The finest I ever saw. I'm an expert in ravines. I made a specialty of 'em all through my boyhood, and I never saw another the equal of this."

"Now, they're guessing badly," said John, as a bomb burst in the far edge of the grove, some distances away.

"I wish we could find shelter for our horses," said Carstairs. "Those fellows in the air undoubtedly have glasses, and, not being able to see us, they may choose to demolish our remaining two beasts."

"There goes one now!" exclaimed John, as another bomb burst and a shrill neigh of pain followed.

A horse had been struck by two fragments, and wild with pain and terror it reared, struggled, finally broke its bridle, and galloped out into the fields, where it fell dead from loss of blood.

"Poor beast," muttered Carstairs, "I've always loved horses, and I'd like to get a little revenge."

"Maybe we can get it by waiting," said John, who was rapidly developing the qualities of leadership. "They can't possibly see us here in the gully which is

lined thickly on either side with bushes."

"And you think if we lie quiet," said Wharton, "that they'll come down lower to see what damage they've done."

"That's my idea."

"You do seem to have a good head on you for a Yankee," said Carstairs.

They were silent a long time. Two more bombs were dropped but they did not strike near them. John heard the remaining horse straining at his bridle, and threshing among the bushes, but he did not succeed in breaking loose.

He was very comfortable among some leaves in the gully, but he was on his back, and he did not cease to watch the aeroplanes, drifting lazily between him and the heavens. It was hard to judge distances in the air, but he had watched them so long and so closely that they seemed to him after a while to be flying lower. Patient as the Germans were, they must see sometime or other whether their bombs had destroyed the fugitives in the grove.

"They're coming down toward the tops of the trees," he whispered. "Since they haven't heard from us for so long they've probably concluded that their bombs have finished us."

"They'll soon find out better," said Carstairs savagely. "That last horse they killed was mine, and the poor brute was torn horribly by pieces of the bomb."

John looked at him curiously.

"War is war," he said.

"I know it," replied Carstairs, "and that's why I shall be so particular to take good aim, when they drop within range. Confound it, I wish they didn't have those armored machines."

"Still they're bound to expose themselves now and then," said John, "or they can't see us."

They now knelt in the gully waiting for the Taubes, which were softly sinking lower and lower. All three were sharpshooters, and they had anger and the love of life to wing their aim.

"Suppose we pick our men," said John. "The heavy plane near the center of the

group is undoubtedly the one that carries the machine gun, and so it's our most dangerous antagonist. It's not likely to have more than two men—otherwise the weight would be too great—one to steer and one to handle the gun."

"Excellent," said Carstairs. "You're undoubtedly the best marksman, Scott. Suppose when the machine tilts enough to give us aim you say: 'fire,' you taking the man at the rudder, while Wharton and I shoot at the one with the gun."

"All right, if you say so."

"Then it's agreed?"

"Agreed it is."

The muzzles of three rifles were now thrust through the bushes, ready to fire at an instant's notice. In those moments of intense excitement and with their own lives to save not one of the three had a single thought of mercy, Kindly in ordinary times war had taken complete possession of them for a space.

John concluded that the Germans were now sure of their success. It had been quiet so long in the grove that the fugitives must be dead. Moreover the afternoon was waning, and night would help the defenders, if they still lived. But he never took his eyes from the big aeroplane, floating easily like a great bird on lazy wing. Lower and lower it dropped and it came within easy range of the high-powered rifles. Now it slanted over on its side, still like a huge bird and the two men it carried came into view.

"Fire!" cried John, and there was one report as the three rifles cracked together. Never had bullets been sent with a more terrible aim. When the dead hand fell from the steering rudder the great machine turned quite over on its side. The two men and the machine gun were shot out, as if they had been hurled by a catapult, and crashed among the trees of the grove. The machine itself, still keeping its likeness to a huge bird, but wounded mortally, now fluttered about wildly for several minutes, and then fell with a tremendous crash among the trees. The other aeroplanes, obviously frightened by the fall of their leader, rapidly flew higher and out of range.

The three did not exult at first. Instead they were appalled.

"We certainly shot well!" said John at last.

"Oh I don't care!" said Carstairs, shaking himself, defiantly.

"They were after us, and we were bound to hit back!"

A bomb exploded in the woods, but they were not hurt. It stirred them to wrath again, and all their compunctions were gone. Instead, they began to feel a pride in their great sharpshooting.

"They've had enough of it for the present," said Wharton. "Look, the whole flock is mounting up and up, where our bullets can't reach 'em! Come down you rascals! Come down out of the sky and meet us face to face! We'll whip the whole lot of you!"

He stood at his full height and shook his rifle at the aeroplanes. John and Carstairs shared his feelings so thoroughly that they saw nothing odd.

"While they're so high," said John, "suppose we go and look at the fallen machine."

They found it among some trees, a part of the frame imbedded in the earth. It looked in its destruction a sinister and misshapen monster. The machine gun, broken beyond repair, lay beside it. They knew that two other shattered objects were somewhere near in the bushes, but they would not look for them.

"A great victory for the besieged," said Wharton, "but it leaves us still besieged."

"However the aspect of the field of battle is changing," said John.

"In what way?"

"The twilight is coming and the sky is our foe's field of battle."

The increase in their own chances became apparent at once. The obscurity of night would be like a blanket between them and the flying men, and its promise now was for speedy arrival. The glory of the sun had faded already in the east, and the sky was becoming gray toward the zenith.

"If that flock expects to achieve anything against us," said John, "they must set about it pretty soon. In an hour they will have to come close to the ground to see us, and I fancy we can then leave the grove."

"Yes," said Wharton, "it's up to them now. We can stand here waiting for them until the darkness comes. Now, they've begun to act!"

A bomb burst, but the obscuring twilight was so deceptive that it fell entirely

outside the wood and exploded harmless in a field.

"Poor work," said Carstairs.

"As I told you it's exceedingly hard to be accurate, dropping bombs from a height," said John, "and the twilight makes it much more so."

Nevertheless the aeroplanes made a desperate trial, throwing at least a half dozen more bombs, some of which fell in the wood, but not near the three defenders, although the last horse fell a victim, being fairly blown to pieces.

Meanwhile the sun sank behind the earth's rim, and, to the great joy of the three, clouds again rolled along the horizon, showing that they would have a dark night, a vital fact to them. In their eagerness to strike while it was yet time the aeroplanes hovered very low, almost brushing the tops of the trees, exposing themselves to the fire of the three who after spending eighteen or twenty cartridges on them moved quickly to another part of the wood, lest an answering bomb should find them.

They did not know whether they had slain any one, but two of the planes flew away in slanting and jerky fashion like birds on crippled wings. The others remained over the grove, but rose to a much greater height.

"That was the last attack and we repelled it," said Carstairs, feeling the flush of victory. "Here is the night black and welcome."

The aeroplanes were now almost invisible. The darkness was thickening so fast that in the grove the three were compelled to remain close together, lest they lose one another. Under the western horizon low thunder muttered, and there was promise of more rain, but they did not care.

They resolved to leave the grove in a half hour, and now they felt deeply the death of their horses. But all three carried gold, and they would buy fresh mounts at the next village. Their regret at the loss was overcome by the feeling that they had been victorious in the encounter with the aeroplanes when at first the odds seemed all against them.

They waited patiently, while the night advanced, noting with pleasure that the mutter of thunder on the western horizon continued. Overhead two aeroplanes were circling, but they were barely visible in the dusk, and rescuing their blankets and some other articles that the horses had carried, the three, with their rifles ready, walked cautiously across the fields.

A hundred yards from the grove, and they looked up. The aeroplanes were still circling there. Wharton laughed.

"They probably think we haven't the nerve to leave the shelter of the trees," he said. "Let 'em watch till morning."

"And then they'll find that the birds have metaphorically but not literally flown away," said Carstairs, a tone of exultation showing in his voice also. "In this battle between the forces of the air and the forces of the earth the good old solid earth has won."

"But it may not always win," said John. "When I was up with Lannes, I saw what the aeroplane could do, and we are bound to admit that if it hadn't been for the grove they'd have got us."

"Right-o!" said Carstairs.

"True as Gospel," said Wharton.

"Do you know where the road is?" asked John. "Now that our horses are gone we've got to do some good walking."

"Here it is," said Carstairs. "Seven miles farther on is the little hamlet of Courville, where we can buy horses."

"Then walk, you terriers, walk!" said Wharton.

The three bending their heads walked side by side toward the hamlet of Courville, which they were destined never to reach.

CHAPTER XI

THE ARMORED CAR

The three talked, because they were in the dark, and because they felt great joy over their escape. The clouds, after a while, floated away, and the thunder ceased to mutter. It seemed that the elements played with them, but, for the present, were in their favor. The walking itself was pleasant, as they were anxious to exercise their muscles after the long hard waiting in the grove.

But as the clouds went away and the stars came out, leaving a sky of blue, sown with stars, John could not keep from looking upward often. The aeroplanes and the daring men who flew them had made a tremendous impression upon him, and he constantly expected danger. But he saw none of those ominous black specks which could grow so fast into sinister shapes. He heard instead a faint rumbling ahead of them on the road to Courville, and he held up his hand as a warning.

"What is it?" asked Carstairs, as the three stopped.

"I don't know yet," replied John, "but the sound seems to be made by wheels."

"Perhaps a belated peasant driving home," said Wharton, as he listened.

"I don't think so. It appears to be a volume of sound, although it's as yet far away. I hear it better now. It's wheels and many of them."

"French reinforcements."

"Maybe, but more likely German. We've seen how ready the Germans are, and we know that they're spreading all over this region."

"Then it's safer for us out of the road than in it."

There was a hedge on either side of the road, but the three slipped easily through the one on the right, and stood in tall grass. The rumbling was steadily coming nearer, and John had no doubt it was made by Germans, perhaps some division seeking to get in the rear of the French forces with which he had fought.

There was a good moon and they saw well through the thin hedge. In ten minutes cyclers, riding six abreast, appeared on the crest of a low hill in the

direction of Courville. The moonlight fell on their helmets and gray uniforms, showing, as John had expected, that they were Germans. Again he was beholding an example of the wonderful training and discipline, which had been continued for decades and which had put military achievement above everything else. Day and night the German hosts were advancing on France.

The cyclers, carrying their rifles before them, advanced in hundreds and hundreds, the files of six keeping perfectly even. Again the sight was unreal, productive of awe. Armies had never before gone to battle like this. The files close together, like a long, grayish-green serpent, moved swiftly along the road.

But it was not the wheels that had made the rumble. They instead gave out a light undulating sound, something like that of skaters on ice, and the three waited to see what was behind, as the rumbling grew louder.

The cyclers passed, then came the strong smell of gasoline, puffing sounds and the head of a great train of motor cars appeared. Most of the motors were filled with soldiers, others drew cannon and provision wagons. They were a full hour in passing, and at the rear were more than a hundred armored cars, also crowded with troops, some of them carrying machine guns also.

"I wish we were in one of those armored cars," said John, "then we wouldn't miss our horses."

"Well, why not get in one of them," said Carstairs.

"While we're about it why not wish for everything else that we can think of?"

"I mean exactly what I say. I didn't speak until I saw an opportunity. One of the cars seems to have something the matter with it and is drawing up by the side of the road not fifteen feet from us. The others have gone on, expecting it of course to catch up soon."

"Do you really mean what you suggest, Carstairs?" asked Wharton.

"I certainly do."

"Then what an Englishman suggests Yankees will perform."

"But with the help of the Englishman. Jove, what luck! There are only two men with the car. One is standing beside it, and the other is crawling under it. The machine is almost in the shadow of the hedge, and if we're smooth about it we

can slip through, and be upon it, before we're seen."

"We must time ourselves. What's the plan?" asked Wharton.

"We'll assume when the man comes out from under the machine that he's fixed it. Then we'll make our rush, knock down the other fellow, jump into it and away. I'm an expert chauffeur, and I don't ask a better chance. Oh, fellows, what luck!"

"It's certainly favoring us," said Wharton, "and we must push it. It would be a crime to quit with such luck as this leading us on."

They slipped noiselessly through the hedge, and stood in its heavy shadow only a few feet from the car. They heard the man under it tapping with metal on metal. The other standing with his back to the three said a few words and the man replied.

"He says it's only a trifle, and it's all right now," whispered Carstairs, who understood German. "He's coming out from under the car. Now, fellows, for it!"

John struck the man standing beside the car with the butt of his rifle, but he did not make the blow hard—he could not bring himself to kill anybody in that manner. But the man fell senseless, and, just as his partner came from beneath it, the three leaped into the car, Carstairs threw on the speed, whirled about on air, it seemed to John, and left the German in the road, staring open-mouthed.

But the German recovered quickly and uttered a shout of alarm, drawing the attention of the armored motors, the rear files of which were not a hundred yards away.

"Down, you fellows!" cried Carstairs, who now took the lead. "Have your rifles ready to fire back, and enjoy what is going to be the greatest ride of your lives!"

Some wild spirit seemed to have taken hold of the Englishman. An expert driver, it may have been the touch of the wheel under his hand at such an exciting moment, and then it may have been the shots from the German cars that, in an instant, rattled upon the steel sides protecting the car.

"Hold fast, you fellows!" cried Carstairs, who bent low over the wheel, his flashing eyes now seeking to trace the road before them. "We are going to eat up the ground!"

The car gave its last dizzy lurch as it completed its circuit and shot ahead. John and Wharton had been thrown together, but they held on to their rifles and righted themselves. Then John noticed beside him the body and barrels of a machine gun, mounted and ready for use. He was the sharpshooter of the three and that gun appealed to him, as the car had appealed to Carstairs.

"Move over a little!" he shouted to Wharton.

"What are you going to do?"

"I'm going to fight that pursuing German army."

In an instant the machine gun began to crackle like a box of exploding crackers, sending back a hail of bullets which rattled upon the pursuing cars or found victims in them. But they, crouching down, were completely protected by the armor, and their careering machine made but a single target while they could fire into the pursuing mass.

Carstairs bent lower and lower. He had gone completely wild for the moment. Millions of sparks flew before his eyes. All the big and little pulses in his head and body were beating heavily. They had just scored two great triumphs. They had defeated the efforts of the masters of the air, and they had taken from their foe one of his most formidable weapons in which they might escape. His soul flamed with triumph, and that old familiar touch of the wheel filled him with the strength not of one giant, but of ten. He saw the road clearly now. There it lay ahead of them, long, white and sinuous, and he never doubted for a moment his ability to guide the armored car along in it at a mile a minute.

John in his turn was filled with the rage of battle. It was not often that one in his situation had a deadly machine gun at hand, ready to turn upon his enemies. While Wharton fed it from the great supply of ammunition in the car he turned a perfect stream of balls upon the pursuing motor, spraying it from side to side like a hose. Wharton looked up at his white strained face, in which his eyes burned like two coals of fire, and then he looked at the bent back and shoulders of Carstairs.

"Two madmen," he muttered. "A Britisher and a Yankee, mad at the same time and in the same place, and I'm their keeper! Good Lord, did a man ever before have such a job!"

Once he pulled John down a little as the machine guns in the pursuing car were

getting the range, but behind the armored sheath of their car they were safe, for the present at least. Wharton regained his coolness and retained it. But he held to his belief that he rode a race with death, with one madman in front of him and another by his side.

Now and then the car took a frightful leap, and Wharton expected to land beneath it, but it always came down right, with Carstairs driving it faster and faster and Scott pouring balls from the machine gun and talking to it lovingly, as if it were a thing of life.

It was Wharton's grim thought that he was about to die soon, but that he would die gloriously. No common death for him, but one amid the crash of motors, machine guns and cannon. Meanwhile steel rained around them, but they were protected by the speed of their flight, and their armor. It was hard for the Germans to hit a fleeting target in a curving road, and the few balls or bullets that struck true fell harmless from the steel plates.

Wharton's own blood began to leap. The two with him in the car might be madmen, but they showed skill and vigor in their madness. The car sprang in the air, but it always came down safely. It whirled at times on a single wheel, but it would right itself, and go on at undiminished speed.

And the other madman at the gun did not neglect precautions. He kept himself well hidden behind the steel shield, and continued to spray the pursuing line from right to left and from left to right with a stream of projectiles.

On flew the car, down valleys and up slopes. It thundered across little ridges, and fled through strips of forest. Then Wharton amid their own roar heard the same deep steady rumble that had preceded the coming of the first German force. The sound was so similar he knew instinctively that it was made by a second detachment, advancing along the same road, but miles back. Their own headlong speed would carry them directly into it, and, as he saw it, they were completely trapped.

He leaned over, put a hand on the shoulder of Carstairs, and shouted in his ear:

"A second army of the enemy is in front, and we're going into it at the rate of a mile a minute!"

"Never mind!" Carstairs shouted back. "I know a little road not far ahead, leading off from this almost due westward. I'm going to take it, but it's a sharp

turn. Hold tight you two!"

"For God's sake, Carstairs, slow up a little on the curve!"

But Carstairs made no answer. He did not even hear him now. He lay almost upon the wheel, and his eyes never left the track in front of him. He was the jockey riding his horse to victory in the greatest of all races.

Wharton ceased to feed the machine gun. The use for it had passed now. They were rapidly gaining on the pursuit, but the same speed was bringing them much nearer to the second force. He wondered if Carstairs really knew of that branch road, or if it were some wild idea flitting through his mad brain. As it was, he laid his rifle on the floor of the car, and commended his soul to God.

"Now!" suddenly shouted Carstairs, and it seemed to Wharton that they were whirling in a dizzy circle. Carstairs boasted afterwards that they made the curve on one wheel, but Wharton was quite sure that they made it on air.

They shot into a narrow road, not much more than a path leading through woods, and when Wharton looked back the pursuit was not in sight. They were now going almost at a right angle from either force, leaving both far behind, and Wharton suggested to Carstairs that he slow down—John had already ceased firing, because there was nothing to fire at. But his words were in vain. Carstairs would not yet come out of his frenzy. As John had talked to his gun he was now talking to his machine, bestowing upon it many adjectives of praise.

Wharton gave up the task as useless and sank back in his seat. He must let the fever spend itself. Besides he was gaining supreme confidence in the driving of Carstairs. The Englishman had shown such superb skill that Wharton was beginning to believe that he could drive the car a mile a minute anywhere save in a dense forest. So, he sank back in his seat, and relaxed mind and body.

They fled on over a road narrow but good. They passed lone farm houses sitting back in the fields, but Wharton had only a glimpse of them. A tile roof, a roar from the car and they were gone.

Yet the fever of Carstairs slowly burned itself out. They had long since been safe from any pursuit by the Germans in the main road, and now the young Englishman realized it. He took one hand from the wheel, and dashed back a lock of hair that had fallen over his brow. Then he slowed down quickly, and when they were going not more than seven or eight miles an hour he said like

one coming out of an ecstasy.

"Don't the Germans build splendid cars?"

"And fine machine guns, too?" said John, in a high-pitched unnatural voice.

"Now here is where I take command," said Wharton firmly. "You two have been madmen, as mad as anybody can be, although it's true that your madness has saved us. But you've done your great deeds, sanity is returning, and you're in a state of exhaustion. Carstairs, give me the wheel at once. I'm not much of a driver, but I can take the car along safely at a rate of five miles an hour, which is all we need now."

Carstairs, the fires within him burned out wholly now, resigned the wheel to his comrade, and sank limply into a seat beside John.

"Now you two rest," said Wharton, sternly, "and if I hear a word out of either of you in the next hour I'll turn the machine gun on you."

They obeyed. Each was a picture of physical collapse. Wharton did not know much about automobiles. In the driver's seat he felt as if he were steering a liner, but in such case as his one readily takes risks, and he sent the machine along slowly and with fair success.

It was beginning to lighten somewhat, and he looked for a village. They must have food, a fresh supply of gasoline, and news of their own army. They bore letters which they meant to deliver or die.

The same beautiful country, though less hilly, stretched before them. Many clear little streams flowed through the valleys, and here and there were groves free from undergrowth. Wharton believed that they were far toward the west, and near the British troops—if any had yet been landed in France.

"Are you two still in a convalescent stage?" he asked, glancing back.

"Getting along nicely, doctor, thank you, sir," said John. "I began to pick up just as soon as we left those German armies out of sight."

Then he turned to the comrade, sitting beside him.

"Carstairs, old man," he said, "I don't know what you are, at home, but here you're the greatest chauffeur that ever lived! I believe you could drive a car sixty miles an hour all day long on a single wheel!"

"Thanks, old man," said Carstairs, grasping his hand, "I didn't have time to look back, but I knew from the sounds that you were working a machine gun, as one was never worked before; fast enough by Jove to drive off a whole hostile army."

"You two have organized the greatest log rolling society in existence," said Wharton, "but you've been brave and good boys. Now let's take a look at this glorious car of ours which we had specially built for us in Germany."

The light in the east was increasing, and for the first time they made an examination of their capture. Despite the armor and presence of the machine gun it was upholstered in unusual style, with cushions and padded sides in dark green leather. There were many little lockers and fittings not to be found often in a car intended for war. On a tiny silver plate under the driver's seat a coat of arms was engraved. John, who was the first to catch sight of it, exclaimed:

"This car belongs to some duke or prince. Carstairs, you're a subject and not a citizen, and you ought to be up on all kinds of nobility worship. What coat of arms is this?"

"I don't know," replied Carstairs, "and I'm as free a man as you are, I'd have you

to know."

"Breaking the treaty already," chuckled Wharton. "It doesn't matter whether we know the coat of arms or not. It's likely that the man standing in the road, the one whom John hit over the head with the gun was the duke or prince. Oh, if the Germans ever get you, Scott, they'll break you on the wheel for such an extreme case of *Majestätsbeleidigung!*"

"And if you pronounce that word again you'll break your jaw," said John. "Let's open all these lockers. We may find spoils of war."

It seemed a good suggestion, and taking the monkey wrench they broke open every locker. They found a pair of splendid field glasses, shaving materials, other articles of the toilet, and a tiny roll of fine tissue paper.

"I've an idea that we have something of value here," said John, as he held up the little roll. "It's in German, which I don't understand. Take it, Wharton."

There were six small sheets, and as Wharton translated them aloud and slowly they realized that in very truth they had made a precious capture. They contained neither address nor signature, but they notified the commander of the extreme German right wing that a British force would shortly appear near the Belgian border, on the extreme allied left, that it would be a small army, and that it could be crushed by a rapid, enveloping movement.

"The prince or duke whom you hit over the head, John," said Wharton, "was carrying this. He did not put it in his pocket, because he never dreamed of such a thing as the one that happened to him. But one thing is sure: our obligation to reach the allied force in the west is doubled and tripled. We three, obscure as we may be, may carry with us the fate of an army."

"He called us two madmen," said John, nudging Carstairs. "Now look at our good sober Wharton going mad with responsibility."

Wharton did not notice them. He was turning over and over the sheets of tissue paper, and his eyes glowed. His hands trembled, too, as he handled the precious document, but he did not let a single page fall.

"Glorious! splendid! magnificent!" he exclaimed. "By our capture, by our own courage and skill, and by ours alone we'll save the allied left wing from destruction."

The timeliness of their exploit, the wonderful chance had gone to Wharton's head. He forgot for the time his comrades, the motor, and the morning sun over the fields and the forest. He thought only of their arrival in the allied camp with those precious documents.

John and Carstairs exchanged glances again. They had come quite back to earth, but there could be no doubt that Wharton was taking an ascension.

"We'll treat him kindly," said Carstairs.

"Of course," said John. "Old friend of ours, you know. Been with us through the wars. But I want to tell you, Carstairs, and I hope I won't hurt your feelings, you being a monarchist, that I'm glad I hit that prince such a solid smash over the head. It will always be a pleasure to me to remember that I knocked out a royalty, and I hope he wasn't any mediatized prince either."

"Don't apologize to me. He was only a German prince, and they're so numerous they don't count British princes are the real thing."

"Stop talking foolishness you two!" exclaimed Wharton. "You ramble on, and we carry the fate of Europe in our hands! My God, we've wasted a quarter of an hour here talking! Carstairs, get back in the driver's seat, and I don't care how fast you drive! Scott, take your place at the machine gun, and shoot down anything that opposes us!"

"Mad! Quite mad!" John and Carstairs said together, but they obeyed with amazing promptness, and in a minute the car was spinning down the road at a great rate. But Wharton leaning forward and looking with red eyes in black rims, saw nothing they passed. He had instead a vision of the three arriving at some point far away with the prince's dispatches, and of English and French generals thanking those who had come in time to save them.

Carstairs drove with a steady hand, but he was his normal self now. He had seen that their supply of gasoline was sufficient to last a while, and he was content for the present with a moderate rate of speed. If they were pursued again then he could make another great burst, but he did not consider it likely that a third force of the foe would appear. They must be getting beyond the vanguard of the German invasion.

John sat beside Wharton. The machine gun was at rest, but he kept his rifle across his knee. Nevertheless he did not anticipate any further danger. He felt an

immense satisfaction over their achievements, but the danger and strain had been so great that rest seemed the finest thing in the world. He hoped they would soon come to another of those neat French inns, where they would surely be welcome.

But Wharton was not thinking of inns and rest. He took out the dispatches and read them a second time. Then he folded them up triumphantly and put them back in his pocket again. His soul burned with ardor. Their fights with the aeroplanes and the armored cars were alike forgotten. They must get forward with the prince's dispatches.

The sun came over the slopes, and the day grew fast. John fell asleep in his seat with his rifle across his knees. He was aroused by the stopping of the car and the murmur of many voices. He sat upright and was wide awake all in a moment.

They had come to the village for which they had wished so ardently and they were surrounded by people who looked curiously at the car, the heavy dents in its armor, the machine gun, and, with the most curiosity of all, at the three occupants.

But their looks were friendly. The three in the car wore the French uniform, and while obviously they were not French, it was equally obvious that they were friends of France. John smiled at them and asked the burning question:

"Is there an inn here?"

They pointed across the street. There it was snug and unimpeachable. Carstairs drove slowly to the front of it, and he and John meanwhile answered a torrent of questions. Yes, they had been in a fight with Germans, and, after seizing one of their armored cars, they had escaped in it. But it was true that the Germans were coming into France by all the main roads, and the people must be ready.

There were many exclamations of dismay, and the questions they asked John and Carstairs never ceased. But they said nothing to Wharton. His stern, absent expression did not invite confidences. He was looking over their heads at something far away, and he seemed merely to be going into the inn, because his comrades were doing so.

The three found the breakfast good as usual. Gasoline could be obtained. It was not for civilians, but as they were soldiers serving France they were able to buy a supply. The news that they desired was scarce, although there was a vast crop of rumors which many told as facts. John was learning that war was the mother of

lies. He believed only what men had seen with their own eyes, and but little of that. It was incredible how people described in detail things they had witnessed, but which had never occurred.

Had a British army landed? It had. It had not. Where was it? It was in Belgium. It was in France. It was at the training camps in England. There was plenty of information, and one could choose whatever he liked best. John and Carstairs looked at each other in dismay. They had a car, but where were they to go. At least they carried dispatches for a British army which some of the French believed to be in France. But Wharton took no notice of the difficulty. He was silent, and preoccupied with their triumphant arrival that was coming.

John asked the most questions, and at last he found a woman whose words seemed to be based upon fact and not imagination. She had a cousin who was employed in the telegraph, and her cousin told her, that British troops had landed, that some of them at least had reached Paris, and then had gone north toward Belgium, the region of Mons or Charleroi, she believed. She spoke quietly and with much detail, and John believed that she had a mind able to tell the truth without exaggeration.

He held a brief conference with Carstairs, who had now replenished the gasoline, and who had also put stores of food in the car. Carstairs agreed with him that the statement was probably correct, and that at any rate they ought to govern themselves in accordance with it. They did not consult Wharton, who they knew was thinking only of the papers.

John took the wheel. Like Wharton he did not know much about driving, but it was a time when one had to do things. Carstairs soon fell asleep, but Wharton sat rigidly erect, staring before him.

John had felt the emotion of triumph strongly that morning, but now much of it was departing. The country was growing more beautiful than ever. He had never seen any outside his own to match it. This had the advantage of age and youth combined. Buildings were gray and soft with centuries, but the earth itself was fresh and eternal with youth. But he knew beyond any shred of doubt that it would soon be torn to pieces by the fighting millions.

There was no occasion for haste now, as they must feel the way, and they were beyond the German advance. While Carstairs slept and Wharton stared ahead he examined the country. Once they passed near a town of considerable size, and he saw on a hill, in the center of it a great gray cathedral, its fine stonework

glittering like tracery.

Then he saw the graybeards, the women, and the young boys and girls coming into the fields to work. All the men of fighting age were gone. He had seen the same in Germany, but it struck him anew with painful force, this turning of millions of workers upon one another, weapons in hand.

John stopped beside the fields once or twice and talked with the peasants. The old men could tell him nothing. They were stolid and stoical. Yes, there was war, but it was not any business of theirs to find where the armies were marching, and his heart went out more strongly than ever to the people, over whom military ambition and the folly of kings were driving the wheels of cannon.

It was well toward midday before he secured any real information. They encountered at the crossing of a brook a small French patrol under a lieutenant, an intelligent man, whom by lucky chance Carstairs had met two weeks before.

He told them that going at a moderate rate they could reach by the next morning a large French army which lay north and west. Some British troops—he did not know how many—had come up, and they were on the extreme left of the allied line. More were expected. In front of them were great masses of the Germans.

They gave him their own news, and then with mutual good wishes they drove on, Carstairs now at the wheel, and their pace increased. It was agreed that they should hasten much more, as soon as they were absolutely sure of the way. Wharton, for the first time, took part in the talk.

"When we have a definite point to aim at," he said, "we must take every risk and race for it. If we don't deliver these documents promptly to the generals we ought to be shot."

"We won't be shot for the lack of trying, Wharton," said John, "but if we go racing along the wrong road we'll be that much farther from our right direction."

"We ought to see more patrols soon," said Carstairs. "They'll surely be watching all through this region."

"Likely enough we'll find 'em in that wood ahead," said John, pointing to a long stretch of forest that clothed a group of hills. "It's just the place for 'em. From the top of that highest hill they can see for miles."

Carstairs increased their speed, and the car shot forward. It was a fine motor,

John thought, and the bombardment it had received had not hurt it much. That German prince certainly knew how to select a car, and he had fortified it in a splendid manner.

John was smiling to himself again in satisfaction, as they dipped down the valley and entered the forest, which in that country they would certainly call a great one. Its shade was pleasant, too, as the beams of the sun were now vertical and hot.

"Nice region," said John approvingly. "See that old castle off there to the left."

An ancient castle, decayed and abandoned, crowned a little hill. Around it was a moat dry for generations, and one of the Norman towers had fallen down. It was a somber picture of lonely desolation.

"I suppose some fine old robber of a baron lived in that," said John, "and preyed upon the country, until he reached the hunting grounds of other robbers like himself."

"Deucedly draughty and uncomfortable they must have been," said Carstairs. "We've some of 'em in my country, but they must have been pretty hard living for my lord and my lady."

"I don't see that we have much advantage over those old fellows," said John thoughtfully. "They were little robbers, and here are all the countries of Europe trying to tear one another to pieces. After all, Carstairs, I'm beginning to think the Americans are the only really civilized people."

Carstairs grinned.

"You can't do it, Scott," he said, "you can't take Wharton's place. I'll argue with him about the merits of Briton and Yankee. It's his time-honored right, but I'll have no dispute with you."

Wharton smiled a stern assent.

"Then we'll let it go," said John, "but do you notice that this is a real forest. It must cover a half dozen square miles. I suppose that in your country they would call it the Royal Forest or by some such high-sounding name."

"Never you mind what we'd call it," rejoined Carstairs, "but whatever it is it's evident that something violent is going on within its shades! Listen!"

John started upright in his seat, as he heard the crackle of three or four shots so close together that they were almost in a volley, and then the sound of feet running swiftly. They stopped the machine, and a figure, stained, bleeding and desperate, emerged from the forest.

"A fugitive!" exclaimed John.

"But from what?" said Carstairs.

"The Germans, of course!" said Wharton.

The man, stained with blood, ragged and dirty came at great bounds, and before any one could put out a detaining hand he sprang into the car.

"Help, for God's sake!" he cried. "I'm a spy in the service of France, and the Uhlans are coming down through the wood after me!"

"Help you!" exclaimed Carstairs. "Of course we will! Any friend of France is a friend of ours!"

He bent low over the wheel once more in his old speeding attitude, and the car shot forward like an arrow.

CHAPTER XII

THE ABANDONED CHÂTEAU

John glanced back toward the point from which the shots had come, but it was already hidden by the curve of the hill. Moreover, the car was going so fast now that the Uhlans would be left as if standing still, and he turned his attention to the man who had crumpled at his very feet.

The stranger lay in a heap on the floor of the car, his breath coming in short gasps from sobbing lungs. There were red stains on the arms and right shoulder of his coat. John felt a great pity and dragged him into one of the seats. Then he uttered a cry of surprise. The features under their mask of blood and dirt were familiar.

"Weber!" he exclaimed.

Weber stared back.

"You, whom I met at the inn!" he said, "and your friends!"

"Yes, we're all here," said John cheerily. "This is indeed a singular chance!"

"A most fortunate one for me," said Weber, straightening himself, and endeavoring to arrange his clothing—it appeared that his pride was returning. "After this I shall think that Providence is watching over me. A man on foot seeking to escape has little chance against horsemen. I saw the automobile moving slowly and I sprang into it, intending to make the appeal which has been successful."

"Look who's here," said John to his comrades. "We've rescued Weber, the Alsatian, from the Uhlans. Battered a bit, but still in the ring and good for many another escape."

"So it is," said Carstairs, reaching back a hand. "We happened along just in time, Weber. It's a way we three have. I've no doubt that we'll rescue you at least a half dozen times more."

Weber grasped the proffered hand and shook it eagerly. Wharton bowed in a friendly manner, but he was still preoccupied. His hand rested on that point in his coat, beneath which the papers lay, and his thoughts were not with the fourth

arrival in the car.

"Your wounds!" said John. "This is an automobile of princes, and for the present we are the princes. I've no doubt we can find in these lockers and drawers material of which to make bandages."

"They're slight. They don't matter," said Weber. "Pay no attention to them at a time like this. I know that you must be going toward the main French army, and time is of value. My strength is coming back now, and my courage, too. I will admit I was frightened. I thought my time had come. Perhaps that may seem a disgraceful confession, but it's true."

"Not disgraceful at all," said John sympathetically. "I haven't been a soldier more than a few days, but it's been long enough to teach me that brave men are often scared. What were you doing and how did you happen to come so near to being caught?"

"I've been inside the German lines. Oh, they're not so far away! And I was slipping out I had passed all, but a body of Uhlans, under a captain, von Boehlen, an uncommonly shrewd man. If I had been caught by him I would now be singing with the angels in Paradise."

He smiled faintly.

"I've met von Boehlen," said John, "and if he suspected you, you acted wisely to run with all your might. I saw him in Dresden on the eve of the war, and I've seen him since, though at some distance."

"We'll forget my narrow escape now," said Weber cheerfully.

"One can't remember such things long in these times."

"They're tremendous times."

"So tremendous that as soon as you've made one escape with your life you're due for another."

"You haven't heard of any Germans on this road?"

"No, but they're raiding far and wide, and von Boehlen will attempt anything."

"We've had uncommon luck so far, and I think it will continue. I see you're admiring our automobile. I wasn't jesting, when I told you it belonged to a

prince."

"It's rather small for an armored car. They usually have seven or eight men in them."

"Yes, and it's fortunate for us that it's small. I told you luck was running our way. But as it is, it's a pretty heavy strain on the man at the wheel, although Carstairs there is an expert."

"I'm a pretty good chauffeur," said Weber, "and whenever Mr. Carstairs wishes it I'll relieve him at the wheel. Besides I know the country thoroughly, and I can take advantage of every short cut."

"I'll call on you soon," said Carstairs. "A lot of my enthusiasm for speeding has gone out of me. My arms ache all the time, but I'm good for another hour yet."

Weber did not insist. John understood why, as it was patent that he needed rest. He made himself comfortable in the seat, and the others left him in peace. The machine rolled on swiftly and smoothly. It was one of the beautiful roads so common in France, and John felt scarcely a jar. A full sun tinted the green country with gold.

The warmth was penetrating and soothing. John had lost so much sleep and the nervous drain had been so great that his eyelids became heavy. They came to a clear little brook, and decided to stop that all might have a drink. Weber used the chance also to bathe his face and hands and get rid entirely of blood, dirt and dust. He seemed then to John a rather handsome man, having the touch of the scholar in his face.

John walked about a little, stretching his arms, and thumping his chest in order to make himself more wakeful. But when he returned to the automobile, and sat down in the cushioned seat the old sleepiness returned. The effort to keep the eyelids from going down was painful. Carstairs in the driver's seat also yawned prodigiously.

"All my strength has returned now, and my nerve has come with it," said Weber. "Let me take the wheel. I see that you three are exhausted, as well you may be after such tremendous energy and so many dangers. I don't boast, when I say that I'm a good driver."

"Take the wheel, and welcome," said Carstairs, yawning prodigiously and retreating to a seat in the body of the car, beside John.

It was evident that Weber understood automobiles. He handled the wheel with a practised hand, and sent it forward with a skill and delicacy of touch equal to that of Carstairs.

"It is, indeed, a beautiful machine," he said. "Splendid work went into the making of it, and I can well believe as you do that it belonged to a prince."

John's sleepiness increased. The motion was so smooth and pleasant! And the absence of danger and strained effort lulled one to slumber. He fought it off, and then concluded that he was foolish. Why shouldn't he go to sleep? Carstairs was asleep already and Wharton, who felt such a tremendous weight of responsibility, was nodding. His eyelids fell. He raised them with a desperate effort, but they fell again and remained closed.

When John awoke a dimness over the western hills showed that the twilight was advancing. Through sleepy eyes he saw Weber's back as he bent a little over the wheel, steering steadily. The road now led through forest.

"Where are we, Weber?" he asked.

"Ah, awake are you," said the Alsatian, not looking back. "You saved my life, but it was most fortunate that you had the chance of doing it. Otherwise all of you would have perished from lack of sleep."

"Lack of sleep? What's that?" exclaimed Carstairs, waking up and hearing the last words. "Why, I'm always lacking sleep. I believe the greatest hardship of war is the way it deprives you of sleep. When I've helped take Berlin, Hamburg, Munich and other important German cities, and this war's over, I'm going back to England to sleep a month, and if anybody wakes me before the right time there'll be a merry civil war in that blessed isle."

Wharton, who had been somewhat uneasy in his sleep, woke up in turn, and his hand flew to his tightly buttoned coat. But he felt the papers safely there and his heart resumed its natural beat. Yet he was angry with himself. No man who carried perhaps the fate of a continent should ever close his eyes a moment.

"We're crossing a range of hills," said Weber, replying as soon as he could to John's question. "We've been making good time. We ought to strike the French line by midnight and then our journey will be over."

"And I'll be glad when we get there," said Carstairs. "I love automobiles, but I've had enough for the present even of such a fine machine as this. I judge that we

slept well, Mr. Weber."

"I never saw two sleep better," replied Weber. "Mr. Wharton was a little troubled in his slumbers though."

"Oh, he's a very grave individual with great responsibilities," said Carstairs.

But he did not add anything about the dispatches.

"A little farther back," said Weber, "I saw a biplane. Although it was high in air I'm quite sure from its make that it was German."

"Scouting," said John. "It was pretty venturesome to come this far west."

"The Germans shun no risks," said Weber, gravely. "The biplane flew back toward the east. It did not alarm me greatly, but I saw another thing that did. Just before you awoke I noticed a gleam in the valley to the right, and I know that it was made by a sunbeam falling on the spiked helmet of a Uhlan."

The three stiffened with alarm, not so much for themselves as for their errand. Wharton's hand moved again toward the pocket, containing the papers, which had transformed him into a man with but a single thought.

"Uhlans here close to this road!" exclaimed John.

"Do you think it can be von Boehlen?"

"It may be. On the whole I think it probable," replied Weber. "Von Boehlen is a most daring man, and to scout along the skirts of the French army would be the most natural thing for him to do. I'm going to speed up a bit—that is, if you gentlemen agree that it's necessary."

"Of course," said John, and the machine sprang forward. He had taken the prince's glasses as his own share of the spoil. They were of great power, and now he searched the forest with them for their enemies. He soon found that Weber was right. He saw steel helmets on the right, and then he saw them on the left. They were surely Uhlans, and evidently they had seen the car.

He quickly put away the glasses and snatched up his rifle.

"You were right, Weber," he exclaimed. "They're German cavalry, and they've begun to pursue us. Faster! Faster! This machine can leave any horsemen behind!"

Weber turned back a despairing face.

"The car is doing its best!" he said. "Something has gone wrong with the machinery!"

He wrenched at the wheel, but he produced no such speed as that which Carstairs had got out of the car, when they were fleeing from the German automobiles. The two forces of Uhlans had now joined and were in the road galloping in swift pursuit. Many of them carried lances, which glittered in the late sun. The sight of the steel points made John shiver. It would be horrible to feel one of them in his back.

He turned to his machine gun. A touch of that old madness returned. The sight of the Uhlans had set his brain on fire.

"I'll teach you not to come too close, my fine lads," he said.

He aimed the gun and undertook to start the mechanism, but nothing moved. No shots came. He jerked at it widly, but it refused to budge. It was jammed, and it would take a long time to put it in order. His heart stood still and a cold perspiration came out on his face. How did it happen? Was it possible that he had left it in such a condition?

"What's the matter, John?" asked Wharton.

"The machine gun's jammed, and I can't fire a shot. The car seems to be breaking down, too. Don't you see that the Uhlans are gaining!"

"So, they are," said Wharton.

He and John snatched up their rifles and fired rapidly at the horsemen. Some of the bullets struck, but did not impede the pursuit. Carstairs pushed Weber out of the driver's seat, and seized the wheel himself. All his pride and confidence were aroused, and he did not have time to be polite. He could get the speed out of that machine and save them.

But it did not obey his hand. It staggered along like a tired man. Weber was right again. Something had gone wrong with the internal organism, and one could not stop to right it with pursuing Uhlans only a few hundred yards away.

"What shall we do?" exclaimed Weber. "Shall we jump for it and run? We may escape in the shelter of the forest?"

"Not yet," replied Carstairs firmly. "Not yet for three of us, though it may be best for you, since you'll be executed as a spy, when you're taken."

"If you don't go, I don't go either," said Weber. "We'll all stay together."

"Brave man!" said Carstairs admiringly. But he had time for no more words. He was wrenching at the machine as a rider for his life would pull at the mouth of a stubborn horse. Crippled as it was he managed to drag a little increase of speed from it. The Uhlans had dropped back somewhat and none of them fired. John believed that they refrained because they were sure of a capture. Wharton suddenly uttered a cry.

"A river," he exclaimed. "It's not more than five hundred yards ahead!"

His cry was echoed by Weber, but its tone was very different. The Alsatian's voice showed despair.

"I had forgotten," he exclaimed. "The river is too deep for fording, and the French have blown up the bridge! We're trapped!"

A deep flush came into the face of Carstairs. As in the case of John a touch of his first madness was returning. The three comrades were now wild together.

"Can you swim?" he shouted back to John.

"Yes!"

"And you?" to Wharton.

"Yes!"

"And you, too?" to Weber.

"Yes, fairly well; but what do you mean?"

"You wait two or three minutes and you'll see something. But when it's time to swim all of you be ready for it!"

A great shout came from the Uhlans, who had begun to gain again, and who could not now keep from seeing the river that cut off the fugitives. But Carstairs wrenched another pound or two of speed out of the automobile, and it shot forward.

"Stop! Stop for God's sake!" cried Weber. "You'll drown us all! It's better to jump

out and take to the woods!"

"Never!" cried Carstairs, his daring flaming to the utmost. "We captured the automobile of a prince, and we'll not give it back again! Ah, the machine is returning to life! Look how much faster we're going! On, my beauty! Your last and greatest run is before you!"

The machine seemed to come out of its maimed and crippled condition, its strength flaring up for the last burst of speed. The jarring and jerking ceased and the road flew behind it.

The river came near at an astonishing rate, and John saw that it was wide and deep. He saw, too, the pillars of the ruined bridge, and he heard another cry from Weber, who started to spring out, but drew back.

Carstairs uttered a wild shout, and then the automobile, leaping far out into the stream, where the bridge had been, sank beneath the deep waters. John had prepared himself for the desperate stroke, and before the machine touched the surface he had sprung clear. Then he struck out desperately for the opposite bank, and his heart filled with gladness, when he saw Wharton and Carstairs swimming almost by his side.

They reached the shore before the Uhlans could come up, and darted into the shelter of the forest, where they threw themselves down on the ground and lay panting, every touch of wildness gone.

"Is Weber here?" asked John.

"No," replied Wharton, who felt of his papers again, and saw that they were wet, but safe.

"Did either of you see him?"

"Not after the auto made its jump."

"Then he must have been drowned. Poor fellow! But I'd rather be drowned than be executed as a spy."

It saddened them. They had learned to like Weber, and, having saved him once, they were sorry they could not save him twice. But one could not mourn long at such a time. The more daring of the Uhlans would certainly swim the river and continue the pursuit, and it was for the three to hide their trail as soon as

possible. John rose first.

"Come, boys," he said. "Our clothes will dry faster while we're running."

"Put it that way if you like," said Carstairs. "At any rate I'm going to toddle."

They had lost their rifles, but they had their automatic pistols which might be of service in spite of their dips, but they wished to avoid the need of their use. They already heard the splashes as the Uhlans made their horses leap into the river, and they ran at their best speed through the forest, coming presently to a vineyard, which they crossed between the rows of vines, finding a high wire fence on the other side. As they darted between the strands they recognized that they could have no better barrier between them and pursuing horsemen.

Near them on the left was a large château, with a flower garden in front and a kitchen garden behind. They resisted the inevitable temptation of man to run to a roof for shelter and protection, and sped instead into the dense foliage and shrubbery that spread away toward the fields. There they threw themselves down again and panted for the breath that came so hardly through their exhausted lungs.

But they did not hear the sinister tread of the Uhlans, nor did they notice the presence of any human being, a fact which for the present failed to impress them, because the Uhlans filled their minds. Five minutes, ten, fifteen passed and still no sound.

"Perhaps they think we're drowned," whispered John. "They were not near enough to see us swim away from the automobile."

"I hope you're right, and maybe you are," said Wharton. "In any case I don't think they'll hunt for us long. We're not important enough for them to waste time on when they're so near the French lines."

"I'm going to stay where I am until I hear the tread of hoofs," said Carstairs. "I'm drying fast and it's comfortable lying here under the vines. You didn't lose those papers, when we were in the river; did you, Wharton?"

"They're safe in my pocket," replied Wharton, "and I had them wrapped up so thoroughly that they didn't have a chance to get wet."

"If the Uhlans don't find us in the next half hour," said John, "it's quite certain they won't find us at all. They won't spend more time than that on us."

Then they lay quite still, sheltered well under the vines. Their armored car, the car of the prince was now lying at the bottom of the river, but it had served them well. John was sure that they would find some other means of reaching the Franco-British army. He was fast learning that ways nearly always opened to daring and persistence.

The half hour passed, and no Uhlans appeared. They had crossed the river, as the splashes indicated, but, doubtless, finding no trail of the fugitives, they had believed them pinned under the car at the bottom of the river, and had gone away on some other more profitable quest.

But the three waited another half hour for the sake of precaution, and then came from under the vines. Twilight was now at hand, and they realized that they were physically weak after so much excitement and exertion.

"I might be able to limp along through the night," said Wharton, "but I doubt it."

"I know I can't," said Carstairs.

"Why try to go on?" said John. "Here's a house. Being in France it must be inhabited by French sympathizers. They'll shelter us and give us food."

"I think we'd better try it," said Carstairs.

"I agree with you," said Wharton, "but I think it strange that we've seen nobody attached to this place. So large a house and grounds must have at least twenty people about, and an affair like ours would certainly attract their attention. Yet, we see nobody."

"That's so," said John. "Suppose we wait a bit—it's darkening fast—and see what's happened."

They still stood among the vines, and, as the night was coming on and their clothing was only partially dried, they shivered with chill. The tile roof of the château, showing among the trees looked attractive. But no light appeared in any of the windows, and not a sound came from the house itself, nor any of the buildings about it.

The windows glittered like fire with the last rays of the sun, and then the darkness soon swept down, heavy and thick. The three holding their automatics, and shivering in the chill wind of the night, approached the silent château. John felt a little awe, too. Chance certainly was taking him into strange places, and he

was devoutly glad that he had two good comrades by his side.

They passed out of the vineyard and entered the grounds, which were large, adorned with ancient trees, several statues, and a fountain, in which the water was still playing. The moonlight, coming out now, gave to the château an appearance of great age.

"I fancy that some old noble family lived here," he said. "It must have been quite a place once."

"Whoever they are, evidently they have no welcome for us," said Carstairs, "but I'm going in, anyhow. Whew, this wind cuts to the bone!"

"I'm just as cold as you are," said John, "and I'm just as much resolved as you are to find shelter here, whether I'm asked in or not. It may belong to a noble family, but I'm a nobleman myself, a king, one of a hundred million American kings."

"Then, king, you lead," said Carstairs. "It's your place. Go right up those steps."

A half dozen marble steps led to the great central door, and John walked up boldly, followed closely by the others. He lifted a huge brass knocker, and beat heavily with it again and again. No sound came back but its echo.

"Push, king," said Carstairs. "Any door will open to royalty. Besides your majesty has been insulted by the refusal to answer your summons."

John pushed hard, and the great door swung back slowly, quivering a little, but with the automatic in his hand, he walked into a hall, the other two at his shoulders. They closed the door behind them and stood there for a little space, accustoming their eyes to the dusk.

It was a long hall with tall windows, through which a faint light filtered. To the right was a stairway, on the first step of which was a figure, of complete medieval armor. Several faded pictures of ancient knights hung on the walls.

"It's old, very old," said Carstairs, "but its owners, whoever they are, have left with all their people. There's nobody to dispute our claim to lodgings, but did you ever see anything more lonesome?"

"There's a double door, leading into the interior of the house," said John. "Let's explore."

They entered a large apartment which John took to be the drawing-room. It was

at once splendid and dignified, furnished in a style at least two centuries old. John liked it, and thought what it would be when it was filled with light and people.

A magnificent chandelier hung from the ceiling, and there were ornamented sconces about the walls, all containing many candles. Evidently the owner of this château scorned such modern lights as gas and electricity.

"We might light a candle or two," said Carstairs. "Doubtless we can find matches about."

"No! No!" exclaimed Wharton. "I'm not at all sure that we're safe here from intrusion!"

"Think you're right," said Carstairs. "Let's explore further."

"Then I vote that we go downward," said John. "I've gathered from my reading that in the big European houses the kitchens are below stairs, and just now a kitchen will be much more welcome to me than a drawing-room."

True to John's reading the kitchen and storerooms were in the basement. Nothing had been disturbed, and they found ample food. Carstairs discovered a wine cellar, and he returned with a bottle of champagne.

"It's an old and famous vintage," he said, "and there'll be no harm in taking one."

"Here's a furnace in the cook-room," said John, "and billets of wood. Suppose we make a fire, and dry ourselves thoroughly while we eat and drink. It's too far down for the reflections of the flames to be seen outside."

The others promptly agreed with him. All wanted to get rid of the wet chill which struck so deeply into their bodies. A search disclosed matches, and John built the fire which was soon burning redly in the furnace. What a glorious warmth it threw out! It created them anew, and they realized that light and heat were the great vital elements of the world.

They drew a table before the fire, and put upon it the food and the bottle of champagne.

"We've been made welcome here after all," said John. "The souls of the absent owners have provided these things for us."

"That's dreamy sort of talk, John," said Wharton.

"Maybe, but I'll go further and say that the house itself invited us to come in. I've an idea that a house doesn't like to be abandoned and lonely. It prefers to be filled with people and to hear the sounds of voices and laughter. These old European houses which have sheltered generation after generation must be the happiest houses of all. I'd like to live in a house like this and I'd like for a house like this to like me. It would help life a lot for a house and its occupant to be satisfied with each other."

"We feel that way in England about our old country houses," said Carstairs, "and you'll come to it, too, in America, after a while."

"No doubt, but will you have a little more of this champagne? Only a half glass. I don't believe the owner, who must be a fine French gentleman, would ever begrudge it to us."

"Just a little. We're rather young for champagne, we three, but we've been doing men's work, and we've been through men's dangers. I wonder what they're doing along the Strand, tonight, John!"

"The same that they've been doing every night for the last hundred years. But you listen to me, Carstairs, old England will have to wake up. This war can't be won by dilettantes."

"Oh, she'll wake up. Don't you worry. It's not worth while to get excited."

"To take a serious view of a serious situation is not to grow excited. You Britishers often make me tired. To pretend indifference in the face of everything is obviously an affectation, and becomes more offensive than boasting."

"All right, I won't resent it. Here, John, take another piece of this cold ham. I didn't know they had such fine ham in France."

"They've a lot of splendid things in France," retorted John, in high, good humor, "and we'll find it out fast. I'm thinking the French soldiers will prove a good deal better than some people say they are, and this château is certainly fine. It must have been put here for our especial benefit."

"Now that we've eaten all we want and our clothing is dried thoroughly," said Carstairs, "I suggest that we put out the fire. There isn't much smoke, but it goes up that flue and escapes somewhere. Even in the night the Germans might see it."

"Good advice, Carstairs," said Wharton. "You're as intelligent sometimes as the Americans are all the time."

"Pleasant children you Americans."

"Some day we'll save the aged English from destruction."

"Meanwhile we'll wait."

They extinguished the fire, carefully put away all the dishes they had used, restored everything to its pristine neatness, and then the three yawned prodigiously.

"Bedrooms next," said Carstairs.

"Do you propose that we spend the night here," said Wharton.

"That's my idea. We're worn out. We've got to sleep, somewhere. No use breaking ourselves down, and we've found the château here waiting for us."

"What about the Germans?"

"We'll have to take our chances. War is nothing but a chain of chances, so far as your life is concerned."

The other two wanted to be persuaded, and they yielded readily, but John insisted upon one precaution.

"Old houses like this are likely to have isolated chambers," he said. "Some of them I suppose have their secret rooms, and if we can find such a place, lock the door on ourselves, and go to sleep in it we're not likely to wake up prisoners of the Germans."

Wharton and Carstairs approved of his suggestion, and they examined the house thoroughly. John concluded from the presence of all the furniture and the good order in which they found everything that the departure of its owners had been hasty, perhaps, too, with the expectation of a return on the morrow.

The room that they liked best they found on the third floor, not a secret chamber, but one that chance visitors to the house would not be likely to see. A narrow stairway starting near it led down through the rear of the house, and the door was fastened with a heavy lock in which the key remained.

It contained only some boxes, and John surmised that it was a storeroom. But it

seemed to suit their purpose admirably, and, bringing blankets from one of the bedrooms, they made their beds on the floor.

John was the last to go to sleep. The others were slumbering soundly before he lay down, but he stood a little while at the single window, looking out. The window was closed ordinarily with a heavy shutter, which was now sagging open. The boughs of a great tree waved almost against it.

The night was clear, but John saw nothing unusual outside. The château, and all its buildings and grounds were bathed in clear moonlight. The only sound was the soothing murmur of leaves before a light wind. It was hard to realize that a great war was sweeping Europe, and that they were in the thick of it.

But utter exhaustion claimed him, too, and soon three instead of two were sleeping soundly.

CHAPTER XIII

ON THE ROOF

John was awakened by the measured thud of heavy boots. It resembled the goosestep of the German army, and he turned over in order to stop the unpleasant dream. But it did not stop, and he sat up. Then it was louder, and it also had an echo.

His heart thumped wildly for a moment or two. The tread was inside the house, and it was made by many men. He slipped to the window, and his heart thumped more wildly than ever. The lawn was covered with German troops, most of them on horseback, the helmets of the Uhlans glittering in the moonlight. Officers stood on the steps at the main door, and at the edge of the vineyard were cannon.

John thought at first that they were lost. Then he remembered their precaution in securing an obscure and isolated room. The Germans might not trouble themselves about ransacking an abandoned house. At least there was hope.

He awoke his comrades in turn, first clasping his hands over their mouths lest they speak aloud.

"We have fellow guests," he said. "The Germans are sharing the house with us."

"Yes, I hear their boots on the steps," said Wharton. "What are we to do?"

John again resumed the leadership.

"Do nothing," he replied. "Do nothing as hard and continuously as we can. Our door is locked. It's natural that it should be so, only we must slip out the key, so it will appear that the owners having locked the door, took the key away with them. Then we'll lie quiet, and see what happens."

"It's the thing to do," said Carstairs, "because we can do nothing else. But I don't believe I can go to sleep, not to the chorus of German boots on the steps."

John slipped the big key from the lock and put it in a corner. Then he lay down again beside the other two. They could hear better with their ears to the floor. It was a solid and heavily built house in the European fashion. Nevertheless they heard the tread from many parts of it, and the sound of voices also.

"It's an invasion," whispered Carstairs. "They're all over the shop."

"Looks like it," said John, "but I've a notion that we're safe here unless they conclude to burn the house. The German advance is so rapid it doesn't seem likely to me they'll stay longer than tonight."

"Still I can't sleep."

John laughed to himself. He was becoming so thoroughly hardened to danger that the complaint of Carstairs amused him.

"They've got an affection for the top of the house," said Wharton, "You can hear them pounding through the upper rooms, and even on the roof."

"But nobody has tried our door yet," said Carstairs, "and it's a consoling thought."

They lay a long time, and heard the continual thump of feet about the place. It suggested at first the thought of plunder, but when John peeped out he did not see anybody bearing things from the house. He beheld instead a sight that caused him to summon the others. A young man had ridden up, and, as he dismounted, all the officers, several of whom were in the uniform of generals, paid him marked deference.

"It's a prince," whispered Carstairs. "It may be the Crown Prince himself, but I can't say, the light isn't good enough."

"And there are other princes behind him," said Wharton. "See the officers still kotowing. I didn't suspect that we had taken a room in a royal residence."

"I'd give a lot to know what they're about," said Carstairs. "Something big must be afoot."

"They're still moving about the house," said John. "We've got to wait. That's all."

They went back to their places on the floor, and waited as best they could, but they heard the sounds for a long time. After an interminable period they went back to the window and saw the prince and the cavalry riding away. The cannon too departed. A dozen Uhlans however remained posted on horseback about the house. The noises inside ceased.

"I can't make it out," whispered Carstairs. "Why should they go away and leave those Uhlans there guarding the house?"

"There must be something inside very precious to them," replied John.

"But what is it? Apparently the house itself is abandoned by all save ourselves."

"I don't know the answer, but my watch tells me it's far in the night. We've had our sleep and rest, and we must try to slip by the Uhlans and get away. Now's the time too."

"Right you are, John," said Wharton, as he felt once more of his precious pocket. "We can't linger, and risk being caught in a trap here."

"But I hear somebody still moving about the château," said Carstairs. "Wait a minute, boys."

He looked through the empty keyhole, and announced that he saw a faint light or the reflection of a light in the hall.

"Something's on foot," he said. "If their officers are sleeping here I should think they'd take the lower rooms, but it seems to me that they're fond of the top of the house, overfond of it."

John who was peeping out at the window once more announced that the Uhlans were still keeping a vigilant watch. They were riding slowly back and forth, and he had no doubt there were others in the rear of the château.

"But I repeat we mustn't linger," said Wharton. "Suppose we hold our automatics ready and slip out."

"Suits me," said John, and he cautiously unlocked the door. The three with their hands on their weapons stepped into the hall, where they noticed the faint glimmer of light, of which Carstairs had spoken. They stood there silently for a moment or two, pressing themselves against the wall, where they would be in the shadow.

"I think the light comes from above," said Carstairs. "You'll notice that the little stairway leads upward, apparently to the roof."

Wharton held up his hand, and the three were so still they scarcely breathed.

"Don't you hear it?" whispered Wharton. "That sound from the roof, the sputtering and crackling."

"I do hear it," said John, listening with all ears. "It's a faint sound, almost like the

light crackling of fire. What does it mean Wharton?"

"The wireless."

"The wireless?"

"Yes, while we were sleeping the Germans were installing a wireless outfit on the roof, and it's talking. I tell you, boys, it's talking at a great rate, and it's saying something. You mayn't have noticed it, but the château stands on a hill, with a clear sweep, and our wireless here is having a big talk with distant stations. We've been sleeping, but the Germans never sleep."

"I suppose you know what you're talking about, Wharton, and you're sure it's a wireless outfit," said John.

"It's impossible for me to be wrong. I could never mistake the sound of the wireless for anything else."

"And it's there on the roof of this château, which belongs to us by right of occupancy, chattering away to German forces elsewhere!" said Carstairs in an indignant whisper.

"It's doing a lot more than chattering," said Wharton. "They wouldn't install a wireless on the roof of a house at this time of the night, merely for a little idle summer conversation. You saw that a prince and generals came here, and undoubtedly they ordered it done."

"Whatever they're talking about," said Carstairs, "it's not likely they're talking about us, so now is our chance to slip away."

"I'm not going to leave the château just now," said Wharton.

"Then what are you going to do?"

"I'd like to see the wireless on the roof and the man who is working it."

John glanced at Wharton. The light was very dim, but he noticed a spark in Wharton's eye, and he knew that something unusual was working in the back of his head.

"I think I'd like to have a look at the roof myself," he whispered.

"If you chaps are bent on going up there," said Carstairs, "I'm bound to go with you. But we'd better keep our automatics in our hands."

They emerged from the shadow of the wall, and reached the foot of the stairway that led to the roof. The door at the top was open, as the moonlight was shining down, and Wharton boldly led the way, walking on tiptoe, his automatic in his hand. At the open door John and Carstairs crowded up by his side, and three pairs of eyes peeped out at once.

They saw two men on the roof both with their backs turned to them. One was the operator of the wireless, sitting on a camp stool, working the instrument. The other, in an officer's uniform, was dictating messages. John surmised that they were talking with a station to the eastward, where some lofty ranges of hills ran.

But Wharton was the most deeply stirred of the three. The spark in his eye was enlarging and glowing more brilliant, and a great resolve had formed in his mind.

"There's nothing that we can do here," said Carstairs. "We'd better go at once."

"We're not going," said Wharton in a fierce whisper. "I can use the wireless, and that's just the instrument on which I wish to exercise my skill. I've heard enough to know they're not talking in code."

"Wharton, you are mad!" said John.

"If so, I'm mad in a good cause. Inside of ten minutes some German general will be hearing remarkable news from this station."

"I tell you again you're mad."

"And I tell you again I'm not. I'm a crack wireless operator and this is my chance to prove it. I'm going up there. All who are afraid can turn back."

"You know that if you're resolved to go mad we'll go mad with you. What do you want us to do?"

"John, club your automatic, and hit that officer on the back of the head with it. Hit hard. Don't kill him, but you must knock him unconscious at the first blow. Carstairs and I will choke all but a spark of life out of the operator."

The three emerged from the stairway upon the flat portion of the roof where the wireless plant had been installed not more than four or five feet away. They made not the slightest sound as they stole forward, but even had they made it the two Germans were so deeply absorbed in their talk through the air that they

would not have heard it.

John felt compunctions at striking an unsuspecting enemy from behind, but their desperate need put strength in his blow. The officer fell without a cry and lay motionless. At the same instant Wharton and Carstairs seized the operator by the throat, and dragged him down. He was a small spectacled man and he was only a child in the hands of two powerful youths. In a minute or two and almost without noise they bound him with strips of his own coat, and gagged him with a handkerchief. Then they stretched him out on the roof and turned to John's victim.

The man lay on his face. His helmet had fallen off and rolled some distance away, a ray of moonlight tipping the steel spike with silver. A dark red stain appeared in his hair where the pistol butt had descended.

The figure was that of a powerful man, and the set of the shoulders seemed familiar to John. He rolled him over, and disclosed the face of von Boehlen. Again he felt compunction for that blow, not because he liked the captain, but because he knew him.

"It's von Boehlen," he said, "and I hope I haven't killed him."

Carstairs inserted his hand under his head and felt of the wound.

"You haven't killed him," he said, "but you struck hard enough to make him a bitter enemy. The skull isn't fractured at all, and he'll be reviving in a few minutes. He's a powerful fellow, and we'd better truss him up as we have his friend here."

While Carstairs and Wharton were binding and gagging von Boehlen, John went to the railing about five feet in height that surrounded the central or flat part of the roof, the rest sloping away. The railing would hide what was passing there from the Uhlans below, but he wanted to take a look of precaution.

The men were riding up and down with their usual regularity and precision, watching every approach to the house, and making the ring of steel about it complete. This little wheel of the German machine was Working perfectly, guarding with invincible thoroughness against the expected, but taking no account of the unexpected. He came back to his comrades.

"All well below," he said.

Von Boehlen and the operator, the big man and the little man, were lying side by side. Von Boehlen's face was very pale, but his chest was beginning to rise and fall with some regularity. He would become conscious in three or four minutes. The operator was conscious already and he was staring at the three apparitions.

But Wharton was paying no attention to the captives. His soul fairly leaped within him as he took his seat at the instrument which was sputtering and flashing with unanswered questions.

"Is that the Château de Friant?" came the words flashing through the air.

"Yes this is the Château de Friant," replied Wharton, learning for the first time the name of the house, in which they had made themselves at home.

"Then why don't you answer? You broke off suddenly five minutes ago and we couldn't get another word from you."

"Something went wrong with the instrument, but it's all right now. Go ahead."

"Is Captain von Boehlen still there?"

"At my elbow."

"Take from his dictation the answers to the questions I ask you."

"At once, sir. He is ready to dictate."

"Have you seen anything of British troops, Captain von Boehlen?"

"I have sir. I saw them marching northward this afternoon."

"In what direction?"

"Toward Mons."

"What seemed to be their purpose?"

"To effect a junction with the main French army."

Wharton improvised rapidly. His whole soul was still alight. It had seldom been granted to one man, especially one so young as he to have two such opportunities, that of the papers, and that of the wireless, and he felt himself ready and equal to his task.

"Were they in large force?" came the question out of the dark.

"Larger than any of us expected."

"How many do you think?"

"About one hundred and fifty thousand men."

For two or three minutes no other question came, and Wharton laughed silently. "I've created a hostile force of a hundred and fifty thousand men," were his unuttered words, "and they don't like it."

"Is it possible for our advance column to get in between them and the French?" finally came the next question.

"It's too late," went back the winged answer. "The column would be destroyed."

"This is not in accordance with our earlier reports."

"No sir. But both the English and French have shown amazing activity. A French force of more than one hundred thousand men, of which we have had no report before, faces our right. It is prepared to strike our line just where it is thinnest."

Another silence, and Wharton's heart beat hard and fast. John standing near him, did not know what was being said through the dark, but he knew by the look on Wharton's strained face that it must be momentous. The wireless was silent, and now he heard the measured tread of horses' hoofs, as the Uhlans rode back and forth, guarding the wireless station against the coming of any foe.

Wharton listened intently at the receiver. Were they accepting all that he said? Why shouldn't they? He had given them no answer which they could know to be wrong.

"You are entirely sure of what you say?" came the question.

"Entirely sir. My Uhlans and I were able to ride under cover of a forest to a point within a few hundred yards of the enemy. We saw them in great masses."

"And their field artillery?"

"We were not able to count the guns, but they were very numerous."

"Then it seems that we can't drive a wedge between the English and the French."

"I fear that we can't sir."

"Send out a portion of the Uhlans under your best officers and report to me again at daylight."

"They shall go at once sir."

"Then good night. Captain von Boehlen. I congratulate you upon your energy and the great service that you have done."

"Thank you sir."

"We may call you again in the night."

"I shall be here sir."

"But I won't," said Wharton, as he stepped back and smashed the receiver with the butt of his automatic.

Then as he turned away he said:

"Boys, I've been talking with the Emperor himself maybe, and if not with some one very high in command. I'll tell you about it later, as we must waste no time in escaping from this château."

"I hope you told the Emperor that we are here, ready to defeat him," said John.

"I didn't tell him that exactly, but I told him or whoever it was something which may help us. Now, fellows, we must be off."

They crippled the instrument beyond hope of repair and started. As John turned toward the stairway, he glanced at von Boehlen. The Prussian had returned to consciousness and his eyes were wide open. They bent upon John such a look of anger and hatred that the young American shuddered. And yet, John felt von Boehlen had full cause for such feelings. Despite himself he believed that they owed him an apology, and stooping a little he said:

"It's been a cruel necessity, Captain von Boehlen. War is violence."

The Prussian's eyes glared back. A handkerchief in his mouth kept him from speaking, but his eyes said enough.

"I hope that you and your comrade will not suffer," said John. "Your friends will find you here in the morning."

Then he followed his comrades down the narrow stairway.

"What were you saying to him?" asked Carstairs. "I was apologizing for the blow I gave him from behind."

"The decent thing to do."

As they descended into the lower part of the house Wharton told them more fully what he had said over the wireless, and Carstairs patted him on the back.

"Good old chap," he said. "You Yankees do have bright ideas sometimes."

"The next bright idea is open to any one who can furnish it," said Wharton. "It's to tell us how we're to get out of the château."

"I think there's a vineyard just behind the house," said John, "and if we can reach it we're safe. And we should be able to get there as the Uhlans are watching for people who may come to the château, and not for anybody going away."

They explored the rear of the house and found a door opening upon a narrow flagged walk, lined on either side with pines, and leading straight to the vineyard about thirty yards away. They could make a dash for it, and a Uhlan might or might not see them.

"And if they should see us," said Carstairs, "we could probably get away in the garden and the darkness."

"But we don't want 'em to discover what's happened on the roof," said Wharton. "Then they might send a new wireless. If we can slip away without being seen maybe they won't know what's happened to the wireless, until morning."

"I think," said John, "that we'd better resort to the tactics, used long ago by the borderers in the American wilderness, and creep along the walk until we reach the vineyard."

"Go ahead," said Carstairs, "I'm as good a creeper as you are. But, since it's one of your Yankee tricks, you lead."

They stepped outside and instantly dropped to their hands and knees. The grass beside the walk was rather high and John led the way through it, instead of on the walk, whispering to Carstairs who was just behind him to do as he did, Carstairs in turn passing the word to Wharton.

They advanced about ten yards, and then, John lay flat. The others did the same. One of the Uhlans riding on his beat was passing near the vineyard. He was a

man of good eyes and he was watchful as became his service, but it was impossible for him to see the three dark figures of his enemies lying in the grass and he rode on. Then John rose to his hands and knees again, and resumed his creeping advance with the others close behind him. He could hear Carstairs muttering against this painful mode of travel, but he would not alter it, and he knew that the Englishman would be true to his word.

Near the vineyard he flattened down a second time in the grass. The Uhlan was riding back again on his beat, and the most critical moment had come. He would certainly pass very near, and although the odds were against it, his eye might catch a glimpse of the three figures in the grass. Even then they might escape through the vineyard and across the wire fence which would impede the horses, but John recognized as fully as Wharton did the importance of the Uhlans believing until morning that all was well on the roof of the château.

The beat of the horse's hoofs came near. The Uhlan was young and blond, a handsome fellow with a kindly face. John hoped that he would never have to shoot at him. But he did not see the three prone figures. It was likely that they blended with the shadows more thoroughly than John had supposed. He passed on and the danger passed on with him.

"Let's get up now and run," whispered Carstairs.

"Not a step until we reach the bushes," replied John. "Not a step, even if your knees and elbows are worn quite away."

But it took only two or three minutes more to reach the vineyard, and they rose to a stooping position, Carstairs expelling his breath in a long sigh of relief.

"I shall never stand up straight again," he whispered.

They ran between the vines and gained the forest, where in spite of the complaint Carstairs had made all three straightened up and began to exchange rejoicings after the manner of youth. The house showed clearly in its grounds, and they saw the dusky figures of two or three of the Uhlans, but they were outside the ring and they knew they were safe from that danger at least. But the creeping had been so painful they were compelled to rest several minutes. Probably the most exultant of the three was Wharton, although he said the least. He had sent the wireless messages which would mislead at least a portion of the German army, enabling the English and French to close up the gap between them, and he carried the papers of the German prince, telling how other German armies were advancing. His hand flew once more to his coat, and when it felt of the priceless packet the blood seemed to tingle in his arm, and shoot back in a stronger flood toward his heart.

"And now Carstairs," said John, "you know this country better than we do. Lead us toward the British army. And as we've lost our horses and our automobile I

suppose it's to be on foot now."

"It shouldn't be much farther," said Carstairs, "and as we're all good walkers we can make it yet."

Under his guidance they left the wood and entered a road which led north and west. Their sleep had refreshed them wonderfully, but above all they had the buoyancy that comes from success and hope. They had triumphed over every danger. Their hearts grew bolder and their muscles stronger, as they sped on their journey.

"I never knew before how good walking could be," said John.

"It's a jolly sight better than creeping and crawling," said Carstairs. "John, I don't think you'll ever get me to do that again, even to save my life."

"No, but the Germans may make you do a lot of it, if you don't get some sense through your thick British head," said Wharton.

"Is that you, Wharton, and are you still alive?" said Carstairs.

"I'm here, all right."

"Wasn't it your great president, Lincoln, who said you couldn't cross a river until you got to it?"

"He said something like that."

"Well, that's what we British are doing. But we're bound to admit that you've done great work for us tonight, old chap."

Their hands met in the darkness in a strong and friendly grasp.

"At least there's one advantage about walking," said John. "If we hear or see Uhlans it's much easier to dodge on our own feet into the woods or fields than it would be with horses or an armored car."

"I'm thinking we've seen the last of the Uhlans for the time," said Carstairs. "Another hour or two ought to take us well inside our own lines. Now, what is that?"

He was looking eastward where he saw a succession of white flashes on the horizon. The three stopped and watched. The white flashes reappeared at intervals for about ten minutes and they wondered. Then the solution came

suddenly to John.

"Powerful searchlights," he said. "The Germans have everything and of course they have them too. If necessary they'll advance in the night and fight under them."

"Of course," said Carstairs. "Why didn't we think of it sooner?"

A certain awe seized the three. The reputation of the German military machine had been immense throughout the world for years, and now real war was proving it to be all that was claimed for it and more. A great and numerous nation for nearly half a century had poured its best energies into the making of an invincible army. Was it possible to stop it? The three were asking themselves that question again as they watched the searchlights flashing on the horizon.

"It must be up and away with us," said Carstairs. "We're the champion walkers of Northern France, and if we're to retain our titles we can't linger here. In another hour the day will come."

Daylight found them at a small river. The bridge was not broken down, and they inferred that it was within the lines of defense. An hour later they learned from a peasant that a British force was camped about fifteen miles north and west, and they induced him with good gold to drive them nearly the whole way in his cart. About a mile from the roadside he insisted on their getting out and drove back rapidly.

"He's afraid his cart and horse would be seized," said Carstairs. "We could have forced him to go on, but we'll not set a bad example."

The road now led over a hill and at its crest Carstairs took off his hat and waved it proudly.

"Don't you see?" he exclaimed. "Look! Look! The British flag!"

"What British flag?" said Wharton. "You've a lot of your rags."

"Never mind they're all glorious. See it, waving there by the tents!"

"Yes, I see it, but why are you English so excitable? Any way it's probably waving over valiant Scotchmen and Irishmen."

"Wharton, you grumpy old Yankee, descendant of sour Puritan ancestors, we've won our way through in face of everything!"

He seized Wharton about the waist, and the two waltzed up and down the road, while John laughed from sheer joy.

"Bill come an' look at the crazy Frenchmen dancin' in the road," said a voice that reeked of the Strand.

Bill who was from London himself came out of some bushes by the side of the road, and gazed with wonder at the whirling figures. John knew that they belonged on the first line of the British outposts and he said politely:

"You're partly wrong. My friends are crazy right enough, but they're not Frenchmen. One is an Englishman like yourselves, and the other is an American, but regularly enlisted in the Franco-British service, as I am too."

Carstairs and Wharton stopped dancing. Carstairs took off his hat, and made a deep bow to the astonished pickets.

"I'm not bowing to you, though God knows you deserve it," he said. "I'm bowing instead to the British nation which is here incarnate in your khaki clad persons."

"Touched a bit 'ere, Bill," said one of the men, putting his finger to his forehead.

"A bit off says I too, 'Arry. We used to get 'em sometimes on our 'bus in the Strand. Speak 'em gentle, and they'll stop carrying on."

Carstairs exuded joy and he extended a welcoming hand.

"I take it that you were the driver and conductor of a 'bus in the Strand."

"Right you are sir," they replied together, and then one added:

"If you'll go down to the foot of the hill you'll see the good old 'bus itself with all the signs still on it. But I'll 'ave to ask you first, sir, who you are and what do you want?"

John had never thought before that the cockney accent would be so grateful to his ear, but his pleasure at seeing the men was scarcely less than that of Carstairs. They did not come from his own land, but they came from the land of his ancestors, and that was next best.

Carstairs and Wharton quickly showed their dispatches. Bill promptly took them to a sergeant, and in a half hour they stood beside the general's tent in the center of ten thousand men, the vanguard of the British army. Dispatches have never

been read more eagerly and when Wharton, in addition, told the story of the château roof and the wireless the general felt a great thrill of excitement.

"I'm bound to believe all that you say," he said looking into the three honest young faces. "Darrell, see that they have refreshment at once, because we move in an hour."

Darrell, a young aide procured them food and horses. Soon the whole detachment was marching toward the main force, and the three true to the promise of their Cockney friends saw London 'buses, still covered with their hideous signs lumbering along as transports. At noon they joined the chief British army, and the next day they were in touch with the French.

The preceding night the three received places in wagons and slept heavily. By morning their strength was fully restored and pending the arrival of the Strangers, with whom they intended to remain they served as aides.

Several days passed, but not in idleness. Incessant skirmishing went on in front, and the Uhlans were nearly always in sight. John felt the presence of vast numbers. He surmised that the British army did not number more than a hundred thousand men, but multitudes of French were on their right and still greater multitudes of Germans were in front. It was a wonderful favor of fortune or skill that the British had not been cut off and as the German hosts, fierce and determined, poured forward, there was no certainty that it would not yet happen.

John soon became at home among the English, Scotch and Irish. He found many of his own countrymen in their ranks and he continually heard his own language in more or less varied form.

The thrilling nature of the tremendous spectacle soon made him forget to some extent the awfulness of war. Riding with his comrades at night along the front he saw again the flashing of the German searchlights, and now and then came the mighty boom of the great guns.

Belgian refugees told them that the advance of the Germans was like the rolling in of the sea. Their gray hosts poured forward on every road. They would be going through a village, for hours and hours, for a day, a night and then the next day, an endless gray tide, every man perfectly equipped, every man in his place, hot food always ready for them at the appointed time, cavalry in vast masses, and cannon past counting.

The knowledge lay upon John like a weight, tremendous and appalling, and yet he would not have been elsewhere. He was glad to be on the battle front when the fate of half a billion people was being decided.

Many of the spectacular features afforded by earlier battles disappeared, but others took their place. In the clear air they sometimes saw the flashes of the giant cannon, miles away, and flying machines and captive balloons sprinkled the air. An army could no longer hide itself. Forests and hollows were of no avail. The scouts of the blue, looking down saw every move, and they brought word that the menace was growing heavier every hour.

"We'll fight on the morrow," said John as he stood with Carstairs and Wharton before a camp fire. "I feel that the Germans will surely attack in the morning."

CHAPTER XIV

THE GERMAN HOST

John was turning away from the camp fire with his friends, when he saw something drop out of the dark, and disappear in a little valley near them.

"Another of those aeroplanes," said Carstairs. "I can't get wholly used to the way they zigzag and spiral about at night like huge birds of prey. They always give me a chill, even when I know they're our own."

John had secured one good look at the machine as it swooped toward the earth, and he asked his friends to walk with him toward the improvised hangar, where it would surely be lying.

They saw a man of slender but very strong build step from the aeroplane, and throw back his visor, showing a tanned face, a somewhat aquiline nose, and eyes penetrating and powerful like those of some bird that soaring far up sees its prey on the earth below. It was an unusual, distinctive face, and the red firelight accentuated every salient characteristic.

"Lannes!" said John joyfully. "I thought it was the *Arrow* when I saw you descending!"

John stood in the shadow, and the young Frenchman took a step forward to see better. Then he too uttered an exclamation of gladness.

"It's Monsieur Jean the Scott, my comrade of the great battles in the air!" he said. "It was my hope rather than my expectation to find you here."

He grasped the extended hand and shook it with great warmth. Then John introduced him to his friends. Lannes and Carstairs surveyed each other a moment.

"Frenchman and Englishman have been on the same battle fields for a thousand years," said Carstairs.

"Usually the only ones there, and fighting each other," said Lannes.

"Whichever side won, the victory was never easy."

"You are a brave people. We French are the best witnesses of it."

"We are always slow to start. We are usually the last to reach the battle field."

"Also, usually the last to leave it."

"It seems fitting to me that the enemies of a thousand years should have exhausted all their enmity and should now be united against a common foe."

"Without you we could not win."

Lannes' wonderful eyes were sparkling. There is something deep and moving in the friendships of youth. Moreover it made a powerful appeal to his strongly-developed dramatic side. Foes of a thousand years were bound to acknowledge the merits of each other. Carstairs, less demonstrative, felt the same appeal. Then they too shook hands with strength and enthusiasm.

"I approve of this love-feast," said Wharton, "but don't fall to kissing each other. Man kissing man is a continental custom I can't stand."

"Don't be alarmed," said Lannes laughing. "It's passing out in France, and I certainly would not do it. I've lived a while in your country. Now will you wait here, my friends? I have a report to make, but I will return in a half hour."

When Lannes returned he handed a letter to John: "Your uncle and the worthy Mr. Anson have managed to reach Paris through Switzerland," he said. "I found them, and, on the chance that I might reach you, the distinguished Senator, your uncle, gave me the letter that I now give to you."

Making his excuses to the others John read it hastily. His uncle wrote in a resigned tone. He and Mr. Anson would remain in Paris a short time, and then if the German forces came near, as he feared they might, they would cross to London. He hoped that his nephew would leave the army and join them there, but if contrary to all good advice, he insisted on remaining he trusted that he would fight bravely and show the superiority of Americans to the decadent Europeans.

"Good old Uncle Jim," said John to himself, as he put the letter back in his pocket. "Maybe it's a faith like his that will really make us the greatest nation in the world."

He did not see any great difference at that moment between the sublime faith of Senator Pomeroy in the United States and the equally sublime faith of Carstairs in the British Empire. The only difference was in their way of expressing it. But

he felt a great affection for his uncle, and he knew very well that the chances were against his ever seeing him again. A slight mist came before his eyes.

"I thank you for bringing the letter, Lannes," he said. "My uncle and Mr. Anson will remain a while in Paris, and then they will probably go to London."

He would not tell Lannes the Senator's reason for leaving Paris.

"From what place have you come after leaving Paris, if it's no army secret?" he asked.

Lannes with a dramatic gesture swept his hand over his head.

"From there. From the heavenly vault," he replied. "I have been everywhere. Over forests and many cities, over the German lines and over our own lines. I have seen the Germans coming not in thousands but in millions. I thought once that the army of our allies would be cut off, but it has joined with our own in time."

"Is it true that we fight tomorrow?"

"As surely as the rising of the sun."

"In that case it would be better for us all to go to sleep," said Carstairs phlegmatically. "We'll need our full strength in the morning."

But John was not able to close his eyes for a long time. His rather loose position as an aide enabled him to go about much with Darrell, the young officer to whom he had been introduced first, and he saw that the British army awaited the battle with eagerness, not unmixed with curiosity. In John's opinion they held the enemy far too lightly, and he did not hesitate to say so. Darrell was not offended.

"It's our national characteristic," he said, "and I suppose it can't be changed. This overweening confidence sometimes brings us defeats that we might have avoided, and again it brings us victories that we might not have won otherwise. Tommy Atkins is always convinced that he can beat two soldiers of any other nation, unless it's you Yankees. Of course he can't, but the belief helps him a lot."

"Remember how you fared in the Boer war." Darrell laughed.

"Tommy Atkins doesn't read history, and those who remember it have long since convinced themselves that the Boer successes were due to strange tricks or are

merely legendary."

John was not at all sure that Darrell was not a better born and better educated Tommy Atkins himself. He, and all the other young officers whom he met, seemed to be absolutely sure of victory on the morrow, no matter how numerous the German host might be.

After a while he lay down in the grass, wrapped in a blanket, near his comrades and slept. But the August night was not quiet, and it was an uneasy sleep. He awoke far before dawn and stood up. He heard distant shots now and then from the pickets, and the powerful searchlights often played on the far horizon, casting a white, uncanny glare. Darker spots appeared in the dusky sky. The aeroplanes were already hovering above, watching for the first movement of the enemy.

He walked to the place, where the *Arrow* was lying, and saw Lannes standing beside it, fully clothed for flight.

"I'm carrying dispatches to our own army on the right," said Lannes, "and I don't think you will see me again for several days. You fight today, you know."

"And we shall win?"

Lannes was silent.

"All the English are confident of victory," continued John.

"Confidence is a sublime thing," said Lannes, "but in a great war it goes best with numbers and preparation."

John felt the gravity of his tone, but he asked no more questions, seeing that the young Frenchman was reluctant to answer them, and that he was also ready for his flight.

"You're in all senses a bird of passage, Philip," he said, "but I know that whatever happens tomorrow or rather today we're going to see each other again. Good-bye."

"Good-bye," said Lannes, extending his gloved hand. "We're comrades, John, and I hope sometimes to turn your little fraternity of three into a brotherhood of four. Tell the Englishman, Carstairs, that France and England together can't fail."

"He'll think it mostly England."

"If we only win, let him think it."

Lannes stepped into the machine, it was shoved forward, then it rose gracefully into the air and flew off in the usual spirals and zigzags toward the east, where it was soon lost in the darkness. John gazed toward the point, where he last saw it. It seemed almost a dream, that flight of his with Lannes, and the fight with the Taubes, and the Zeppelin. He was on the ground now, and the coming battle would be fought on the solid earth, as man had been fighting from time immemorial. He was about to return to his blanket when a glad voice called to him and a figure emerged from the dark.

"Mr. Scott," came a pleasant voice. "And you were not drowned after all! I thought that I alone escaped!"

It was Weber, paler than usual, but without a wound. John's surprise was lost in gladness. He liked this man, whose manners were so agreeable, and he had mourned his death.

"Mr. Weber," he said, shaking hands with him, "it's I who should say: 'and you are not dead?' We thought you were drowned under the automobile. Mr. Wharton, Mr. Carstairs and myself escaped uninjured although we had a hard time afterward with the Germans. How did you manage it?"

"I *was* under the automobile, and I *did* come near being drowned, but not quite. I'm a good swimmer, but I was caught by a strap. As soon as I could disengage myself I swam rapidly down stream under water, came up in the shadow, and crawled among some bushes on the bank. I saw the Germans ride into the river, search the opposite shore, and after a while go away. Then I emerged from the bushes, walked more hours than I can count, and you see me here. I've brought information which I think of value, and I'm on my way now to give it to high officers."

John shook hands with him again. Weber's manner, at once frank and cheerful, invited confidence.

"Providence seems to watch over all four of us," he said. "It's quite certain that none of us will ever meet his death by drowning."

"Nor by hanging either I hope," said Weber.

"Now I must hurry. If I'm not sent away immediately on another mission it's likely I'll see you tomorrow."

He disappeared almost at once. He seemed to John to have some mysterious power of melting into the air, or of re-embodying himself. It was terrifying for the moment, but John shook himself and laughed. "Lightness of foot and silence are the two great assets in his trade," he said to himself.

He wrapped himself in his blanket and again sought sleep which came readily enough despite the distant shots and the flashing white lights. But he was awakened at the first upshoot of dawn, and the whole army was soon on its feet, its front spreading a long distance across the green country. They had hot coffee and good hot food, and then turned to their duty, John at the same time telling them of the return of Weber, over which both Wharton and Carstairs rejoiced.

"It's a good omen," said Carstairs. "We'll take it that way and let it point to our success today."

"We need it," muttered Wharton, who was looking through glasses, "and a lot more just as good. If I don't make any mistake the German nation is advancing against us in a solid mass."

Carstairs had observed the same fact.

"They seem to be quite numerous," he said.

"Now's your chance," said John, "to prove not only that one Englishman is as good as any other two Europeans, but as good as four."

"Looks like it," said Carstairs coolly. "I'm bound to admit that we can get all the fighting we want. But our men are ready and willing. Listen to the bagpipes of those Highlanders."

"Sounds more like a dirge," said Wharton.

"A dirge for the other fellows."

"Do they keep their legs bare so they can run fast?"

"Yes, after the enemy."

John smiled.

"You're true blue, Carstairs, old fellow," he said. "What do you see, Wharton?"

"Germans, Germans, and then more Germans. Germans on the right, Germans on the left, and Germans in the center, always Germans. They're advancing by

kingdoms, grand dukedoms, dukedoms and principalities. The whole circle of the horizon is gray with them."

The three were mounted and ready for orders. Aloft swung the aeroplanes and over the hostile front hovered those of the Germans also. John had little to do, but; as he rode slowly back and forth with the others, he heard the light talk and the jesting among these troops who spoke English. Although he knew that they underrated the danger he was proud of them, and he remembered that his transplanted blood and theirs were the same.

His eyes turned back to the gray sea, coming forward like the tide across the open fields. It's edge was yet far away, but the sunlight was so bright and the columns so deep that he saw them plainly. As in the battle with the French they made upon him the impression of irresistible strength. He saw too that their tremendous line would overlap the British on both left and right, and he was assailed by a sudden and deadly fear that they stood in the presence of the invincible. But his strong will took command of his imaginative mind, and his face seemed calm as he sat on his horse with the others and watched the advancing foe.

Rifles were already crackling in the valleys between, where the pickets were seeking the lives of one another, and now came the deep, rumbling thunder of the giant cannon as they threw their shells from a range of eight or ten miles. When a shell burst there was a crash like that of a volcano in eruption, great cavities were torn in the earth, and men fell in dozens. Vast clouds of smoke from the monster guns began to drift against the horizon, but nearer where the smaller guns were at work only light white clouds appeared.

The advancing German army was a semicircle of fire. From every point the field batteries opened, making a steady crash so frightful and violent that it seemed to rend the earth. But above their roar the eruption of the colossal cannon in the rear could be heard now, and shells of immense weight struck and burst in the English lines. Along the whole British front the cannon were replying, and the roar reached incredible proportions. Noxious fumes too filled the air. Gases seemed to be released and the air was heavy and poisonous in the lungs. War had taken on a new aspect, one more sinister and menacing than the old.

The shock from the great guns became so terrific that John tore little pieces from the lining of his coat and stuffed them in his ears, in fear lest he should be made deaf forever. He did it surreptitiously, until he saw others doing the same, and

then he put in more. Many of the troops were lying down now. Others were kneeling, but everywhere the officers stood up or sat their horses, reckless of death. The rifle firing had ceased, because the pickets and skirmishers of both were driven in, and the masses on the two sides were not yet near enough to each other for that weapon.

But the cannon, hundreds and hundreds of them were pouring forth two storms of death. The British position was raked through and through by the fire of a thousand guns. Shrapnel seemed to rain from the clouds scattering death and wounds everywhere. The air was filled with its ferocious whine like that of a hurricane.

John, having no messages to carry, continued to watch the German advance. He had no doubt that thousands had already fallen before the hostile fire, but he could see no break in that living gray line. It came steadily on, solid, tremendous and, again he felt that it was impossible to stay it.

"The field telephone brings news that the French on our right miles away are engaged also!" shouted Wharton.

"That doesn't concern us!" John shouted back. "Look what's coming, a million Germans at least!"

The shrapnel whined terribly over his head and his horse fell, but he sprang clear.

"My horse is killed!" he cried.

"So's mine," said Carstairs, as he picked himself from the grass.

Wharton's was hurt by the same deadly shower and he dismounted to examine his wound, but the horse maddened by pain and fright broke loose and ran toward the German lines. Before he had gone far a shell swept him away in fragments.

John thought they were safer on foot, but his fear began to leave as the madness of battle seized him. He had the curious but not uncommon feeling in a soldier that the whole hostile army was firing at him alone. His heart swelled with indignation, and his hair bristled with anger. Snatching up the rifle of a fallen man he stood, ready to use it, when the gray line came within fair range.

Carstairs and Wharton shouted something to him, but he could not hear the

words. He merely saw their lips moving. The crash had become so tremendous that voices were inaudible. John was now quite certain that if he had not put the lint in his ears he would have become deaf forever. But both Wharton and Carstairs seized him and dragged him down. Wharton, through his glasses, had noticed that new German batteries were coming into action, and their fire would converge upon the place, where they stood.

As they lay almost flat behind a little ridge the shrapnel began to shriek over their heads with increased violence. Many men behind them were killed and a stream of wounded dragged themselves toward the rear. The giant shells also fell among them, spreading death over wide areas. The hideous smell of fumes and gases spread. The air seemed poisoned.

The rifles now opened fire, and the air was filled with singing steel. The little bullets flew in millions, cutting down men, bushes, grass, everything. John and his comrades using the ridge for shelter fired their own weapons as fast as they could pull the trigger. He did not know how Carstairs and Wharton had obtained their rifles, but plenty were lying about for the taking.

As the German lines drew nearer John saw the men falling in hundreds. Their ranks were swept by shell, shrapnel and the unceasing storm of bullets, but the gray hosts, a quarter of a million strong, passing over the dying and the dead, always swept on, their generals eager to cut off and destroy the English army where it stood. As they marched vast bodies of troops thundered out "The Watch on the Rhine," or "A Mighty Fortress is our God." Now and then a strain of the song came to John's ears on the roar of the battle.

The gray sea was coming nearer, ever nearer. Losses, however large, were nothing to the Germans. Their generals led them on straight into the face of the British fire, and John gasped as if all that tremendous weight were about to be hurled upon his own chest.

The British fire doubled, tripled. The German line wavered, steadied itself and came on again. Then John saw a flash extending along their own front, and he and his comrades sprang to their feet. He saw an officer give an order and then with a tremendous shout the men, their line bristling with steel, rushed forward.

John heard the shrapnel and bullets shrieking and whistling among them, but he was untouched. Whether there was any bayonet on the end of his rifle he did not know, but he was running forward with the others, and then he was in the center of a vast red whirlwind, in which the faces of men shone and steel glittered.

Cannon and rifles crashed, and there was a great shouting, but the Germans at last reeled and gave back before the bayonet.

A tremendous roar of cheers came from the British line, and for a little space there was a comparative lull in the thunder of the battle. John heard a Highland brigade singing some wild song, and near him the Irish were pouring forth a fierce, wailing note. Wharton and Carstairs were still by his side, unharmed.

"The bayonet after all is the weapon for close quarters! It takes a good man to stand the cold steel!" shouted Carstairs.

"So it does!" John shouted back, "but they've stopped for only a few moments! They're gathering anew!"

"And we're here waiting for them! But I wish there were more of us!"

John echoed the wish. He saw the German army advancing again or at least enough of it to know that it could overpower the defense. The Germans were as brave as anybody and under their iron discipline they would come without ceasing. He borrowed Wharton's glasses, and also saw the vast overlapping lines to right and left. A great fear was born in his heart that the German effort would succeed, that the British army would be surrounded and destroyed. But he handed the glasses back to Wharton without a word.

The battle swelled anew. The German generals reformed their lines and the hosts poured forward again, reckless of losses. The defense met them with a terrible fire and charged again and again with the bayonet.

For hours the battle raged and thundered over the hills and valleys, and the British line still held, but it was cut up, bleeding at every pore, and to right and left the horns of the long German crescent were slowly creeping around either flank. John from his place on a hill saw well and he knew that their position was growing extremely dangerous. It seemed to him that the German threat would certainly be carried out, unless help came from the French.

A vast red whirlwind in which the faces of men shone and steel glittered.

Late in the day he was on horseback again, carrying a message from a general to any French commander whom he could reach, urging immediate help. He had left Wharton and Carstairs on the battle line, and the horse was that of a slain colonel.

Gaining the rear, where the weight of the fire would not reach him John galloped toward the right, passing through a small wood, and then emerging upon a field, in which wheat had stood.

As his blood cooled a little he slowed his speed for a moment or two, and took a look at the battle which was spread over a vast area. He was appalled by the spectacle of all those belching cannon, and of men falling like grass before the mower. A continuous flash and roar came from a front of miles, and he saw well that the German host could not be stopped.

He galloped toward the right, but it seemed to him that distance did not cause any decrease in the crash and roar. Either his imagination supplied it, or the battle was increasing in violence. He rode on, and then a new sound greeted him. It was the thunder of another battle, or rather a link in the chain of battles. He was approaching the position of a French army which had been assailed with a fury equal to that from which the British suffered.

John was merely one of many messengers and the French commander smiled grimly when he read his dispatch.

"Look!" he said, pointing a long arm.

John saw another vast gray host, rolling forward, crushing and invincible. At some points the French had already lost ground, and they were fighting a desperate, but losing battle. No help could come from them, and he believed that the French armies farther east were in the same mortal danger.

John received his return dispatch. He knew without the telling what was in it. The French would certainly urge the British to fall back. If they did not do so they would be lost, the French line in its turn would be crumpled up, and France was conquered.

It was given to John, a youth, as he rode back in the red light of the late sun, to know that a crisis of the world was at hand. He was imaginative. He had read much and now he saw. It struck upon him like a flash of lightning. Along that vast front in face of the French armies and the British there must be a million troops, armed and trained as no other troops ever were, and driven forward by a military autocracy which unceasingly had taught the doctrine, that might is right. The kings, the princes, the dukes and the generals who believed it was their right to rule the world were out there, and it was their hour. By morning they might be masters of Europe.

He had all the clear vision of a young prophet. He saw the sword and cannon triumphant, and he saw the menace to his own land. He shuddered and turned cold, but in a minute warmth returned to his body and he galloped back with the message. Others had returned with messages like his own, and, giving up his horse, he rejoined his comrades.

Carstairs and Wharton were gloomy. The ground that had been the front line of the British was now under the German foot. The German weight, irresistible in appearance, had proved so in fact, and far to left and right those terrible horns were pushing farther and farther around the flanks, John now saw the German army as a gigantic devil fish enveloping its prey.

"What did you find, John?" shouted Carstairs.

"I found a French army pressed as hard as our own, and I heard that farther to the east other French armies were being driven with equal fury."

"Looks as if we might have to retreat."

"It will soon be a question, whether or not we can retreat. The Germans are now on both our flanks."

Carstairs' face blanched a little, but he refused to show discouragement.

"They're telling us to retire now," he said, "but we'll come again. England will never give up. John, your own transplanted British blood ought to tell you that."

"It does tell me so, but when I was riding across the hills I saw better than you can see here. If we don't get away now we never shall, and England and France cannot regain what they will have lost."

But the British army was withdrawing. Those terrible horns had not quite closed in. They were beaten back with shell, bullets and bayonets, and slowly and sullenly, giving blow for blow the British army retreated into France.

John and his comrades were with a small force on the extreme left, almost detached from the main body, serving partly as a line of defense and partly as a strong picket. They stopped at times to rest a little and eat food that was served to them, but the Germans never ceased to press them. Their searchlights flashed all through the night and their shell and shrapnel searched the woods and fields.

"It's no little war," said Carstairs.

"And I tell you again," said Wharton, "that England must wake up. A hundred thousand volunteers are nothing in this war. She must send a half million, a million and more. Germany has nearly seventy million people and nearly every able-bodied man is a trained soldier. Think of that."

"I'm thinking of it. What I saw today makes me think of it a lot. Jove, how they did come, and what numbers they have!"

A huge shell passed screaming over their heads and burst far beyond them. But they did not jump. They had heard so much sound of cannon that day that their ears were dulled by it.

"It's evident that they haven't given up hope of cutting us off," said Wharton, "since they push the pursuit in the night."

"And they'll be at it again as hard as ever in the morning," said John. "We'll see those horns of the crescent still pushing forward. They mean to get us. They mean to smash up everything here in a month, and then go back and get Russia."

The firing went on until long past midnight. Toward morning they slept a little in a field, but when day came they saw the gray masses still in pursuit. All day long the terrible retreat went on, the defense fighting fiercely, but slowly withdrawing, the Germans pressing hard, and always seeking to envelop their flanks. There was continual danger that the army would be lost, but no dismay. Cool and determined the defense never relaxed, and all the time bent to the right to get in touch with the French who were retreating also.

It was a gloomy day for John. Like most Americans his feeling for France had always been sympathetic. France had helped his own country in the crisis of her existence, and France was a free republic which for a generation had strictly minded its own business. Yet this beautiful land seemed destined to be trodden under foot again by the Germans, and the French might soon cease to exist as a great nation. French and English together had merely checked the German host for a few hours. It had swept both out of its way and was coming again, as sure and deadly as ever.

They did not hear until the next day that the French and English armies were already in touch, and while still driven back it was not probable that they could be cut apart, and then be surrounded and destroyed in detail. John felt a mighty joy. That crisis in the world's history had passed and by the breadth of a hair the military autocracy had missed its chance. Yet what the German hour had failed

to bring might come with slow time, and his joy disappeared as they were driven back farther and farther into France. Thus the retreat continued for days and nights.

Carstairs was the most cheerful of the three. They had slipped from the trap, and, as he saw it, England was merely getting ready for a victory.

"You wait until our second army comes up," he said, "and then we'll give the Germans a jolly good licking."

"When is it coming up?" asked John. "In this century or the next?"

"Be patient. You Yankees are always in too much of a hurry."

"I'm not in such a hurry to get to Paris, but it seems that we'll soon be there if we keep on at the rate we're going."

"You could be in a worse place than Paris, It's had quite a reputation in its time. Full of life, gayety, color. I'll be glad to see Paris."

"So will the Germans, and if we don't do better than we've been doing they'll see it just about as soon as we do."

Carstairs refused to be discouraged, and John hoped anew that the armies would be able to turn. But he hoped against what he knew to be the facts. They were driven on mile after mile by the vast German force.

Another night came, after a day of the desperate retreat and powerful pursuit. John and his comrades by some miracle had escaped all wounds, but they were almost dead from anxiety and exhaustion. Their hearts too were sinking lower and lower. They saw the beautiful country trampled under foot, villages destroyed, everything given to ruin and the peasants in despair fleeing before the resistless rush of the enemy.

"John," said Carstairs, "you know Unter den Linden, don't you?"

"Yes, it's a fine street."

"So I've heard. Broad enough for the return of a triumphal army, isn't it?"

"Just suited to the purpose."

"Well, I don't know whether the Germans will go back to the old Roman customs, but I want to tell you right here that I won't be a captive adorning their

triumphal procession."

"How are you going to keep from it?"

"I'll get myself shot first. No, I won't! I'll see that they don't have a chance for any such triumph! I and a million others."

"I feel like despairing myself sometimes," said John gravely, "and then I say to myself: 'what's the use!' I don't mean to give up, even when the Germans are in Paris."

"Well spoken," said Wharton, who was lying on his back in the grass. "All is not lost yet by a long shot. When our army drew out of their clutches their first great stroke failed. Who knows what will happen to their second?"

They were still on the extreme left of the Allied line, forming a sort of loose fringe there, but their comrades on the right were only a few hundred yards away. They heard in front the scattered firing of the pickets and skirmishers which continued day and night, while the searchlights of the pursuers winked and winked, and, at far intervals, a mighty shell crashed somewhere near.

There was a pause in the retreat and John also lay down on the grass. At first he was flat on his back, and then he turned over on his side. His ear touched the earth, and he heard a sound that made him spring to his feet in alarm.

"Horses!" he cried. "It must be the Uhlans!"

They saw lances gleaming through the dusk, and then with a rush and a shout the Uhlans were upon them.

John sprang to one side, dodging the sweep of a sabre, and firing his rifle at the man who wielded it. He did not have time to see whether or not he fell, because the little camp, in an instant, was the scene of terrible turmoil and confusion, a wild medley of shouting men and rearing horses. Instinctively he rushed to one side, dodging the thrust of a lance, receiving a blow from the butt of another on his head, but finally coming clear of the tumult.

The lance blow had made him see stars, and he could not think or see clearly now. He had dropped his rifle, but he remembered his automatic, and drawing it he began to fire into the mass of horses and horsemen. Then a lancer rode at him with poised weapon. He fired at him, leaped aside and ran through some bushes, intending to come around on the other flank.

But the dizziness in his head increased and his sight became dimmer. The whole world suddenly turned black, and he felt himself falling through space.

CHAPTER XV

THE GIANT GUN

When John came back to the world he was conscious of a painful throbbing in his head, and that he was lying in a very awkward position. He seemed to be doubled up with his feet nearly as high as his head. Around him were narrow, earthy walls, but above him was a sky full of stars.

"Well, if I'm dead," he muttered, "they certainly didn't take the trouble to bury me very well. I didn't know it was the fashion in this country to leave tombs open."

But he felt too weak and languid to "unbury" himself, and lay for a little while in this awkward position. He saw the same circle of peaceful sky, but he heard nothing. The Uhlans, whose rush he faintly remembered, evidently had passed on. He rubbed his head where the throbbing was most acute and felt a big lump there.

But his skull was not fractured. He felt of it gingerly, and it seemed to be as solid as ever.

He lay a little while longer and made an effort. Slowly and painfully he straightened himself out and stood up. His head rose considerably above the edge of the hole, in which he had lain, and he saw a country free from troops, where he stood. But he heard beyond him in the direction of Paris the flashing and roaring which had been going on for days. The German army had marched over him, and for some mysterious reason had left him there.

John looked at the hole in which he stood. It was not more than three or four feet across and at the bottom lay his automatic, which he was glad to find as he had plenty of cartridges left in his belt. But how had such a queer place happened to be there? And how had he come to be in it?

He rubbed his hand several times across his face. The throbbing in his head was becoming less acute. Evidently he had been there a long time, as he saw a faint touch of daylight in the east. He drew himself out of the hole, saw some pieces of metal lying near and then knew the truth.

One of the giant shells striking there had made the cavity and luckily for him he

had fallen into it. The German cavalry riding by in the night had passed him, unseeing.

"I never expected one of those big shells to be so kind to me," murmured John.

He drew himself out of the hole, and flexed and tensed his muscles until his physical vigor returned. The throbbing in his head continued to decrease, and he felt confident and cheerful. He began to believe that a special Providence was watching over him. If a giant shell, intended to destroy his comrades and himself, merely made a safe hiding place for him while the triumphant legions stalked past then he was indeed a favorite child of fortune.

It was early dawn and the air was very crisp and fresh. He drew deep breaths of it, and continually grew stronger. Far to the southwest he saw a long, white line of smoke, and beneath it the rapid flash of many great guns. The horizon thundered. It was the pursuing German army, and John sighed. "Still on the road to Paris," he murmured.

He wondered what had become of his comrades in that wild charge of the Uhlans in the night, but his was a most hopeful nature, and since they had escaped he must have done so too. Moreover, fortune as he had observed was watching over them as well as himself. Safe therefore in supposition they slipped from his mind.

He stood for a little space watching the line of battle, as it rolled off toward the southwest and then he looked at the ground about him, the lovely country torn to pieces by the armies. He had resented sometimes that attitude of superiority assumed by Europeans, but, here was Europe gone mad. Americans were sane and sensible. No military monarchs or military autocracies could drag them into wholesale war.

It was the spectacle spread before him that caused John to condemn Europe for the moment. The armies had passed on, but all about him lay the dead. Most of them had been torn horribly by shells and shrapnel, while some had met a quick death from the bullets.

He saw the gray of the Germans and the khaki of the English often close together. Two or three shattered cannon also lay in the fields, and abandoned guns were numerous. Here and there were overturned wagons and in one of them he found food.

After eating he sat down and considered. His momentary feeling of revulsion had passed. He was heart and soul for the Franco-British cause, and he meant to rejoin the army. If he could not find his own company of the Strangers he would go with the British again. But the direction in which he must go was obvious. To Paris. Everything was going toward Paris now, because the German army was driving that way. He resolved upon a great curve to the right which would take him around the invading force, and then flight with the others to the capital.

He knew that he must act quickly, his decision once taken. German reserves or bands of cavalry might come up at any moment. He found a rifle beside one of the fallen soldiers, and cartridges in his belt. He did not hesitate to appropriate them and he walked swiftly toward a little wood on his right, where he drank at a brook and bathed his face and wound.

He was never cooler, and his mind was never more acute. He calculated that at the present rate of decrease his headache would all be gone by night, and by that time also he would pass the right flank of the German army. A man walking could not go so very fast, but at least he could go as fast as an army, impeded by another army still intact.

Choosing his course he followed it without swerving for a long time, keeping as well as he could in the shadow of woods and hedges. The day was as beautiful as any that he had seen, flecks of white on a background of blue and a pleasant coolness. The inhabitants of the villages had fled, but several times he saw small bands of Uhlans. Then he would drop down in the trampled grass, and wait until they passed out of sight.

But he feared most the watchers of the sky. He saw monoplanes, biplanes, Taubes, and every kind of flying machine soaring over the German army. Once he heard the rattle of a Zeppelin, and he saw the monstrous thing, a true dragon flying very close to the ground. Then he crept farther under the hedge and lay flat, until it was miles away in the southwest.

In the afternoon he found a cottage in the forest, still occupied by a sturdy couple who believed that France was not yet lost. They gave him food, made up more for him, putting it in a knapsack which he could carry on his back, and refused to take any pay.

"You are young, you are American, and you have come so far to fight for France," the man said. "It would be a crime for us to take your money."

They also dressed his bruise which the peasant said would disappear entirely in a day or two, and then as John was telling them adieu the woman suddenly kissed him on the forehead.

"Farewell, young stranger who fights for France. The prayers of an old woman are worth as much in the sight of God as the prayers of an emperor, and mine may protect you."

Late in the afternoon John saw the battle thicken. The earth quivered under his feet with the roll of the cannon, and the German line moved forward much more slowly. It allowed him to gain in his own great, private flanking movement. At twilight he rested a while and ate supper. Then he pushed forward all through the night, and in the morning he saw flying just above the trees an aeroplane which he recognized as the Arrow.

Shouting tremendously he attracted at last the attention of Lannes who dropped slowly to the ground. The young Frenchman was overjoyed, and, in his intense enthusiasm wanted to embrace him. But John laughingly would not allow it. Instead they shook hands violently again and again.

But after the first gladness of meeting Lannes was mournful.

"I have seen your friends Carstairs and Wharton," he said, "and they are unhurt, but the German flood moves on. Only a miracle can save Paris. My errand takes me there. Come, you shall have another flight with me, and we shall see together, for perhaps the last time, that Paris, that city of light, that crown of Europe, that fountain of civilization."

"I, an American, still hope for Paris."

"Then I do too."

John put on the coat and visor that Lannes gave him, and they took their seats.

The *Arrow* rose slowly, and John, with his visor and his clothing adjusted carefully for speed and the colder air of the upper regions, settled in his place. He felt an extraordinary sense of relief and comfort. In the air he had a wonderful trust in Lannes, the most daring of all the flying men of France, which perhaps meant the most daring in the world.

He leaned back in his seat, and watched the strong arm and shoulders and steady hand of his comrade. Again Lannes in the *Arrow* was a master musician playing

on the keys of a piano. The *Arrow* responded to his slightest touch, rising swooping and darting. John, after the long and terrible tension of so many days, released his mind from all responsibility. He was no longer the leader, and he did not have any doubt that Lannes would take him, where he ought to go. His feeling of ease deepened into one of luxury.

They did not rise very high at present, and John could still catch glimpses of the world below which was now a sort of blurred green, houses and streams failing to show.

They sailed easily and John told much of what had befallen him and his comrades, Carstairs the Englishman and Wharton the American.

"The British army came within a hair's breadth of destruction," he said, "and I'm not so sure that it will escape yet."

"Oh yes it will," said Lannes, "after it once formed the junction with our own army and they were able to retreat in a solid line the great chance of the Germans to strike the most deadly blow of modern times passed. And I tell you again that the French Republic of 1914 is far different from the French Empire of 1870. We have the fire, the enthusiasm, and the strength that the First French Republic commanded. We are not prepared—that's why the Germans are rushing over us now—but we will be prepared. Nor is our nature excitable and despondent, as people have so often charged. Even though our capital be removed to Bordeaux we'll not despair. Using your own phrase, we'll 'come again.'"

"What, has Paris been abandoned?"

"They're talking of it. But John, look toward the east!"

The *Arrow* had dropped down low, toward a wood, until it almost lay against the tops of the trees, blending with their leaves. Lannes pointed with the finger of his free hand, after passing his glasses to John.

John saw puffs of flame and white smoke, and the dim outline of masses of men in gray, moving forward. From another line farther west came the blaze of many cannon.

"Our men are making a stand," said Lannes. "Perhaps it's to gain time. But whatever the reason, you and I hope it will be successful."

"And we may save our Paris," said John.

He was not conscious that he used the pronoun "our". He had become so thoroughly identified with the cause for which he fought that it seemed natural. The battle deepened in fury and volume. Although far away John felt the air quivering with the roar of the great cannonade. They rose somewhat higher and each took his turn at the glasses. John was awed by the spectacle. As far as he could see, and he could see far, men, perhaps a half million of them, were engaged in mortal struggle. The whole country seemed to roar and blaze and innumerable manikins moved over the hills and valleys.

Above the thunder of this battle rose a mighty crash that sent the air rolling in circular waves. The *Arrow* quivered and then Lannes dropped it down several hundred yards, in order that they might get a better view.

"It's one of their giant guns, a 42 centimeter," he said, "and it's posted on that hill over to our right. I didn't think they could bring so big a gun in the pursuit, but it seems that they have been able to do so."

"And it's plumping shells more than a ton in weight, right into the middle of the Franco-British army."

"It would seem so, and doubtless they're doing terrible destruction."

John was silent for a moment or two. He had felt an inspiration. It was a terrible and dangerous impulse, but he meant to act upon it.

"Philip," he said, "have you any bombs with you?"

"A good supply, John. But why?"

"I propose that you and I fly over the mammoth gun and blow it up."

Lannes turned a little in his seat, and stared at his comrade.

"I hold that against you," he said.

"Why?"

"Because I didn't think of it first. I'm considered reckless, and it's the sort of enterprise that ought to have occurred to me. Instead the idea comes to you, a reserved and conservative sort of a fellow. But John, you and I will try it. We'll either blow up that gun or die for France. Search the heavens with the glasses, and see if any of the German flyers are near."

"There are some dots far off toward the east, but I don't think they're near enough to interfere with us."

"Then well try for the gun at once. We've got to sink low to be sure of our aim, and for that reason, John, I'm going to ask you to drop the bombs, while I steer. But don't do it, until I say ready because I mean to go pretty close to the 'Busy Bertha.'"

"Good enough," said John, as Lannes passed him the bombs. His hand was perfectly steady and so was that of Lannes on the steering rudder, as they made a gentle curve toward the point, from which the mighty crash had come. John knew that the bombs would not make a destructive impression upon those vast tubes of steel, but he hoped to strike the caisson or ammunition supply behind, and blow up one or two of the shells themselves, involving everything in a common ruin. But to do so he knew that they must fly very low, exposing themselves to the danger of return fire from the Germans.

"I can see the gun now," said Lannes. "The gunners are all around it, and infantry with rifles are near, but I'm going to make a swoop within five hundred feet of it. Whenever we're directly over it drop two of the bombs. It may be, it's most likely in fact, that neither will hit, but I'll swoop down again and again, until we do, unless they get us first."

"I'm ready," said John, who had steeled every nerve, "and I'll do my best."

He felt the rush of air as the *Arrow* increased her speed, and shot downward in a slanting curve, and he heard also a shout from below, as the sinister shadow of the aeroplane showed black between the gunners and the sky.

He leaned over and watched. He saw hundreds of eyes turned upward, and he heard the crackle of many rifles, as they sent their bullets toward the Arrow. Some whistled near, but the darting target, high in air, was hard to hit and none touched it.

John paid no heed to the bullets, but watched the huge cannon with its monstrous mouth upturned at a sharp angle to the sky. When he thought they were directly over it he hurled two of the bombs at the caisson, but they missed. They struck among the men, and several were killed, but the gun and its equipment remained unharmed.

"Never mind," said Lannes, knowing that John felt chagrin. "You came pretty

close for a first trial. Now, ready, I'm going to swoop back again."

The second attempt was not quite as good as the first, and a bullet tipped John's ear, drawing blood. Off in the east the black specks were growing larger, and they knew but little time was left to them now. The German aeroplanes were coming.

The third swoop and with an eye and hand in perfect accord John threw once and then twice. A terrific roar came from below. The giant cannon had been blown from its concrete bed and lay a vast mass of shattered steel and iron, with dead and dying men around it.

"One mighty blow for France!" exclaimed Lannes, and exultant they flew westward, dipping low, now and then behind the trees to hide their flight.

"Well consider it a good omen," said John.

"Are any of the Taubes pursuing now?" said Lannes.

"There's nothing in sight," replied John, after a long examination through the glasses.

"Then, they can't find us," exclaimed Lannes, joyfully, "and now for glorious Paris!"

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