

THE SECRETS OF POTSDAM

BY

WILLIAM LE QUEUX

The Secrets Of Potsdam

SECRET NUMBER ONE

THE TRAGEDY OF THE LEUTENBERGS

You will recollect our first meeting on that sunny afternoon when, in the stuffy, nauseating atmosphere of perspiration and a hundred Parisian perfumes, we sat next each other at the first roulette table on the right as you enter the rooms at Monte Carlo?

Ah! how vivid it is still before my eyes, the jingle of gold and the monotonous cries of the croupiers.

Ah! my dear friend! In those pre-war days the Riviera—that sea-lapped Paradise, with its clear, open sky and sapphire Mediterranean, grey-green olives and tall flowering aloes, its gorgeous blossoms, and its merry, dark-eyed populace who lived with no thought of the morrow—was, indeed, the playground of Europe.

And, let me whisper it, I think I may venture to declare that few of its annual habitués enjoyed the life more than your dear old ink-stained self.

What brought us together, you, an English novelist, and I a—well, how shall I describe myself? One of your enemies—eh? No, dear old fellow. Let us sink all our international differences. May I say that I, Count Ernst von Heltzendorff, of Schloss Heltzendorff, on the Mosel, late personal-adjutant to His Imperial Highness the Crown-Prince, an official attached to that precious young scoundrel's immediate person, call you my dear friend?

True, our nations are, alas! at war—the war which the Kaiser and his son long sought, but which, as you well know, I have long ago detested.

I have repudiated that set of pirates and assassins of whom I was, alas! born, and among whom I moved until I learned of the vile plot afoot against the peace of Europe and the chastity of its female inhabitants.

On August 5th, 1914, I shook the dust of Berlin from my feet, crossed the French frontier, and have since resided in the comfortable old-fashioned country house which you assisted me to purchase on the border of the lovely forest of Fontainebleau.

And now, you have asked me to reveal to you some of the secrets of Potsdam—secrets known to me by reason of my official position before the war.

You are persuading me to disclose some facts concerning the public and private life of the Emperor, of my Imperial master the Crown-Prince, known in his intimate circle as "Willie," and of the handsome but long-suffering Cecil Duchess of Mecklenbourg, who married him ten years ago and became known as "Cilli." Phew! Poor woman! she has experienced ten years of misery, domestic unhappiness, by which she has become prematurely aged, deep-eyed, her countenance at times when we talked wearing an almost tragic look.

No wonder, indeed, that there is a heavy and, alas! broken heart within the beautiful Marble Palace at Potsdam, that splendid residence where you once visited me and were afterwards commanded to a reception held by His Imperial Highness.

I risk much, I know, in taking up my pen to tell the truth and to make these exposures to you, but I do so because I think it only just that your British nation should know the true character of the Emperor and of the unscrupulous and ubiquitous "Willie," the defiant young Blackguard of Europe, who is the idol of the swaggering German Army, and upon whom they pin their hopes.

It is true that the Commander of the Death's Head Hussars—the "Commander" who has since the war sanctioned the cold-blooded murder of women and children, the shooting of prisoners, rapine, incendiarism, and every other devil's work that his horde of assassins could commit—once declared that "the day will come when Social Democrats will come to Court."

True, he has been known to be present at the golden wedding festivities of a poor cobbler in Potsdam; that he has picked up in his yellow ninety-horse-power car—with its black imp as a mascot—a poor tramp and taken him to the hospital; and that he possesses the charming manner of his much-worshipped grandfather, the Emperor Frederick. But he is as clever and cunning as his criminal father, Wilhelm-der-Plötzliche (William the Sudden) or Der Einzige (The Only), as the Kaiser is called by the people of the Palace. He shows with double cunning but one side of his character to the misguided German people, the Prussian Junker party, and the Tom-Dick-and-Harry of the Empire who have been made cannon-fodder and whose bones lie rotting in Flanders and on the Aisne.

Ah, my dear friend, what a strange life was that of the German Court before the war—a life of mummery, of gay uniforms, tinsel, gilded decorations, black hearts posing as virtuous, and loose people of both sexes evilly scandalizing their neighbours and pulling strings which caused their puppets to dance to the War-Lord's tune.

I once lifted the veil slightly to you when you stayed at the Palast Hotel in Potsdam and came to us at the Marble Palace, and I suppose it is for that reason that you ask me to jot down, for the benefit of your readers in Great Britain and her Dominions, a few facts concerning the plots of the Kaiser and his son—the idol of Germany, the Kronprinz "Willie."

What did you think of him when I presented you?

I know how, later on that same night, you remarked upon his height, his narrow chest, and his corset-waist, and how strangely his animal eyes set slant-wise in his thin, aquiline face, goggle eyes, which dilate so strangely when speaking with you, and which yet seem to penetrate your innermost thoughts.

I agreed with you when you declared that there was nothing outwardly of the typical Hohenzollern in the Imperial Rake. True, one seeks in vain for traces of martial virility. Though his face is so often wreathed in boyish smiles, yet his heart is as hard as that of the true Hohenzollern, while his pretended love of sport is only a clever ruse in order to retain the popularity which, by dint of artful pretence, he has undoubtedly secured. Indeed, it was because of the All-Highest One's jealousy of his reckless yet crafty son's growing popularity that we were one day all suddenly packed off to Danzig to be immured for two long years in that most dreary and provincial of all garrisons.

Of the peccadilloes of the elegant young blackguard of Europe—who became a fully-fledged colonel in the German Army at the age of thirty-one—I need say but little. His life has been crammed with disgraceful incidents, most of them hushed up at the Kaiser's command, though several of them—especially certain occurrences in the Engadine in the winter of 1912—reached the ears of the Crown-Princess, who, one memorable day, unable to stand her husband's callous treatment, threatened seriously to leave him.

Indeed, it was only by the Kaiser's autocratic order that "Cilli" remained at the Marmor Palace. She had actually made every preparation to leave, a fact which I, having learned it, was compelled to report to the Crown-Prince. We were at the Palace in the Zeughaus-Platz, in Berlin, at the time, and an hour after I had returned from Potsdam I chanced to enter the Crown-Prince's study. The door was a self-locking one, and I had a key. On turning my key I drew back, for His Majesty the Emperor, a fine figure in the picturesque cavalry uniform of the Königsjäger—who had just come from a review, and had no doubt heard of the threatened Royal scandal—was standing astride in the room.

"I compel it!" cried the Emperor, pale with rage, his eyes flashing as he spoke. "She shall remain! Go to her at once—make your peace with her in any way you can—and appear to-night with her at the theatre."

"But I fear it is impossible. I——"

"Have you not heard me?" interrupted the Emperor, disregarding his son's protests. And as I discreetly withdrew I heard the Kaiser add: "Cannot you, of our House of Hohenzollern, see that we cannot afford to allow Cilli to leave us? The present state of the public mind is not encouraging, much as I regret it. Remember Frederick August's position when that madcap Luisa of Tuscany ran away with the French tutor Giron. Now return to Marmor without delay and do as I bid."

"I know Cilli. She will not be appeased. Of that I am convinced," declared the young man.

"It is my will—the will of the Emperor," were the last words I heard, spoken in that hard, intense voice I knew so well. "Tell your wife so. And do not see that black-haired Englishwoman again. I had a full report from the Engadine a fortnight ago, and this contretemps is only what I have expected. It is disgraceful! When will you learn reason?"

Ten minutes later I was seated beside the Crown-Prince in the car on our way to Potsdam.

On the road, driving recklessly as I sat by his side, he laughed lightly as he turned to me, saying:

"What an infernal worry women really are—aren't they, Heltzendorff—more especially if one is an Imperial Prince! Even though one is a Hohenzollern one cannot escape trouble!"

How the conjugal relations were resumed I know not. All I know is that I attended their Imperial Highnesses to the Lessing Theatre, where, in the Royal box, the Kaiser—ever eager to stifle the shortcomings of the Hohenzollerns—sat with us, though according to his engagements he should have been on his way to Düsseldorf for a great review on the morrow. But such public display allayed all rumour of his son's domestic infelicity, and both Emperor and Kronprinz smiled benignly upon the people.

Early next day the Crown-Prince summoned me, in confidence, and an hour later I left on a secret mission to a certain lady whom I may call Miss Lilian Greyford—as it is not fair in certain cases in these exposures to mention

actual names—daughter of an English county gentleman, who was staying at the "Kulm" at St. Moritz.

Twenty-four hours afterwards I managed to see the winter-sports young lady alone in the hotel, and gave her a verbal message, together with a little package from His Imperial Highness, which, when she opened it, I found contained a souvenir in the shape of an artistic emerald pendant. With it were some scribbled lines. The girl—she was not much more than twenty—read them eagerly, and burst into a torrent of tears.

Ah! my dear Le Queux, as you yourself know from your own observations, there are as many broken hearts beating beneath the corsets of ladies-in-waiting and maids-of-honour, as there are among that frantic feminine crowd striving to enter the magic circle of the Royal entourage or the women of the workaday world who pass up Unter-den-Linden on a Sunday.

Phew! What a world of fevered artificiality revolves around a throne!

Very soon after this incident—namely, in the early days of 1912—I found myself, as the personal-adjutant of His Imperial Highness the Crown-Prince, involved in a very strange, even inexplicable, affair.

How shall I explain it? Well, the drama opened in the Emperor's Palace in Berlin on New Year's night, 1912, when, as usual, a Grand Court reception was held.

The scene was one which we who revolve around the throne know so well. Court gowns, nodding plumes, gay uniforms, and glittering decorations—a vicious, tinselled, gossip-loving little world which with devilish intent sows seeds of dark suspicion or struggles for the Kaiser's favour.

In the famous White Salon, with its ceiling gaudily emblazoned with the arms of the Hohenzollerns as Burgraves, Electors, Kings, Emperors, and what-not, its walls of coloured marble and gilded bronze, and its fine statues of the Prussian rulers, we had all assembled and were waiting the entrance of the Emperor.

Kiderlen-Waechter—the Foreign Secretary—was standing near me, chatting with Von Jagow, slim, dark-haired and spruce. The latter, who was serving as German Ambassador in Rome, happened to be in Berlin on leave, and the pair were laughing merrily with a handsome black-haired woman whom I recognized as the Baroness Bertieri, wife of the Italian Ambassador.

Philip Eulenburg, one of the Emperor's personal friends (by the way, author, with Von Moltke, of the Kaiser's much-advertised "Song to Ægir"—a fact not

generally known), approached me and began to chat, recalling a side-splitting incident that had occurred a few days before at Kiel, whither I had been with the Crown-Prince to open a new bridge. Oh, those infernal statues and bridges!

Of a sudden the tap of the Chamberlain's stick was heard thrice, the gold-and-white doors instantly fell open, and the Emperor, his decorations gleaming beneath the myriad lights, smilingly entered with his waddling consort, the Crown-Prince, and their brilliant suite.

All of us bowed low in homage, but as we did so I saw the shrewd eyes of the All-Highest One, which nothing escapes, fixed upon a woman who stood close to my elbow. As he fixed his fierce gaze upon her I saw, knowing that glance as I did, that it spoke volumes. Hitherto I had not noticed the lady, for she was probably one of those unimportant persons who are commanded to a Grand Court, wives and daughters of military nobodies, of whom we at the Palace never took the trouble to inquire so long as their gilt command-cards, issued by the Grand Chamberlain, were in proper order.

That slight contraction of the Emperor's eyebrows caused me to ponder deeply, for, knowing him so intimately, I saw that he was intensely annoyed.

For what reason? I was much mystified.

Naturally I turned to glance at the woman whose presence had so irritated him. She was fair-haired, blue-eyed, petite and pretty. Her age was about twenty-five, and she was extremely good-looking. Beside her stood a big, fair-haired giant in the uniform of a captain of the First Regiment of the Hussars of the Guard, of which the Crown-Prince was Colonel-in-Chief.

Within a quarter of an hour I discovered that the officer was Count Georg von Leutenberg, and that his pretty wife, whom he had married two years before, was the eldest daughter of an English financier who had been created a Baron by your rule-of-thumb politicians.

"Pretty woman, eh?" lisped Eulenburg in my ear, for he had noticed her, and he was assuredly the best judge of a pretty face in all Berlin.

Next day, just before noon, on entering the Crown-Prince's private cabinet, I found "Willie" in the uniform of the 2nd Grenadiers, apparently awaiting me in that cosy apartment, which is crammed with effigies, statuettes, and relics of the great Napoleon, whom he worships just as the War Lord reveres his famous ancestor Frederick the Great.

"Sit down, Heltzendorff," said his Elegant Highness, waving his white, well-manicured hand to a chair near by, and puffing at his cigarette. "It is really pleasant to have an hour's rest!" he laughed, for he seemed in merry mood that day. "Look here! As you know, after the little affair with the Crown-Princess I trust to your absolute discretion. Do you happen to know Count Georg von Leutenberg, of the Hussars of the Guard?"

"By sight only," was my reply. Mention of that name caused me to wonder.

"He is a very good fellow, I understand. Do you know his wife—a pretty little Englishwoman?"

"Unfortunately, I have not that pleasure."

"Neither have I, Heltzendorff," laughed the Prince, with a queer look in those slant-set eyes which appear so strangely goggly sometimes. "But I soon shall know her, I expect. In that direction I want your assistance."

"I am yours for your Highness to command," I replied, puzzled to know what was in progress. After a few seconds of silence the Crown-Prince suddenly exclaimed:

"So good is the report of Von Leutenberg that has reached the Emperor that—though he is as yet in ignorance of the fact—he has been promoted to the rank of major, and ordered upon a foreign mission—as military attaché in London. He will leave Berlin to-night to take up his new post."

"And the Countess?"

"By a secret report I happen to have here it is shown that they are a most devoted pair," he said, glancing at a sheet of buff paper upon which was typed a report, one which I recognized as emanating from the secret bureau at the Polizei-Prasidium, in Alexander Platz. "They live in the Lennestrasse, No. 44, facing the Tiergarten. Note the address."

Then his Highness paused, and, rising, crossed to the big writing-table set in the window, and there examined another report. Afterwards, glancing at the pretty buhl clock opposite, he suddenly said:

"The Count should call here now. I have sent informing him of the Emperor's goodwill, and ordering him to report here to take leave of me as his Colonel-in-Chief."

Scarcely had he spoken when Count von Leutenberg was announced by a flunkey in pink silk stockings, and a moment later the tall officer clicked his heels together and saluted smartly on the threshold.

"I thought you would be pleased at your well-merited promotion," said his Highness in quite a genial tone. "The Emperor wishes you to leave for London by the ten o'clock express for Flushing to-night, so as to report to his Excellency the Ambassador before he departs on leave. Hence the urgency. The Countess, of course, will remain in Berlin. You will, naturally, wish for time to make your arrangements in London and dispose of your house here."

"I think she will wish to accompany me, your Imperial Highness," replied the fond husband. "London is her home."

"Ah! That is absurd!" laughed "Willie." "Why, you who have been married two whole years are surely not still upon your honeymoon?" and his close-set eyes glinted strangely. "You will be far too busy on taking up your new appointment to see much of her. No. Let her remain comfortably at home in Berlin until you are quite settled. Then I will see that Kiderlen grants you leave to return to put your house in order."

From the Count's manner I could see that he was very much puzzled at his sudden promotion.

Indeed, on entering he had stammered out his surprise at being singled out for such high distinction.

Von Leutenberg's hesitation was the Crown-Prince's opportunity.

"Good!" went on his Highness in his imperious, impetuous way. "You will leave for London to-night, and the Countess will remain until you have settled. I congratulate you most heartily upon your well-deserved advancement, which I consider is an honour conferred by the Emperor upon my regiment. I know, too, that you will act to the honour of the Fatherland abroad."

And with those words the major was dismissed.

"A charming man!" remarked the Prince, after the door had closed. "He has only been brought to my notice quite recently. An enthusiastic officer, he will be of great use to us at Carlton House Terrace. There is much yet to be done there, my dear Heltzendorff. Fortunately we have put our friends the English comfortably to sleep. It has cost us money, but money talks in London, just as it does in Berlin."

And he drew a long, ecstatic breath at the mere thought of the great international plot in progress—of the staggering blow to be struck against

France, and the march upon Paris with those men who were his boon companions—Von Kluck, Von Hindenburg and Von der Goltz.

"Heltzendorff," he exclaimed a few moments later, after he had reflected deeply between the whiffs of his cigarette. "Heltzendorff, I wish you to become acquainted with the Countess von Leutenberg, and you must afterwards introduce me. I have a fixed and distinct reason. I could obtain the assistance of others, but I trust you only."

"But I do not know the lady," I protested, for I had no desire whatsoever to become implicated in any double-dealing.

"Hohenstein knows her well. I will see that he introduces you," replied the Kaiser's son, with that strange look again in his eyes. "She's uncommonly pretty, so mind you don't fall in love with her!" he laughed, holding up his finger reprovingly. "I've heard, too, that Count Georg is a highly jealous person, but, fortunately, he will be very busy writing secret reports at Carlton House Terrace. So go and see Hohenstein at once, and get him to introduce you to the pretty little Englishwoman. But, remember, not a word of this conversation is to be breathed to a single soul."

What did it all mean? Why had the Emperor singled out for advancement the husband of that woman, the sight of whom had so greatly annoyed him? I confess that I became more than ever puzzled over the curious affair.

Within a week, however, thanks to the introduction of that old roué, Hohenstein, I had dined at Count von Leutenberg's pretty house in the Lennestrasse in a fine room, the long windows of which commanded a delightful view over the Tiergarten and the Siegesallee.

The Countess, extremely charming and refined, having the misfortune of being English, had not been taken up warmly by Berlin society. She was, I found, a most delightful hostess. The party included Laroque, the elegant First Secretary of the French Embassy, and his Parisian wife, together with Baron Hoffmann, the burly, round-faced Minister of the Interior, and Doctor Paulssen, Under-Secretary at the Colonial Office, against whom you will remember there were allegations of atrocities committed upon the natives in German East Africa. Hohenstein was, however, not there, as he had been suddenly dispatched by the Emperor upon a mission to Corfu.

At table the talk ran upon Leutenberg's sudden promotion, whereupon the Minister Hoffmann declared:

"His Majesty only gives reward when it is due. When he discerns talent he is never mistaken."

A week later the Crown-Prince had returned from a surprise visit the Kaiser had made to Stettin. The Emperor had played his old game of rousing the garrison in the middle of the night, and then laughing at the ludicrous figures cut by his pompous Generals and Colonels rushing about in their night attire eager to greet their Sovereign.

I was in the Prince's private room arranging the details of a military programme at Potsdam on the following day when he suddenly entered and exclaimed:

"Well, Heltzendorff, and how are you proceeding in the Lennestrasse, eh?" and he looked at me with those crafty eyes of his. "I hear you were at the house last night."

I started. Was I being watched? It was quite true that I had called on the previous evening, and, finding the Countess alone, had sat in her pretty drawing-room enjoying a long and delightful chat with her.

"Yes. I called there," I admitted. "The Count is returning from London next week to take his wife back with him."

The Crown-Prince smiled mysteriously, and critically examined the curious snake ring which he always wears upon the little finger of his left hand.

"We need not anticipate that, I think. Kiderlen will not grant him leave. He is far better in Carlton House Terrace than in the Lennestrasse."

"I hardly follow your Highness," I remarked, much mystified at his words.

"H'm. Probably not, my dear Count," he laughed. "I do not intend that you should."

And with that mysterious remark he turned to meet Count von Zeppelin, the round-faced, snow-haired, somewhat florid inventor, who was one of his Highness's most intimate friends, and who had at that moment entered unannounced. Zeppelin was a character in Berlin. He sought no friends, no advertisement, and shunned notoriety.

"Ha, my dear Ferdinand!" cried the Prince, shaking the hand of the man who so suddenly became world-famous at the age of seventy. "You have travelled from Stuttgart to see me—unwell as you are! It is an honour. But the matter is one of greatest urgency, as I have already written to you. I want to show you the correspondence and seek your advice," and the Prince invited his white-haired friend to the big, carved arm-chair beside his writing-table. Then, turning to me, he said: "Will you see Von Glasenapp for me, and hand

him those orders for Posen? He must leave to-night. The General Court-Martial at Stendal I have fixed for the 25th. I shall be with the Emperor this afternoon. Report here at seven to-night—understand?"

Thus was I dismissed, while His Imperial Highness and Count Zeppelin sat together in secret counsel.

At ten minutes to seven that evening I unlocked the Crown-Prince's room with the key I carried, the other two keys being in the hands of the Crown-Princess and her husband. I had placed upon the table a bundle of reports which had just been brought round from the Ministry of War, and required that scribbly signature, "Wilhelm Kronprinz," when I noticed three private letters that had evidently been placed aside. The envelopes were addressed in a thin, angular, female hand, and bore an English address. I noted it. The name on each was that of a lady residing in Aylesbury Avenue, Hampstead, London. The letters bore German stamps. In keen curiosity, I took one and examined it, wondering whether it could be the correspondence which the Crown-Prince had been so eager to show Count von Zeppelin in secret.

I drew the letter from the envelope and scanned it rapidly.

What I read caused me to hold my breath. The signature to the letters was "Enid von Leutenberg."

Those letters of hers had, it was plain, been seized in the post on their way to London. The Countess either had a traitor in her household or secret watch was being kept by the Secret Service upon her correspondence.

All three of those letters I read—letters which opened my eyes and broadened my mind. Then, taking up my bundle of reports, I crept away from the room, carefully re-latching the door. I intended that his Highness should return, discover the letters left there inadvertently, and put them away ere my arrival, in which case he would never suspect that I had any knowledge of their contents.

With the papers in my hand I passed along the many carpeted corridors to the south wing of the Palace, where I found Tresternitz, Marshal of the Prince's Court, in his room.

The Crown-Prince imitated his father's sharp punctuality, therefore I knew that he would be there at seven or soon afterwards.

Tresternitz was always full of scandal concerning those who lived in the higher circles of Berlin, and it was to one of these stories of Court scandal

concerning one of the ladies-in-waiting which I listened while I smoked one of his excellent Russian cigarettes.

Then, glancing at the clock, I rose suddenly and left him, returning again to the private room.

I found his Highness there, and as I entered I noticed that he had hidden those remarkable letters which he had in secret shown to Count Zeppelin.

A fortnight went past. The Kaiser, with his mad love of constant travel, had been rushing up and down the Empire—to Krupp's at Essen, to the trials of a newly-invented howitzer, thence to an inspection at Kassel, and afterwards to unveil monuments at Cologne and at Erfurt. The Crown-Prince and Princess had accompanied him, the Kaiserin being indisposed, and I, of course, had been included in "Willie's" suite.

The week had been a strenuous one of train-travel, luncheons, tiring dinners, receptions, dancing, and general junketings, and I was glad enough to get back to my bachelor rooms—those rooms in the Krausenstrasse that you knew so well before the bursting of the war-cloud. To dance attendance upon an Imperial Crown-Prince, as well as upon an autocratic Emperor, becomes after a time a wearisome business, however gay and cosmopolitan a man may be.

I had only been at home a few hours when a telephone message summoned me at five o'clock to the Crown-Prince's Palace.

His Imperial Highness, who had, I knew, been lunching with the Emperor at the Königliches Schloss across the bridge, seemed unusually serious and thoughtful. Perhaps the Emperor had again shown his anger at his peccadilloes, as he did so frequently.

"Count," he said, after a few seconds of silence, during which I noted that upon his table lay a private letter from the German Ambassador in London. "You will recall my conversation regarding the Countess von Leutenberg—eh?"

"Perfectly," was my reply.

"I told you that I should require you to introduce me," he said. "Well, I want you to do so this evening. She has taken a box at the Königliche Opera to-night, where they are to play Falstaff. I shall be there, and you will be with me. Then you will introduce me to your pretty friend. Understand?" And he grinned.

That night, in accordance with my instructions, I sat in the Emperor's box with the Crown-Prince, Tresternitz, and two personal-adjutants, and, recognizing the Countess von Leutenberg in a box opposite, accompanied by an elderly lady, I took the Crown-Prince round, and there presented her to him, greatly to her surprise and undisguised delight.

The Prince and the Countess chatted together, while I sat with her elderly companion. Then, when we had withdrawn, my Imperial Master exclaimed:

"Ah! my dear Heltzendorff. Why, she is one of the prettiest women in all Berlin! Surely it is unfortunate—most unfortunate."

What was unfortunate? I was further puzzled by that last sentence, yet I dare not ask any explanation, and we went back to our own box.

After our return to the Palace the Crown-Prince, who was standing in one of the corridors talking with the slim, fair-haired Baroness von Wedel, one of his wife's ladies-in-waiting, left her and beckoned me into an adjoining room.

"I wish you, Heltzendorff, to call upon the Countess von Leutenberg at nine o'clock to-morrow evening. She will expect you."

I looked at his Highness, much puzzled. How did he know that the pretty Countess would expect me?

But he gave me no time to reply, merely turning upon his heel, and striding down the corridor to the private apartments.

Punctually at nine o'clock that wintry evening I called at the Lennestrasse, but Josef, the elderly manservant, informed me that his mistress was engaged, adding that His Imperial Highness the Crown-Prince had paid a surprise call.

"The Crown-Prince here!" I gasped, astounded.

"Yes, Count. And, further, my mistress is in high glee, for my master returned this morning quite unexpectedly from London. He has been out at the Ministry for Foreign Affairs all the evening, and I expect him home at any moment. The Crown-Prince ordered me to ask you to await him here."

Count von Leutenberg in Berlin! What did it mean? He was absurdly jealous, I recollected. He might return at any moment and find the Crown-Prince alone in the Countess's drawing-room. If so, the situation might certainly be a most unpleasant one.

Hardly had the thought crossed my mind when I heard the Count enter, his spurs clinking and his sabre rattling as he strode up the stairs.

I crept forth, listening breathlessly.

A few seconds later I heard the Count's voice raised in anger and high, bitter words. Next moment I sprang up the stairs and, dashing into the room, found the pretty Countess standing near the window, white and rigid as a statue, while the two men in uniform faced each other. Von Leutenberg's countenance was distorted with rage as he abused the Crown-Prince, and openly charged him with having brought about his exile to London.

His Highness made no reply, but only smiled sarcastically and shrugged his narrow shoulders.

So enraged the other became at this latter gesture that, with a sudden movement, he drew his sword.

The Countess shrieked and swooned as I sprang forward and stayed her husband's hand.

It was a dramatic moment. The Count instantly realized the enormity of his crime, and his hand dropped.

"Enough!" cried the Crown-Prince, waving his adversary aside. Then, turning to me, he said in a calm, hard voice:

"Heltzendorff, you are witness that this man has drawn his sword upon the heir to the Throne."

And with those haughty words he bowed stiffly and strode out of the room.

Two hours later I was commanded to the Kaiser's presence, and found him in counsel with his son.

The Emperor, who wore the uniform of the Guards, looked pale and troubled, yet in his eyes there was a keen, determined look. As I passed the sentries and entered the lofty study, with its upholstery and walls of pale green damask—that room from which the Empire and the whole world have so often been addressed—the Kaiser broke off short in his conversation.

Turning to me as he still sat at his littered table, he said in that quick, impetuous way of his:

"Count Heltzendorff, the Crown-Prince has informed me of what has occurred this evening in the Lennestrasse. I wish you to convey this at once to Count von Leutenberg and to give it into his own hand. There is no reply."

And His Majesty handed me a rather bulky envelope addressed in his own bold handwriting, and bearing his own private cipher impressed in black wax.

Thus commanded, I bowed, withdrew, and took a taxicab straight to the Lennestrasse, being ushered by Josef into the presence of husband and wife in that same room I had quitted a couple of hours before.

I handed the Count the packet the Emperor had given me, and with trembling fingers he tore it open.

From within he drew three letters, those same letters which his wife had written to London, and which had been intercepted by the Secret Service—the letters which I had read in his Highness's room.

As he scanned the lines which the Emperor had penned his face blanched. A loud cry of dismay escaped his wife as she recognized her own letters, and she snatched the note from her husband's hand and also read it.

The light died instantly from her beautiful countenance. Then, turning to me, she said in a hoarse, hopeless tone:

"Thank you, Count von Heltzendorff. Tell His Majesty the Emperor that his command shall be—yes, it shall be obeyed."

Those last words she spoke in a deep, hoarse whisper, a strange, wild look of desperation in her blue eyes.

An hour later I reported again at the Imperial Palace, was granted audience of the Emperor, and gave him the verbal reply.

His Majesty uttered no word, merely nodding his head slowly in approval.

Next afternoon a painful sensation was caused throughout Berlin when the *Abendpost* published the news that Count von Leutenberg, the man so recently promoted by the Emperor, and his pretty wife had both been found dead in their room. During the night they had evidently burned some papers, for the tinder was found in the stove, and having agreed to die together, they being so much attached during life, they had both taken prussic acid in some wine, the bottle and half-emptied glasses being still upon the table.

The romantic affair, the truth of which I here reveal for the first time, was regarded by all Berlin as an inexplicable tragedy. The public are still unaware of how those intercepted letters contained serious warnings to the British Government of the Emperor's hostile intentions towards Britain, and the probable date of the outbreak of war. Indeed, they recounted a private conversation which the Countess had overheard between the Kaiser and Count Zeppelin, repeating certain opprobrious epithets which the All-Highest had bestowed upon one or two British statesmen, and she also pointed out the great danger of a pending rupture between the two Powers, as well as explaining some details regarding the improved Zeppelins in course of construction secretly on Lake Constance, and certain scandals regarding the private life of the Crown-Prince.

It was for the latter reason that the heir, aided by the War-Lord, took his revenge in a manner so crafty, so subtle, and so typical of the innate cunning of the Hohenzollerns.

Thus the well-meant warnings of one of your good, honest Englishwomen never reached the unsuspecting address to which they were sent, and thus did "Willie"—who, as I afterwards discovered, devised that subtle vengeance—act as the Emperor's catspaw.

SECRET NUMBER TWO

THE CROWN-PRINCE'S REVENGE

The Trautmann affair was one which caused a wild sensation at Potsdam in the autumn of 1912.

In the Emperor's immediate entourage there was a great deal of gossip, most of it ill-natured and cruel, for most ladies-in-waiting possess serpents' tongues. Their tongues are as sharp as their features, and though there may be a few pretty maids-of-honour, yet the majority of women at Court are, as you know, my dear Le Queux, mostly plain and uninteresting.

I became implicated in the unsavoury Trautmann affair, in a somewhat curious manner.

A few months after the Leutenberg tragedy I chanced to be lunching at the "Esplanade" in Berlin, chatting with Laroque, of the French Embassy. Our hostess was Frau Breitenbach, a wealthy Jewess—a woman who came from Dortmund—and who was spending money like water in order to wriggle into Berlin society. As personal-adjutant of the Crown-Prince I was, of course, one of the principal guests, and I suspected that she was angling for a card of invitation to the next ball at the Marmor Palace.

Who introduced me to the portly, black-haired, rather handsome woman I quite forget. Probably it was some nobody who received a commission upon the introduction—for at the Berlin Court introductions are bought and sold just as the succulent sausage is sold over the counter.

In the big white-and-gold *salle-à-manger* of the "Esplanade," which, as you know, is one of the finest in Europe, Frau Breitenbach was lunching with sixteen guests at one big round table, her daughter Elise, a very smartly dressed girl of nineteen, seated opposite to her. It was a merry party, including as it did some of the most renowned persons in the Empire, among them being the Imperial Chancellor, Bethmann-Hollweg, of the long, grave face and pointed beard, and that grand seigneur who was a favourite at Court, the multi-millionaire Serene Highness Prince Maximilian Egon zu Fürstenberg. Of the latter it may be said that no man rivalled his influence with the Emperor. What he said was law in Germany.

Fürstenberg was head of the famous "Prince's Trust," now dissolved, but at that time, with its capital of a hundred million pounds, it was a great force in the German commercial world. Indeed, such a boon companion was he of the Kaiser's that an august but purely decorative and ceremonial place was

actually invented for him as Colonel-Marshal of the Prussian Court, an excuse to wear a gay uniform and gorgeous decorations as befitted a man who, possessing twenty millions sterling, was an important asset to the Emperor in his deep-laid scheme for world-power.

Another Prince of the "Trust" was fat old Kraft zu Hohenlohe Oehringen, but as he had only a paltry ten millions he did not rank so high in the War-Lord's favour.

Fürstenberg, seated next to the estimable Jewess, was chatting affably with her. Her husband was in America upon some big steel transaction, but her pretty daughter Elise sat laughing merrily with a young, square-headed lieutenant of the Death's Head Hussars.

That merry luncheon party was the prologue of a very curious drama.

I was discussing the occult with a middle-aged lady on my right, a sister of Herr Alfred Ballin, the shipping king. In society discussions upon the occult are always illuminating, and as we chatted I noticed that far across the crowded room, at a table set in a window, there sat alone a dark-haired, sallow, good-looking young civilian, who, immaculate in a grey suit, was eating his lunch in a rather bored manner, yet his eyes were fixed straight upon the handsome, dark-haired young girl, Elise Breitenbach, as though she exercised over him some strange fascination.

Half a dozen times I glanced across, and on each occasion saw that the young man had no eyes for the notables around the table, his gaze being fixed upon the daughter of the great financier, whose interests, especially in America, were so widespread and profitable.

Somehow—why I cannot even now decide—I felt a distinct belief that the young civilian's face was familiar to me. It was not the first time I had seen him, yet I could not recall the circumstances in which we had met. I examined my memory, but could not recollect where I had before seen him, yet I felt convinced that it was in circumstances of a somewhat mysterious kind.

Two nights later I had dined with the Breitenbachs at their fine house in the Alsenstrasse. The only guest beside myself was the thin-faced, loud-speaking old Countess von Bassewitz, and after dinner, served in a gorgeous dining-room which everywhere betrayed the florid taste of the parvenu, Frau Breitenbach took the Countess aside to talk, while I wandered with her daughter into the winter garden, with its high palms and gorgeous exotics, that overlooked the gardens of the Austrian Embassy.

When we were seated in cane chairs, and the man had brought us coffee, the pretty Elise commenced to question me about life at the Crown-Prince's Court, expressing much curiosity concerning the private life of His Imperial Highness.

Such questions came often from the lips of young girls in society, and I knew how to answer them with both humour and politeness.

"How intensely interesting it must be to be personal-adjutant to the Crown-Prince! Mother is dying to get a command to one of the receptions at Potsdam," the girl said. "Only to-day she was wondering—well, whether you could possibly use your influence in that direction?"

In an instant I saw why I had been invited to dinners and luncheons so often, and why I had been left alone with the sweet-faced, dark-eyed girl.

I reflected a moment. Then I said:

"I do not think that will be very difficult. I will see what can be done. But I hope that if I am successful you will accompany your mother," I added courteously, as I lit a cigarette.

"It is really most kind of you," the girl declared, springing up with delight, for the mere thought of going to Court seemed to give her intense pleasure. Yet all women, young and old, are alike in that respect. The struggle to set foot near the throne is, as you yourself have seen, always an unseemly one, and, alas! the cause of many heart-burnings.

When I looked in at Tresternitz's room in the Palace next morning, I scribbled down the name of mother and daughter for cards.

"Who are they?" grunted the old marshal, removing a big cigar from his puffy lips.

"People I know—they're all right, and the girl is very good-looking."

"Good. We can do with a little beauty here nowadays. We've had an infernally ugly lot at the balls lately," declared the man, who was the greatest gossip at Court, and who thereupon commenced to tell me a scandalous story regarding one of the ladies-in-waiting to the Kaiserin who had disappeared from the New Palace, and was believed to be living in Scotland.

"The Emperor is furious," he added. "But he doesn't know the real truth, and never will, I expect."

A week later the Crown-Prince and Princess gave a grand ball at the Marmor Palace at Potsdam, and the Emperor himself attended.

Frau Breitenbach, gorgeously attired, made her bow before the All-Highest, and her daughter did the same.

That night I saw that the Kaiser was in no good mood. He seldom was at the Court functions. Indeed, half an hour before his arrival the Crown-Prince had told me, in confidence, of his father's annoyance at the failure of some diplomatic negotiations with Britain.

The Emperor, in his brilliant uniform, with the Order of the Black Eagle, of which he was chef-souverain, and the diamond stars of many foreign Orders, presented a truly Imperial figure, his shrewd, unrelenting gaze everywhere, his upturned moustache accentuated, his voice unusually sharp and commanding.

I spoke with Elise, and afterwards, when I danced with her I saw how impressed she was by the glitter and glamour of the Potsdam Court circle, and by the fact that she was in the presence of the All-Highest One, without whose gracious nod nothing could hope to prosper in the Fatherland, and without whose approval no public work could be undertaken in Berlin. Those statesmen, admirals and generals present might plan, but he alone willed. His approval or his frown was as a decree of Providence, and his autocratic will greater than that of his "brother," Nicholas of Russia.

I remember how, one day in the Militär-Kabinett, an old buffer at Court whom we called "Hans" Hohenlohe—he was one of the hundred and sixty odd members of the aristocratic family of Hohenlohe which swarm the Fatherland, mostly penurious, by-the-way, salary-grabbers, all elbowing each other to secure the Kaiser's favour—made a very true remark which has ever remained in my memory. It was very soon after Herr von Libenau, the Imperial Master of Ceremony, had been arrested owing to a scandal at Court, though perfectly innocent. My friend "Hans" Hohenlohe said in a low, confidential whisper at a shooting party, after the French Ambassador had wished us a merry bon jour and passed out:

"My dear friend Heltzendorff, you, like myself, know that war is inevitable. It must come soon! The reason is to be found in the madness of the Emperor, which has spread among our military party and among the people, till most of them are no more sane than himself. Hypnotized by good fortune, we have become demented with an overweening vanity and a philosophy which must end in our undoing. The Emperor's incessant drum-beating, sabre-rattling, and blasphemous appeals to the Almighty have brought our German nation

to that state which, since the world began, has ever gone before destruction."

No truer words were ever spoken of modern Germany.

They recurred to me as, while waltzing with the pretty daughter of the Dortmund parvenu, I noticed the Emperor standing aside, chatting with old Von Zeppelin, who every now and then patted his silvery hair, a habit of his when in conversation. With the pair stood Ernst Auguste, the young Duke of Brunswick, who in the following year married the Emperor's daughter, the rather petulant and go-ahead Victoria Louise. The Prince, who wore the uniform of the Prussian Guard, was laughing heartily over some remark of old Zeppelin's as, with my partner, I passed quite close to them.

The dainty Elise was, I found, quite an entertaining little person. Old Tresternitz had already whispered his opinion of her.

"Undoubtedly the prettiest girl at Court," he had declared, with a twinkle in his grey eyes.

From words the pretty Elise let drop that night as she hung upon my arm I wondered whether she was really as ingenuous as she pretended. And yet Frau Breitenbach was one of dozens of others who strove to enter the Court circle, flapping their wings vainly to try and cross the wide gulf which separated the "high life" in Berlin from "Court life."

The rooms were stifling, therefore I took my pretty dancing partner along a corridor and through several deserted apartments into the east wing of the Palace, showing her some of the Crown-Princess's private rooms, until at length we stepped through a French window on to the long terrace before the lake, the Heilige-See.

There we were alone. The white moon was reflected upon the waters, and after the heat of the ball-room the balmy air was delightful.

Against the marble balustrade beside the water I stood chatting with her. All was silent save for the tramp of soldiers passing near, for the guard was at that hour changing. As became a courtier, I chaffed and laughed with her, my intention being to learn more concerning her.

But she was, I found, an extremely discreet and clever little person, a fact which further increased the mystery.

One night about two months later I had an appointment with Max Reinhardt at the Deutsches Theater, in Berlin, to arrange a Royal visit there, and after

the performance I went back to the Palace, prior to retiring to my rooms in the Krausenstrasse. The guards saluted as I crossed the dark courtyard, and having passed through the corridors to the private apartments I entered with my key the Crown-Prince's locked study.

To my surprise, I found "Willie" seated there with the Emperor in earnest discussion.

With apology, I bowed instantly and withdrew, whereupon the Kaiser exclaimed:

"Come in, Heltzendorff. I want you."

Then he cast a quick, mysterious glance at the young man, who had thrown himself in lazy attitude into a long cane lounge chair. It was as though His Majesty was hesitating to speak with me, or asking his son's permission to do so.

"Tell me, Heltzendorff," exclaimed His Majesty suddenly, "do you know this person?" and he placed before my astonished gaze a very artistic cabinet photograph of the pretty Elise.

"Yes," I answered frankly, quite taken aback. "It is Fräulein Breitenbach."

"And what do you know of her?" inquired His Majesty sharply. "You introduced her and her mother to Court, I believe."

I saw that the Emperor had discovered something which annoyed him. What could it be?

At once I was compelled to admit that I had set down their names for invitation, and, further, I explained all that I knew about them.

"You are certain you know nothing more?" asked the Emperor, his brows contracted and his eyes fixed steadily upon mine. "Understand that no blame attaches to you."

I assured him that I had revealed all that I knew concerning them.

"Hold no further communication with either mother or daughter," His Majesty said. "Leave for Paris by the eight o'clock train to-morrow morning, and go to Baron von Steinmetz, the chief of our confidential service in France."

Then, turning to the Crown-Prince, he said: "You have his address."

"Yes," said the younger man. "He is passing as Monsieur Felix Reumont, and is living at 114 bis, Avenue de Neuilly, close to the Pont."

I scribbled the name and address upon the back of an envelope, whereupon His Majesty said:

"Carry my verbal orders to Steinmetz, and tell him to act upon the orders I sent him by courier yesterday. And you will assist him. He will explain matters fully when you arrive."

Then, crossing to the Crown-Prince's writing-table, His Majesty took a large envelope, into which, with the same hand, he dexterously placed the photograph with several papers, and sealed them with the Crown-Prince's seal. At the moment the Crown-Princess entered, said some words to her husband in a low voice, and went out again.

"Give this to Von Steinmetz from me," His Majesty said after she had gone.

I bowed as I took it from His Majesty's hand, my curiosity now greatly excited regarding Frau Breitenbach and her pretty daughter. What, I wondered, was in the wind?

"And, Heltzendorff, please report to me," remarked the Heir, still lounging lazily in the chair, his white, well-manicured hands clasped behind his head. "Where shall you stay?"

"At the Hôtel Chatham. I always stay there in preference to the larger hotels."

"And not a bad judge," laughed His Majesty merrily. "I remember when I used to go to Paris incognito one could dine at the 'Chatham' most excellently—old-fashioned, but very good. Vian's, across the road, is also good."

The Kaiser knows Paris well, though he has never visited the French capital openly.

Bowing, I took leave of my Imperial master, and next morning at eight o'clock, set out upon my mysterious mission.

I found the Baron von Steinmetz living in a good-sized house in the leafy Avenue de Neuilly, not far from the bridge. One of the cleverest and most astute officials that Germany possessed, and a man high in the Kaiser's favour, he had, in the name of Felix Reumont, purchased, with Government funds of course, a cinema theatre in the Rue Lafayette, and ostensibly upon the proceeds of that establishment lived comfortably out at Neuilly.

At eleven o'clock in the morning his valet, evidently a German, showed me in.

"I quite understand, my dear Heltzendorff," he said, as in his cosy little den he took from the Emperor's packet the picture of Fräulein Elise and stood gazing at it thoughtfully. "It is quite plain why you should have been sent by His Majesty."

"Why. I don't understand. But His Majesty told me that you would explain. The young lady and her mother are friends of mine."

"Exactly. That's just it!" exclaimed the round-faced, rather florid man whom I had once met before. "You apparently know but little of them—eh?—or you would not call them your friends!"

Those mysterious words surprised me, but I was the more astounded when he continued:

"You of course know of those disgraceful anonymous letters which have been continually arriving at Court—of the Emperor's fury concerning them."

I replied in the affirmative, for, as a matter of fact, for the past three months the whole Court had been flooded with most abusive and disgraceful correspondence concerning the camarilla that had again sprung up around the Kaiser. The Emperor, the Empress, the Crown-Prince and Princess, Prince Eitel, Sophie Caroline, Prince Henry of Prussia and others had received letters, most of them in typewriting, containing the most intimate details of scandals concerning men and women around the Emperor.

Fully a dozen of these letters addressed to the Crown-Prince he had handed to me—letters denouncing in some cases perfectly innocent people, destroying the reputations of honest men and women, and abusing the Heir to the Throne in an outrageous manner.

On at least three occasions "Willie" had shown me letters addressed to the Kaiser himself, and intercepted by the Kaiserin, who, in consequence of this flood of anonymous epistles that had produced such a terrible sensation at Potsdam, had ordered that all such letters found in the Imperial post-bag should be handed at once to her.

The great War-Lord's feelings had been sorely wounded by the vitriolic shafts, and his vanity much injured by the boldness of the unknown letter-writer who had dared to speak his mind concerning the Eulenburg scandals, which Maximilian Harden had some time before exposed in the *Zukunft*.

All Berlin was gossiping about the scandal of the letters and the horrible innuendoes contained in them. The Allerhöchste Person, though boiling over with anger, blissfully believed that outside the Palaces nothing was known of the contents of the correspondence. But the Emperor, in his vanity, never accurately gauges the mind of his people.

"The identity of the writer is the point that is engaging my attention," the Baron said, as, seating himself at his big, carved-oak writing-table, he opened a drawer and drew forth a bundle of quite a hundred letters, adding: "All these that you see here have been addressed either to the Emperor or the Empress," and he handed me one or two, which on scanning I saw contained some outrageous statements, allegations which would make the hair of the All-Highest One bristle with rage.

"Well!" I exclaimed, aghast, looking up at the Baron after I had read an abusive letter, which in cold, even lines of typewriting commenced with the words: "You, a withered crook in spectacular uniform better fitted for the stage of the Metropol Theatre, should, instead of invoking the aid of Providence, clear out your own Augean stable. Its smell is nauseous to the nostrils of decent people. Surely you should blush to have feasted in the castle of Liebenberg with the poet, Prince Philip, and your degenerate companions, Hohenau, Johannes Lynar, and your dearly beloved Kuno!"

And the abusive missive proceeded to denounce two of my friends, ladies-in-waiting at the Neues Palais, and to make some blackguardly allegations concerning the idol. Von Hindenburg.

"Well," I exclaimed, "that certainly is a very interesting specimen of anonymous correspondence."

"Yes, it is!" exclaimed the Baron. "In Berlin every inquiry has been made to trace its author. Schunke, head of the detective police, was charged by the Emperor to investigate. He did so, and both he and Klewitz failed utterly. Now it has been given into my hands."

"Have you discovered any clue to the writer?" I asked anxiously, knowing full well what a storm of indignation those letters had produced in our own circle.

Presently, when I sat with the Baron at his table, he switched on an intense electric light, even though it was day-time, and then spread out some of the letters above a small, square mirror.

"You see they are on various kinds of note-paper, bearing all kinds of watermarks, of French, English, and German manufacture. Some we have

here are upon English paper, because it is heavy and thick. Again, three different makes of typewriter have been used—one a newly-invented importation from America. The written letters are, you will see, mostly in a man's hand."

"Yes, I see all that," I said. "But what have you discovered concerning their author? The letter I received bore a French stamp and the postmark of Angers."

He placed before me quite a dozen envelopes addressed to the Emperor and Empress, all bearing the postmark of that town in the Maine-et-Loire. Others had been posted in Leipzig, Wilhelmshaven, Tours, Antwerp, Berlin-Wilmersdorf, and other places.

"The investigation is exceedingly difficult, I can assure you," he said. "I have had the assistance of some of the best scientific brains of our Empire in making comparisons and analyses. Indeed, Professor Harbge is with me from Berlin."

As he uttered those words the Professor himself, an elderly, spectacled man in grey tweeds, entered the room. I knew him and greeted him.

"We have been studying the writing-papers," the Professor said presently, as he turned over the letters, some of which were upon commercial typewriting paper, some on cheap thin paper from fashionable "blocks," and others upon various tinted paper of certain mills, as their watermarks showed. The papers were various, but the scurrilous hand was the clever and evasive one of some person who certainly knew the innermost secrets of the German Court.

"Sixteen different varieties of paper have been received at the Neues and Marmor Palaces," the Baron remarked. "Well, I have worked for two months, night and day, upon the inquiry, for, as you know, the tentacles of our Teuton octopus are everywhere. I have discovered that eleven of these varieties of paper can be purchased at a certain small stationer's shop, Lancry's, in the Boulevard Haussmann, close to the 'Printemps.' One paper especially is sold nowhere else in Paris. It is this."

And he held over a mirror a letter upon a small sheet of note-paper bearing the watermark of a bull's head.

"That paper was made at a mill in the south of Devonshire, in England, destroyed by fire five years ago. Paper of that make cannot be obtained anywhere else in France," he declared.

I at once realized how much patience must have been expended upon the inquiry, and said:

"Then you have actually fixed the shop where the writer purchased his paper?"

"Yes," he replied. "And we know that the newly-invented typewriter, a specimen one, was sold by the Maison Audibert, in Marseilles. The purchaser of the typewriter in Marseilles purchases his paper and envelopes at Lancry's, in the Boulevard Haussmann."

"Splendid!" I said enthusiastically, for it was clear that the Baron, with the thousand-and-one secret agents at his beck and call, had been able, with the Professor's aid, to fix the source of the stationery. "But," I added, "what is wanted from me?" Why, I wondered, had His Majesty sent the Baron that photograph of Elise Breitenbach?

"I want you to go with me to the central door of the 'Printemps' at four o'clock this afternoon, and we will watch Lancry's shop across the way," the Baron replied.

This we did, and from four till six o'clock we stood, amid the bustle of foot passengers, watching the small stationer's on the opposite side of the boulevard, yet without result.

Next day and the next I accompanied the prosperous cinema proprietor upon his daily vigil, but in vain, until his reluctance to tell me the reason why I had been sent to Paris annoyed me considerably.

On the fifth afternoon, just before five o'clock, while we were strolling together, smoking and chatting, the Baron's eyes being fixed upon the door of the small single-fronted shop, I saw him suddenly start, and then make pretence of utter indifference.

"Look!" he whispered beneath his breath.

I glanced across and saw a young man just about to enter the shop.

The figure was unfamiliar, but, catching sight of his face, I held my breath. I had seen that sallow, deep-eyed countenance before.

It was the young man who, two months previously, had sat eating his luncheon alone at the "Esplanade," apparently fascinated by the beauty of little Elise Breitenbach!

"Well," exclaimed the Baron. "I see you recognize him—eh? He is probably going to buy more paper for his scurrilous screeds."

"Yes. But who is he? What is his name?" I asked anxiously. "I have seen him before, but have no exact knowledge of him."

The Baron did not reply until we were back again in the cosy room in Neuilly. Then, opening his cigar-box, he said:

"That young man, the author of the outrageous insults to His Majesty, is known as Franz Seeliger, but he is the disgraced, ne'er-do-well son of General von Trautmann, Captain-General of the Palace Guard."

"The son of old Von Trautmann!" I gasped in utter amazement. "Does the father know?"

The Baron grinned and shrugged his shoulders.

Then after I had related to him the incident at the "Esplanade," he said:

"That is of greatest interest. Will you return to Berlin and report to the Emperor what you have seen here? His Majesty has given me that instruction."

Much mystified, I was also highly excited that the actual writer of those abominable letters had been traced and identified. The Baron told me of the long weeks of patient inquiry and careful watching; of how the young fellow had been followed to Angers and other towns in France where the letters were posted, and of his frequent visits to Berlin. He had entered a crack regiment, but had been dismissed the Army for forgery and undergone two years' imprisonment. Afterwards he had fallen in with a gang of clever international hotel thieves, and become what is known as a rat d'hôtel. Now, because of a personal grievance against the Emperor, who had ordered his prosecution, he seemed to have by some secret means ferreted out every bit of scandal at Potsdam, exaggerated it, invented amazing additions, and in secret sown it broadcast.

His hand would have left no trace if he had not been so indiscreet as to buy his paper from that one shop close to the Rue de Provence, where he had rooms.

On the third night following I stood in the Emperor's private room at Potsdam and made my report, explaining all that I knew and what I had witnessed in Paris.

"That man knows a very great deal—but how does he know?" snapped the Emperor, who had just returned from Berlin, and was in civilian attire, a garb quite unusual to him. He had no doubt been somewhere incognito—visiting a friend perhaps. "See Schunke early to-morrow," he ordered, "and tell him to discover the link between this young blackguard and your friends the Breitenbachs, and report to me."

I was about to protest that the Breitenbachs were not my friends, but next instant drew my breath, for I saw that the great War-Lord, even though he wore a blue serge suit, was filled with suppressed anger.

"This mystery must be cleared up!" he declared in a hard voice, reflecting no doubt upon the terrible abuse which the writer had heaped upon him, all the allegations, by-the-way, having contained a certain substratum of truth.

Next morning I sat with the bald-headed and astute Schunke at the headquarters of the detective police in Berlin, and there discussed the affair fully, explaining the result of my journey to Paris and what I had seen, and giving him the order from the Kaiser.

"But, Count, if this woman Breitenbach and her pretty daughter are your friends you will be able to visit them and glean something," he said.

"I have distinct orders from the Emperor not to visit them while the inquiry is in process," I replied.

Schunke grunted in dissatisfaction, stroked his iron-grey beard, but made no further comment.

We walked out together, and I left him at the door of the Etat-major of the Army in the Königsplatz.

Later that same morning I returned to the Marmor Palace to report to the Crown-Prince, but found that His Highness was absent upon an official visit of inspection at Stuttgart. The Marshal of the Court, Tresternitz, having given me the information, laughed, and added:

"Officially, according to to-day's newspapers, His Highness is in Stuttgart, but unofficially I know that he is at the Palace Hotel, in Brussels, where there is a short-skirted variety attraction singing at the Eden Theatre. So, my dear Heltzendorff, you can return to the Krausenstrasse for a day or two."

I went back to Berlin, the Crown-Princess being away at Wiesbaden, and from day to day awaited "Willie's" return.

In the meantime I several times saw the great detective, Schunke, and found that he was in constant communication with Baron Steinmetz in Paris. The pair were evidently leaving no stone unturned to elucidate the mystery of those annoying letters, which were still falling as so many bombs into the centre of the Kaiser's Court.

Suddenly, one Sunday night, all Berlin was electrified at the news that General von Trautmann, Captain-General of the Palace Guard—whom, truth to tell, the Crown-Prince had long secretly hated because he had once dared to utter some word of reproach—had been arrested, and sent to a fortress at the Emperor's order.

An hour after the arrest His Majesty's personal-adjutant commanded me by telephone to attend at the Berlin Schloss. When we were alone the Kaiser turned to me suddenly, and said:

"Count von Heltzendorff, you will say nothing of your recent visit to Paris, or of the authorship of those anonymous letters—you understand? You know absolutely nothing."

Then, being summarily dismissed by a wave of the Imperial hand, I retired, more mystified than ever. Why should my mouth be thus closed? I dared not call at the Alsenstrasse to make my own inquiries, yet I knew that the police had made theirs.

When I returned to my rooms that evening Schunke rang me up on the telephone with the news that my friends the Breitenbachs had closed their house and left early that morning for Brussels.

"Where is Seeliger?" I inquired in great surprise.

"In Brussels. The Breitenbachs have gone there to join him, now that the truth is out and his father is under arrest."

The Emperor's fury was that of a lunatic. It knew no bounds. His mind, poisoned against the poor old General, he had fixed upon him as the person responsible for that disgraceful correspondence which for so many weeks had kept the Court in constant turmoil and anxiety. Though His Majesty was aware of the actual writer of the letters, he would not listen to reason, and openly declared that he would make an example of the silver-haired old Captain-General of the Guard, who, after all, was perfectly innocent of the deeds committed by his vagabond son.

A prosecution was ordered, and three weeks later it took place in camera, the Baron, Schunke and a number of detectives being ordered to give

evidence. So damning, indeed, was their testimony that the Judge passed the extreme sentence of twenty years' imprisonment.

And I, who knew and held proofs of the truth, dared not protest!

Where was the General's son—the real culprit and author of the letters? I made inquiry of Schunke, of the Baron, and of others who had, at the order of the All-Highest, conspired to ruin poor Von Trautmann. All, however, declared ignorance, and yet, curiously enough, the fine house in the Alsenstrasse still remained empty.

Later, I discovered that the Crown-Prince had been the prime mover in the vile conspiracy to send the elderly Captain-General to prison and to the grave, for of this his words to me one day—a year afterwards—were sufficient proof:

"It is a good job, Heltzendorff, that the Emperor rid himself at last of that canting old pest, Von Trautmann. He is now in a living tomb, and should have been there four years ago!" and he laughed.

I made no response. Instead, I thought of the quiet, innocent old courtier languishing in prison because he had somehow incurred the ill-will of the Emperor's son, and I confess that I ground my teeth at my own inability to expose the disgraceful truth.

About six months after the secret trial of the unfortunate General I had accompanied the Crown-Prince on a visit to the Quirinal, and one afternoon while strolling along the Corso, in Rome, suddenly came face to face with the dainty little figure of Fräulein Elise Breitenbach.

In delight I took her into Ronzi's, the noted confectioner's at the corner of the Piazza Colonna, and there, at one of the little tables, she explained to me how she and her mother, having become acquainted with Franz Seeliger—not knowing him to be the General's son—they suddenly fell under the suspicion of the Berlin Secret Police, and, though much puzzled, did not again come to Court.

Some weeks later mother and daughter chanced to be in Paris, and one day called at Seeliger's rooms in the Rue de Provence, but he was out. They, however, were shown into his room to wait, and there saw upon his table an abusive and scurrilous typewritten letter in German addressed to the Emperor. Then it suddenly dawned upon them that the affable young man might be the actual author of those infamous letters. It was this visit which, no doubt, revealed to the Baron the young man's hiding-place. Both mother and daughter, however, kept their own counsel, met Seeliger next day, and

watched, subsequently learning, to their surprise, that he was the son of General von Trautmann, and, further, that he had as a friend one of the personal valets of the Emperor, from whom, no doubt, he obtained his inside information about persons at Court.

"When his poor father was sentenced we knew that the young man was living in Brussels, and at once went there in order to induce him to come forward, make confession, and so save the General from disgrace," said the pretty girl seated before me. "On arrival we saw him alone, and told him what we had discovered in the Rue de Provence, whereupon he admitted to us that he had written all the letters, and announced that he intended to return to Berlin next day and give himself up to the police in order to secure his father's release."

"And why did he not do so?" I asked eagerly.

"Because next morning he was found dead in his bed in the hotel."

"Ah, suicide."

"No," was her half-whispered reply. "He had been strangled by an unknown hand—deliberately murdered, as the Brussels police declared. They were, of course, much mystified, for they did not know, as we know, that neither the young man's presence nor his confession were desired in Berlin."

Fearing the Emperor's wrath, the Breitenbachs, like myself, dare not reveal what they knew—the truth, which is here set down for the first time—and, alas! poor General von Trautmann died in prison at Mulheim last year.

SECRET NUMBER THREE

HOW THE KAISER PERSECUTED A PRINCESS

The truth of the dastardly plot which caused the downfall of the unfortunate and much-maligned Imperial Princess Luisa Antoinette Marie, Archduchess of Austria, and wife of Friedrich-August, now the reigning King of Saxony, has never yet been revealed.

I know, my dear Le Queux, that you had a good deal to do with the "skittish Princess," as she was called, and her affairs after she had left the Court of Saxony and went to live near you in the Via Benedetto da Foiano, in Florence. You were her friend, and you were afterwards present at her secret marriage in London. Therefore, what I here reveal concerning a disgraceful conspiracy by which a clever, accomplished, and generous Princess of the blood Royal was hounded out of Germany will, I think, be of peculiar interest to yourself and to those readers for whom you are setting down my reminiscences.

As you know, before being appointed to my recent position in the Crown-Prince "Willie's" household, I was personal-adjutant to His Majesty the Emperor, and in that capacity accompanied Der Einzige (the One) on his constant travels. Always hungry for popular applause, the Emperor was ever on the move with that morbid restlessness of which he is possessed, and which drove him from city to city, hunting, yachting, unveiling statues, opening public buildings, paying ceremonial visits, or, when all excuses for travel became exhausted, he presented new colours to some regiment in some far-off garrison.

Indeed, within that one year, 1902, I accompanied "William-the-Sudden" and his host of adjutants, military and civil secretaries, valets, chasseurs and flunkies, to twenty-eight different cities in Germany and Scandinavia, where he stopped and held Court. Some cities we visited several times, being unwelcome always because of the endless trouble, anxiety and expense caused to the municipal authorities and military casinos.

I, of course, knew the charming Imperial Highness the Crown-Princess Luisa of Saxony, as she often came on visits to the Kaiserin, but I had never spoken much with her until at Easter the Emperor went to visit Dresden. He took with him, among other people, one of his untitled boon companions, Judicial Councillor Löhlein, a stout, flabby-faced hanger-on, who at the time possessed great influence over him. Indeed, he was really the Emperor's financial agent. This man had, some time ago, very fortunately for the Emperor, opened his eyes to the way in which Kunze had manipulated the

amazing Schloss Freiheit Lottery, and had been able to point out to the All-Highest One what a storm of ridicule, indignation and defiance must arise in Berlin if he attempted to carry out his huge reconstruction and building scheme.

I was present in the Emperor's room at Potsdam when old Löhlein, with whom sat Herr von Wedell, openly declared to the Emperor that if he prosecuted his pet building scheme great indignation must arise, not only in the capital, but in Hanover, Wiesbaden, and Kassel.

The Kaiser knitted his brows and listened attentively to both of his advisers. I well remember how, next day, the Press, in order to allay the public dissatisfaction, declared that the huge building projects of the Emperor never existed. They had been purely imaginary ideas put forward by a syndicate of speculative builders and taken up by the newspapers.

Without doubt the podgy, fair-haired man in gold-rimmed spectacles, the Judicial Councillor Löhlein, by crushing the Kaiser's mad scheme gained considerable popularity in a certain circle. He was, however, a man of exceptional craft and cunning, and during the eight years or so he remained the intimate friend of the Emperor he must have, by advising and looking after the Imperial investments, especially in America, amassed a great fortune.

On the occasion of our Easter visit to the Saxon Court—a Court which, to say the least, was a most dull and uninteresting one—we all went, as is the custom there, to the shoot at the Vogelschiessen, a large wooden bird made up of pieces which fall out when hit in a vital part. The bird target is set up at the Easter fair held close to Dresden, and on that afternoon the whole Court annually go to try their skill at marksmanship. We were a merry party. The Emperor went with the old King and Queen of Saxony, being accompanied by the Crown-Prince Friedrich-August and the Crown-Princess Luisa, merry, laughing, full of spirits, and unusually good-looking for a Royalty.

The Saxon Royal Family all shot, and, thanks to her father's tuition, the Crown-Princess knocked a piece out of the bird at the first shot, which sent the public wild with enthusiasm.

Luisa was the most popular woman in Saxony, and deservedly so, for hers had been a love match. Her father, Ferdinand IV., Grand Duke of Tuscany, had, at the suggestion of the Emperor Francis Joseph, endeavoured to arrange a match between the Princess and the man now known as "foxy" Ferdinand of Bulgaria. With that object a grand *dîner de cérémonie* was held

one night at the Imperial Castle of Salzburg, and at that dinner Luisa, suspecting the conspiracy, publicly insulted the Ruler of Bulgaria, which for ever put an end to the paternal plans.

After her marriage to the Saxon Crown-Prince the Kaiser, in one of his whimsical moods, became greatly attached to her because of her frankness, her love of outdoor life, and her high educational attainments, hence we often had her visiting at Potsdam or at the Berlin Schloss. She was known to be one of the few feminine Royalties in whom the Kaiser took the slightest interest.

After our return from the public shooting to the Royal Palace in Dresden, a banquet was, of course, held in honour of the Emperor in that great hall where, on the walls, the four estates are represented by scenes from the history of the Emperor Henry I.

At the grand ball afterwards I found myself chatting with Luisa, who, I recollect, wore a most charming and artistic gown of sea-green chiffon, décolleté, of course, with pink carnations in her hair and a few diamonds upon her corsage, as well as the Order of St. Elizabeth and her magnificent rope of matched pearls, which went twice round her neck and reached to her knees—a historic set which had once belonged to Marie Antoinette. She looked very charming, and, in her frank way, asked me:

"How do you like my dress, Count? I designed it myself," she added.

I complimented her upon it, but I afterwards heard that the old King of Saxony had been horrified at the lowness to which the bodice had been cut, and, further, that every yard of green chiffon in Dresden had been sold out before noon next day and the dress copied everywhere.

As we stood chatting in a corner of the room, watching the scene of unusual brilliancy because of the Kaiser's presence, the Princess, turning to me, said suddenly:

"Do you believe in omens, Count von Heltzendorff?"

"Omens!" I exclaimed, rather surprised at her question. "Really, I'm afraid I am a little too matter-of-fact to take such things seriously, your Highness."

"Well, a curious thing happened here about a month ago," she said. "I was—" At that instant the Emperor, in the uniform of the 2nd Regiment of Saxon Grenadiers, of which he was chief, and wearing the Order of Crancelin of the House of Saxony, strode up, and, standing before us exclaimed:

"Well, Luisa? What is the very interesting topic of conversation, eh?" He had evidently overheard her words about some curious thing happening, for, laughing gaily, he asked; "Now, what did happen a month ago?"

Her Imperial Highness hesitated, as though endeavouring to avoid an explanation, but next second she waved her lace fan quickly and said:

"Well, something remarkable. I will tell your Majesty if you really wish to hear it."

"By all means, Luisa, by all means," replied His Majesty, placing his sound hand behind his back and drawing himself up very erect—a habit of his after asking a question.

"Well, recently Friedrich-August and myself have moved into rooms in the older wing of the Palace—rooms that have not been occupied for nearly forty years. They are old-world, charming, and remind me constantly of Augustus the Strong and the times in which he lived. Just about a month ago the King and Queen of Roumania were paying us a visit. We were at dinner, and while we were all laughing and talking, for 'Carmen Sylva' had been telling us one of her stories, we heard a great clatter of horses' hoofs and the heavy rumble of wheels, just as though a stage coach was crossing the Small Courtyard. All of us listened, and in the silence we heard it receding quite distinctly. I at once sent my lady-in-waiting to ascertain who had arrived or departed, four-wheeled coaches being quite unusual nowadays. It seemed just as though the coach had driven out of the Palace gate. The message brought back from the guardroom was that no carriage had entered or left. I told this to those around the table, and the Queen of Roumania, who had taken much interest in omens and folk-lore, seated opposite me, seemed much impressed, and even perturbed."

"Then the noise you heard must have been quite an uncanny one, eh?" asked the Emperor, deeply interested.

"Quite. Two of the women at the table declared that it must have been thunder, and then the conversation proceeded. I, however, confess to your Majesty that I was very much puzzled, and the more so because only two nights ago, while we sat at dinner Friedrich-August and myself en famille, we heard exactly the same sounds again!"

"Really!" laughed the Emperor. "Quite uncanny. I hope, here in Dresden, you are not believing in spooks, as London society believes in them."

"Not at all," said the Princess earnestly. "I don't believe in omens. But, curiously enough, the King told me yesterday that his two old aunts, who

formerly lived in our wing of the Palace, had sometimes heard the clatter of horses' hoofs, the jingle of harness, the grinding of the brakes, and the rumbling of heavy carriage wheels."

"H'm!" grunted the Emperor. "I've heard that same story before, Luisa. The departing coach means trouble to the reigning family."

"That is exactly what the King said to me only last evening," answered Luisa frankly. "Does it mean trouble to me, I wonder?"

"Certainly not," I declared. "Your Imperial Highness need not worry for one moment over such things. Nobody nowadays regards such phenomena as presage of evil. There is no doubt some perfectly natural explanation of the sounds. Every old palace, castle, and even private house, has its traditions."

"Quite right, Heltzendorff," laughed the Emperor, "especially in England and Scotland. There they have white ladies, grey ladies, men with heads like stags, lights in windows, the sound of mysterious bells ringing, and all sorts of evil omens. Oh, those dear, superstitious English! How ready they are to take up anything unpractical that may be a pleasant change to the senses."

"Your Majesty does not believe in omens?" I ventured to remark.

"Omens!" he exclaimed, fixing his gaze upon me. "No; none but cowards and old women believe in them." Then, turning to the Princess, he smiled, saying: "If I were you, Luisa, I would give your chief of police orders to question all the servants. Somebody rattled some dishes, perhaps. You say it was during dinner."

But the pretty Crown-Princess was serious, for she said:

"Well, all I can say is that not only did I myself hear, but a dozen others at table also heard the noise of horses, not dishes."

"Ah, Luisa! I see you are a trifle nervous," laughed the Emperor. "Well, as you know, your Royal House of Saxony has lasted from the days of Albert the Courageous in the early fifteenth century, and the Dynasty of the Ravenssteins has been prosperous from then until to-day, so don't trouble yourself further. Why, you are really quite pale and unnerved, I see," His Majesty added, for nothing escapes those shrewd, wide-open eyes of his.

Then the Emperor, after acknowledging the salute of Baron Georg von Metzsch, Controller of the Royal Household—a tall, thin, crafty-eyed man, with hair tinged with grey, and wearing a dark blue uniform and many

decorations—changed the topic of conversation, and referred to the Saxon Easter custom which that morning had been carried out.

The Kaiser was in particularly merry mood that night. He had gone to Dresden against his inclination, for he had long ago arranged an Easter review on the Tempelhofer Feld, but the visit was, I knew, for the purpose of a consultation in secret with the King of Saxony. A week before, in the Berlin Schloss, I had been sent by the Emperor to obtain a paper from his table in the upstairs study, and in looking for the document in question—one that he had signed and wished to send over to the Reichsamt des Innern (Office of the Interior)—I came across a letter from King George of Saxony, begging the Emperor to visit him, in order to discuss "that matter which is so seriously threatening the honour of our House."

Several times I wondered to what His Majesty of Saxony had referred. That morning Emperor and King had been closeted alone together for fully three hours, and the outcome of the secret conference seemed to have put the All-Highest into a most excellent mood.

He left us, accompanied by Baron von Metzsch and Judicial Councillor Löhlein, and I noticed how both men were talking with the Emperor in an undertone. To my surprise also I saw how Löhlein cast furtive glances towards where I still stood with the Crown-Princess.

A few moments later, however, a smart officer of the Prussian Guard, whom I recognized as Count von Castell Rudenhausen, a well-known figure in the gay life of Berlin, came forward, and, bowing, invited the Princess to waltz.

And a moment later Luisa was smiling at me across the shoulder of her good-looking cavalier.

Suddenly, while waltzing, her magnificent rope of historic matched pearls accidentally caught in the button of a passing officer, the string snapped, and many of the pearls fell rattling upon the polished floor.

In a moment a dozen officers in tight uniforms were groping about to recover them from the feet of the dancers when, during the commotion, I heard the voice of Judicial Councillor Löhlein remark quite loudly:

"Ah! now we can all see who are the Crown-Princess' admirers!"

Luisa flushed instantly in anger and annoyance, but said nothing, whilst her lady-in-waiting in silence took the broken rope of pearls, together with those recovered from the floor, and a few moments later the significant incident ended.

The Saxon Crown-Prince and his wife were at that time a most devoted couple, though all of us knew that the modern ideas Luisa had brought to Dresden from the Hapsburg Court had much shocked old King George and his consort. The Saxon Court was unused to a pretty woman with buoyant spirits rejoicing in life with a capital "L." According to the Court whisperings, trouble had started a few days after marriage, when the King, having given his daughter-in-law a tiara of diamonds, a Royal heirloom, with strict injunctions to wear them just as they were—a style of the seventeenth century—he one evening at the opera saw her wearing the stones re-set in that style known as art nouveau. The King became furious, and ordered them to be set again in their original settings, whereupon Luisa coolly returned the present.

Such was the commencement of the old King's ill-feeling towards her.

The State ball that night was certainly a brilliant one for such a small Court, and next day we all returned to Potsdam, for the Emperor had suddenly cancelled a number of engagements and arranged to pay a visit to Wilhelmshaven, where the Kaiserliche Werft (Imperial Dockyard) contained certain naval secrets he wished to see.

Before we left Dresden, however, I met the Crown-Princess in one of the corridors. It was nine o'clock in the morning. She wore her riding-habit, for, being a splendid horsewoman, she had just come in from her morning canter.

"Well, Count!" she laughed. "So you are leaving us unexpectedly! I shall be coming to pay another visit to Potsdam soon. The Emperor invited me last night. Au revoir!" And after I had bent over her small white hand she waved it merrily and passed the sentry towards her private apartments, wherein she had heard the ghostly coach and four.

Her Imperial Highness paid her promised visit to the Empress at the Neues Palais in July.

At the time of her arrival the Emperor had left suddenly and gone away to Hubertusstock. When anything unusual upset him he always went there. I overheard him the day before his departure shouting to Löhlein as I passed along one of the corridors. The Judicial Councillor seemed to be trying to pacify him, but apparently entirely without avail, for the Emperor is a man not easily convinced.

"You are as sly as all the rest!" I heard the Emperor declare in that shrill, high-pitched tone which always denotes his anger. "I'll hear none of it—no excuses. I want no fawning, no Jew-juggling."

Then, fearing to be discovered, I slipped on past the door.

The next I heard was that the Kaiser had left for that lonely retreat to which he went when he wished to be alone in those periods of crazy impetuosity which periodically seized the Mad Dog of Europe; and, further, that he had taken with him his crafty crony, Löhlein.

During that mysterious absence—when the tinselled world of Potsdam seemed at peace—the good-looking Saxon Crown-Princess arrived.

I was on duty on the railway platform to bow over her hand and to welcome her.

"Ah! Count von Heltzendorff! Well, did I not say that I should not be very long before I returned to Potsdam, eh?" she exclaimed. Then, in a whisper, she said with a merry laugh: "Do you remember those clattering hoofs and my broken rope of pearls? Nothing has happened yet."

"And nothing will," I assured her as, with a courtier's obeisance, I conducted Her Imperial Highness to the Royal carriage, where the Crown-Prince "Willie" was awaiting her, chatting with two officers of the Guard to while away the time.

Three days later an incident occurred which caused me a good deal of thought, and, truth to tell, mystified me considerably.

That somewhat indiscreet journal, the *Militär Wochenblatt*, had published a statement to the effect that Friedrich-August of Saxony and the handsome Luisa had had a violent quarrel, a fact which caused a great deal of gossip throughout Court circles.

Old Von Donaustauf, who at that time was master of the ceremonies at the Emperor's Court, busied himself by spreading strange scandals regarding the Crown-Princess Luisa. Therefore, in the circumstances, it struck me as strange that Her Highness should have been invited to the puritanical and hypocritical circle at Potsdam.

That afternoon, soon after the guard had been changed, I chanced to be writing in my room, which overlooked the big central courtyard, when I heard the guard suddenly turn out in great commotion, by which I knew that His Majesty had suddenly returned from Hubertusstock.

Ten minutes later my telephone rang, and, passing the sentries, I went by order to His Majesty's study, that chamber of plots and secrets, hung with its faded pale green silk damask, its furniture covered with the same

material, and its net curtains at the windows threaded with ribbons of the same shade.

The moment I entered the Emperor's countenance showed me that he was very angry. His low-bowing crony, Löhlein, always a subtle adviser, had returned with him, and stood watching the Emperor as the latter impatiently paced the room.

I saluted, awaiting orders in silence, as was my habit, but so preoccupied was His Majesty that he did not notice my presence, but continued his outburst of furious wrath. "Only see what Von Hoensbroech has reported!" he cried, suddenly halting against one of those big buhl chests of drawers with grey marble tops—heavy pieces of furniture veneered with tortoise-shell in which the Emperor keeps his official papers. "I am being made a laughing-stock—and you know it, Löhlein! It has been said of us that a woman, a whim, or a word will to-day raise any person to high rank in our Empire! That blackguard, Harden, has actually dared to write it in his journal. Well, we shall see. That woman—she shall——"

As the Kaiser uttered those words he suddenly realized that I was present, and hesitated. Next second both his tone and his manner changed.

"Heltzendorff—I—I—wish you to go to Dresden and take a private letter. It will be ready in half an hour. Say nothing to anyone concerning your departure, but report to me here at"—and he glanced at the small bronze clock on the overmantel between two elegant candelabra—"at four o'clock."

As commanded, I reported, but the Kaiser was with the Empress, who, in one of her private apartments, was holding petit cercle, the Princess Luisa being present. Indeed, as I entered that semi-circular salon the Kaiser was standing astride before Luisa's chair laughing gaily with her. Surely none who saw him at that moment would ever have believed that not half an hour before his face had been blanched by anger. He could alter his moods just as he changed his three hundred odd uniforms.

There was something mysterious in the wind—of that I felt absolutely convinced. The atmosphere of that faded green upstairs room was always one of confidential conversations, intimate conferences and secret plots—plots despicable and vile, as has since been proved—against the peace of the world.

The Emperor, noticing that I had entered the Imperial presence, came forward, and I followed him back into the softly-carpeted corridor. Then his action further aroused my curiosity, for he took from the inner pocket of his tunic an envelope of what you in England call "court" size—linen-lined, as

are all envelopes used by the Emperor for his private correspondence. I saw it had been sealed in black by his own hand. Then, as he handed it to me, he said:

"Go to Dresden as quickly as possible and obtain a reply to this."

I clicked my heels together, and, saluting, left upon my secret mission to the Saxon Court.

The letter was addressed to Baron Georg von Metzsch at Dresden.

Next day, when I presented it to the tall, thin Controller of the Household, who sat in his small but cosy room in the Royal Palace, I saw that its contents greatly puzzled him.

He wrote a reply, and as Imperial messenger I returned at once to Potsdam, handing it to the Emperor as he strode alone from the Shell Saloon, through which he was passing after dinner.

He took it from my hand without a word. The All-Highest never bestows thanks upon those who obey his orders. It is, indeed, said to-day that Hindenburg has never once, during his whole official career, been verbally thanked by his Imperial Master.

The Emperor, with impatient fingers, tore open the envelope, read its contents, and then smiled contentedly, after which I went to old Von Donaustauf's room, and, tired out by the long journey, smoked a good cigar in his company.

Next day we were all back at the Berlin Schloss—for we never knew from day to day where we might be—Hamburg, Stuttgart, Düsseldorf or Danzig.

During the morning His Majesty inspected the Berlin garrison in the Tempelhofer Feld, and the Princess Luisa rode with him. That same afternoon, while I was busy writing in the long room allotted to me in the Berlin Schloss, Her Imperial Highness, to my surprise, entered, closing the door quietly after her.

"Count von Heltzendorff, you have been on a secret mission to that spy, Von Metzsch, in Dresden, have you not?"

I rose, bowed, and without replying courteously offered her a chair.

"Why do you not admit it?" she asked quickly.

"Princess, if the Emperor gives me orders to preserve secrecy, then it is my duty to obey," I said.

"I know," she answered, and then I realized how upset and nervous she seemed. "But Von Metzsch hates me, and has put about all sorts of scandalous reports concerning me. Ah! Count," she sighed, "you do not know how very unhappy I am—how I am surrounded by enemies!"

These words caused me much surprise, though I had, of course, heard many unsavoury rumours regarding her unhappy position at the Saxon Court.

"I much regret to hear that," I said. "But Your Imperial Highness has also many friends, of whom I hope I may be permitted to number myself."

"Ah! it is extremely good of you to say that—very good. If you are really my friend, then you can help me. You are in a position to watch and discover what is in progress—the reason the Emperor exchanges those constant confidences with Von Metzsch, the man who has twisted my husband around his little finger, and who has, with my Lady-of-the-Bedchamber, Frau von Fritsch, already poisoned his mind against me. Ah!" she sighed again, "you have no idea how much I have suffered!"

She seemed on the verge of a nervous crisis, for I saw that in her fine eyes stood the light of unshed tears, and I confess I was much puzzled, for I had certainly believed, up to that moment, that she was on excellent terms with her husband.

"But surely His Highness the Crown-Prince of Saxony does not believe any of those wicked reports?" I said.

"Ah! Then you have heard. Of course, you have. Von Metzsch has taken good care to let the whole world know the lies that he and the Countess Paule Starhemberg have concocted between them. It is cruel!" she declared in a paroxysm of grief. "It is wicked!"

"No, no. Calm yourself, Princess!" I urged sympathetically. "I am at least your friend, and will act as such should occasion arise."

"I thank you," she sighed in relief, and she put out her hand, over which I bent as I took it in friendship.

"Ah!" she exclaimed in a low voice. "I fear I shall require the assistance of a friend very soon. Do you recollect my broken pearls?"

And a few moments later she left my room.

Through all that day and the next I wondered what sly, underhand work could be in progress. I pitied the good-looking, unconventional Imperial Princess who, because of her somewhat hoydenish high spirits, had aroused the storm of anger and jealousy in the Saxon Court. But the Hapsburgs had ever been unfortunate in their loves.

On the day before the Crown-Princess's visit to the Berlin Court was due to end, at about six o'clock in the evening, I passed the sentries and ascended to the Emperor's study with some papers I had been going through regarding the reorganization of the Stettin garrison. I was one of the very few persons ever admitted to that wing of the Palace.

As I approached the door, treading noiselessly upon the soft carpet, I heard voices raised excitedly, the door being slightly ajar.

Naturally I halted. In my position I was able to hear a great deal of Palace intrigue, but never had I listened to a conversation that held me more breathless than at that moment.

"Woman," cried the Emperor, "do you, then, openly defy my authority?"

"What that crafty sycophant, Von Metzsch, has told you is, I repeat, a foul and abominable lie," was the reply.

And I knew that the unfortunate Princess was defending her reputation, which her enemies at the Court of Saxony had torn to shreds.

"No woman ever admits the truth, of course," sneered the Emperor. "I consider you a disgrace to the Dresden Court."

"So this is the manner in which you openly insult your guests!" was the Princess's bitter retort. "You, who believe yourself the idol of your people, now exhibit yourself in your true light as the traducer of a defenceless woman!"

"How dare you utter those words to me!" cried the All-Highest One, in fury.

"I dare defend myself—even though you may be Emperor," replied Luisa, in a cold, hard tone of defiance. "I repeat that your allegations are untrue, and that you have no right to make them. Surely you can see that my enemies, headed by the King of Saxony, are all conspiring to effect my downfall. I know it! I have written proof of it!"

"Bosh! You say that because you know that the statements are true!"

"You lie!" she cried fiercely. "They are not true. You cannot prove them."

"Very well," answered the Emperor in that tone of cold determination that I knew too well. "I will prove the charges to my entire satisfaction."

I was startled at the manner in which the Princess had dared to call the Emperor a liar. Surely nobody had ever done so before.

I drew a long breath, for as I crept away unseen I recollected the Kaiser's unrelenting vindictiveness.

Poor Princess! I knew that the red talons of the Hohenzollern eagle would sooner or later be laid heavily upon her.

She left Berlin two hours later, but half an hour before her departure I found a hurriedly-scribbled note upon my table explaining that she had had "a few unpleasant words with the Emperor," and that she was leaving for Dresden a day earlier than had been arranged.

A fortnight passed. Twice Baron von Metzsch came to Potsdam, and was on each occasion closely closeted with the Emperor, as well as having frequent consultations with Judicial Councillor Löhlein. I had strong suspicion that the vile conspiracy against the lively daughter of the Hapsburgs was still in progress, for I felt assured that the Kaiser would never forgive those words of defiance from a woman's lips, and that his vengeance, slow and subtle, would assuredly fall upon her.

I did not know at the time—not, indeed, until fully three years later—how the blackguardly actions of Von Metzsch, who was a creature of the Kaiser, had from the first been instigated by the All-Highest, who, from the very day of the Prince's marriage, had, notwithstanding his apparent graciousness towards her, determined that a Hapsburg should never become Queen of Saxony.

For that reason, namely, because the Emperor in his overweening vanity believes himself to be the Heaven-sent ruler of the destinies of the German Empire, was much opposed to an Austrian princess as a potential queen at Dresden, he set himself the task to ruin the poor woman's life and love and to arouse such a terrible scandal concerning her that she could not remain in Saxony with every finger pointing at her in opprobrium and scorn.

A fresh light, however, was thrown upon what I afterwards realized to be a dastardly conspiracy by the receipt of a cipher message late one November night at Potsdam. I was at work alone with the Emperor in the pale green upstairs room, reading and placing before him a number of State documents to which he scrawled his scribbly signature, when the telegram was brought.

"Decipher that, Heltzendorff," he commanded, and went on with the work of reading and signing the documents, while I sat down with the red leather-covered personal code book which bore the Imperial coronet and cipher, and presently found that the message, which was from Dresden, read:

"Frau von Fritsch to-day had an interview with Giron, the French tutor to the Crown-Princess's children, but unfortunately the latter refuses to admit any affection for Luisa. Giron angrily declared his intention to leave Dresden, because of Von Fritsch's suggestion. This course, I saw, would be unfortunate for our plans, therefore I urged the King to induce Luisa to request him to remain. She has done so, but to no avail, and Giron left for Brussels to-night. May I be permitted to come to discuss with your Majesty a further elaboration of the plan?—Von Metzsch."

The Emperor read the secret message twice. Then he paused, with knit brows, and brushed his moustache with his hand, a habit of his when perplexed.

"We go to Erfurt to-morrow, do we not?" he said. "Telegraph in cipher to Von Metzsch to meet us there to-morrow evening at seven. And destroy that message," he added.

I obeyed his orders, and afterwards continued to deal with the State papers, much enlightened by the news transmitted by the Emperor's creature.

The Imperial hand was slowly destroying the conjugal happiness of a pair who really loved each other, even though they were of the blood royal. The long arm of the Emperor was outstretched to crush and pulverize the soul of the woman who had dared to defend herself—who had defied the imperious will of that man whose hand he had, with awful blasphemy in addressing his Brandenburgers, declared to be the hand of God.

I confess that I felt the deepest sympathy for the helpless victim. At the Schloss, high above the old-world town of Erfurt, the sneaking sycophant Von Metzsch had a long conference with the Emperor but I was unable to overhear any word of it. All I know is that the Controller of the Saxon Household left Erfurt for Dresden by special train at midnight.

A quarter of an hour after the Saxon functionary had departed I was with the Emperor receiving orders for the following day, and found him in high spirits, by which, knowing him so intimately, I knew that he was confident in his ultimate triumph.

Poor, defenceless Luisa! You, my dear Le Queux, to whom the Princess a few months afterwards flew for advice, know well how sterling, how womanly

and honest she was; how she was one victim of many of the unholy, unscrupulous intrigues by which the arrogant War-Lord of Germany, aided by his devil's spawn, has until the present managed to retain his now tottering throne.

Well, I watched the course of events; watched eagerly and daily. Twice I had received letters from Her Imperial Highness, short notes in her firm, bold handwriting.

From Von Metzsch came several cipher messages to the Emperor after we had returned to Potsdam, but Zorn von Bulach, my colleague, deciphered all of them, and, as he was not my friend, I did not inquire as to their purport. I knew, however, that matters in Dresden were fast approaching a crisis, and that the unfortunate Hapsburg Princess could no longer sustain the cruel and unjust pressure being put upon her for her undoing. That a hundred of Germany's spies and agents-provocateurs were busy I realized from the many messages by telephone and telegraph passing between Berlin and Dresden, and I felt certain that the ruin of poor Princess Luisa was nigh.

A significant message came to Potsdam late one December night—a message which, when I deciphered it and handed it to the Emperor, caused him to smile in triumph.

I bit my lip. The Princess had left Dresden!

Three days later, on December 9th, a further cipher telegram came from Von Metzsch, the Emperor's sycophant in Dresden, which read: "Luisa has learnt of the Sonnenstein project, and has left Salsburg for Zurich, her brother accompanying.—Von Metzsch."

Sonnenstein! That was a private lunatic asylum! I held my breath at the awful fate which the Emperor had decided should be hers.

In a few moments the Kaiser had summoned, by his private telephone, Koehler, then chief of the Berlin secret police, and given orders that the Princess was to be watched in Switzerland. Half an hour later three police agents were on their way to Zurich to follow and persecute the poor, distracted woman, even beyond the confines of the Empire.

She was, no doubt, in deadly fear of being sent to a living tomb, so that her mouth should be closed for ever.

The Emperor, not content with casting her out of Germany, intended to wreak a terrible and fiendish revenge upon her by closing her lips and confining her in an asylum. She knew that, and seeing herself surrounded

by enemies and spies on every hand—for even her brother Leopold, with whom she had travelled to Switzerland, now refused to assist her—she adopted the only method of further escape that at the moment presented itself.

Alone and without anyone to advise her, she, as you know, took a desperate resolve, one, alas! fraught with disastrous consequences.

The iron had indeed entered the poor Princess's soul.

Note by William Le Queux

The dénouement of this base intrigue of the Emperor's will be best related in Her Imperial Highness's own words. In one of her letters, which I have on my table as I write, she says:

"I saw before me in those never-to-be-forgotten days all the horrors of a 'Maison de Santé.' What could I do? I was friendless in a strange hotel. Even Leopold seemed disinclined to be further troubled by a runaway sister. I knew Frau von Fritsch, that unscrupulous liar, had accused me falsely of having secret love affairs, and that the Emperor had directed the whole plot which was to culminate in my confinement in an asylum. Suddenly a solution occurred to me. I remembered that Monsieur Giron, who had already suffered greatly through his friendship with me. If he joined me, then my flight from Dresden would be considered as an elopement, and I should escape a living death in a madhouse! Monsieur Giron was at that moment my only friend, and it was for that reason that I telegraphed to him at Brussels. Well, he joined me, and by doing so completed the Emperor's triumph."

The subtle, ever-scheming Madman of Europe, warped as he is in soul as in body, had, with his true Hun craftiness and unscrupulousness, aided by Judicial Councillor Löhlein and the spy Von Metzsch, succeeded in hounding down an honest, defenceless woman as high born as his own diseased self, and casting her in ignominy and shame out of his now doomed Empire.

SECRET NUMBER FOUR

THE MYSTERIOUS FRAU KLEIST

The clever intrigues of Frau Kleist were unknown to any outside the Court circle at Potsdam.

She was indeed a queer personage, "only less of a personality than His Majesty," as that shiftiest of German statesmen, Prince Bülow, declared to me one day as we sat together in my room in the Berlin Schloss.

Frau Kleist was the Court dancing-mistress, whose fastidious judgment had to be satisfied by any young *débutante* or officer before they presumed to dance before Royalty at the State balls. Before every ball Frau Kleist held several dance rehearsals in the Weisser-Saal (White Salon) at the Berlin Schloss, and she was more exacting than any pompous General on parade. Perhaps she was seventy. Her real age I never knew. But, friends that we were, she often chatted with me and deplored the flat-footedness of the coming generation of Teutons, and more than once I have seen her lift her skirts and, displaying neat silk-stockinged ankles on the polished floor of the Weisser-Saal, make, for the benefit of the would-be *débutantes*, graceful tiptoe turns with a marvellous grace of movement.

Truly Frau Kleist, with her neat waist and thin, refined face, was a very striking figure at the Berlin Court. The intricacies of the minuet and gavotte, as well as those of the old-world dances in which she delighted, were taught by the old lady to Prince Joachim and Princess Victoria Luise, both of whom always went in deadly fear of her caustic tongue and overbearing manner.

The Emperor never permitted any dancing at Court which was not up to a high standard of excellence, and all who sought to dance were compelled to pass before the critical eye of the sharp-tongued old lady in her stiff silken gown.

Once, I remember, certain young people of the smart set of Berlin sought to introduce irregularities in the Lancers, but they soon discovered that their cards were cancelled.

Whence she had come or who had been responsible for her appointment nobody knew. One thing was quite certain, that though at an age when usually rheumatism prevents agility, yet she was an expert dancer. Another thing was also certain, that, if a *débutante* or a young military elegant were awkward or flat-footed, she would train them privately in the Terpsichorean art, especially in the old-world dances which are so popular at Court, and,

accepting a little palm-oil, would then pass them—after squeezing them sufficiently—as fit to receive the Imperial command to the Court balls.

The old woman, sharp-featured and angular as became her age, with her complexion powdered and rouged, lived in considerable style in a fine house close to the Glienicke Bridge at Potsdam, beneath the Babelsberg, a power to be reckoned with by all who desired to enter the Court circle.

Regarding her, many strange stories were afloat. One was that she was an ex-dancer, the mother of the famous Mademoiselle "Clo-Clo" Durand, première danseuse of the Paris Opera, and another was that she had been mistress of the ballet at the Imperial Opera in Petrograd in the days of the Emperor Alexander. But so great a mystery were her antecedents that nobody knew anything for certain, save that, at the age of nearly seventy, she had access at any hour to the Kaiser's private cabinet. I have often seen her whisper to His Majesty strange secrets which she had picked up here and there—secrets that were often transferred to certain confidential quarters which control the great Teuton octopus.

Those at Court who secured the benignant smiles of Frau Kleist knew that their future path in life would be full of sunshine, but woe betide those upon whom she knit her brows in disapproval. It was all a question of bribery. Frau Kleist kept her pretty house and her big Mercédès car upon the secret money payments she received from those who "for value" begged her favours. With many young officers the payment to Frau Kleist was to open the back door to the Emperor's favour.

We in the Neues Palais (New Palace) knew it. But surely it did not concern us, for all of us looked askance at those who strove so strenuously and eagerly for "commands" to Court functions, and really we were secretly glad if the parvenus of both sexes were well bled before they were permitted by Frau Erna to make their obeisance before Royalty.

The palace world at every European Court is a narrow little world of its own, unknown and unsuspected by the man in the street. There one sees the worst side of human nature without any leaven of the best or even nobler side. The salary-grabber, the military adventurer, the pinchbeck diplomat, the commercial parvenu, and the scientist, together with their heavy-jowled, jewel-bedecked women-folk, elbow each other in order to secure the notice of the All-Highest One, who, in that green-upholstered private room wherein I worked with him, often smiled at the unseemly bustle while he calmly discriminated among men and women according to their merits.

It is in that calm discretion that the Emperor excels, possessing almost uncanny foresight, combined with a most unscrupulous conscience.

"I know! Frau Kleist has told me!" were the words His Majesty used on many occasions when I had ventured perhaps to express doubt regarding some scandalous story or serious allegation. Therefore I was confident, even though a large section of the entourage doubted it, that the seventy-year-old dancing-mistress, whose past was a complete mystery, was an important secret agent of the Emperor's.

And what more likely? The Kaiser, as ruler of that complex empire, would naturally seek to know the truth concerning those who sought his favour before they were permitted to click their heels or wag their fans and bow the knee in his Imperial presence. And he had, no doubt, with that innate cunning, appointed his creature to the position of Court dancing-mistress.

The most elegant, corsetted Prussian officer, even though he could dance divinely, was good-looking and perfectly-groomed, would never be permitted to enter the Court circle unless a substantial number of marks were placed within the old woman's palm. It was her perquisite, and many in that ill-paid entourage envied her her means of increasing her income.

In no Court in Europe are the purse-strings held so tightly as in that of Potsdam. The Emperor and Empress, though immensely wealthy, practise the economy of London suburbia. But at every Court bribery is rife in order to obtain Royal warrants and dozens of other small favours of that kind, just as open payment is necessary to-day to obtain titles of nobility. The colour of gold has a fascination which few can resist. If it were not so there would be no war in progress to-day.

On October 17th, 1908, I had returned with the Emperor and his suite from Hamburg, where His Majesty had been present at the launching of one of Herr Ballin's monster American liners, and at three o'clock, after the Kaiser had eaten a hurried luncheon, I was seated at the side table in his private room in the Berlin Schloss, taking down certain confidential instructions which he wished to be sent at once by one of the Imperial couriers to the commandant of Posen.

Suddenly Von Kahlberg, my colleague, entered with a message that had been taken by the telegraphist attached to the Palace, and handed it to His Majesty.

Having read it, the Kaiser at once grew excited, and, turning to me, said:

"The Crown-Prince sends word from Potsdam that the American, Orville Wright, is flying on the Bornstedter Feld. We must go at once. Order the cars. And, Von Kahlberg, inform Her Majesty at once. She will accompany us, no doubt."

Quickly I placed before His Majesty one of his photographs—knowing that it would be wanted for presentation to the daring American—and he took up his pen and scrawled his signature across it. Afterwards I placed it in the small, green-painted dispatch-box of steel which I always carried when in attendance upon His Imperial Majesty.

Within a quarter of an hour three of the powerful cars were on their way to Potsdam, the Emperor with Herr Anton Reitschel—a high German official at Constantinople—and Professor Vambéry, who happened to be at the Palace at the time, in the first car; the Kaiserin with her daughter, Victoria Luise, and the latter's ober-gouvernante (governess), with one of the Court ladies, in the next; while in the third I rode with Major von Scholl, one of the equeries.

Cheers rose from the crowds as we passed through the Berlin streets, and the Emperor, full of suppressed excitement at the thought of seeing an aeroplane flight, constantly saluted as we flew along.

On arrival at the Bornstedter Feld it was already growing dusk, and a great disappointment awaited us. The Crown-Prince rode up to inform us gravely that the flying was over for the day. At this the Kaiser grew angry, for he had been out once before upon a wild-goose chase, only to find that Orville Wright had gone home, declaring the wind to be too strong.

At his father's anger, however, "Willie" burst out laughing, declaring that he was only joking, and that all was in readiness. Indeed, as he spoke the aviator, in his leather jacket, came up, and I presented him to His Majesty, while from everywhere soldiers and police appeared, in order to keep back the crowd to the road.

Then, while we stood alone in the centre of the great, sandy plain, Mr. Orville Wright clambered into his machine and, rising, made many circuits high above us.

The Emperor stood with Herr Reitschel and the shaggy old Professor, straining his eyes with keenest interest. It was the first time His Majesty had seen an aeroplane in flight. Much had been promised of old Von Zeppelin's invention, yet the German public had, until those demonstrations by the American aviator, taken but little heed of the heavier-than-air machine. At that time, indeed, the Emperor had not taken up Von Zeppelin, and it was

only after seeing Orville Wright's demonstrations that he entered with any enthusiasm into aeronautical problems.

High above us against the clear evening sky, wherein the stars had already begun to twinkle, the daring American rose, dipped, and banked, his machine droning like a huge gad-fly, much to the interest and astonishment of the Emperor.

"Marvellous!" he exclaimed, as I stood beside him, with the Empress on his right. "How is it done?"

The crowds went wild with enthusiasm. The sight of a man flying in the air, manœuvring his machine at will, rising swiftly, and then planing down with the engine cut off, was one of the most amazing spectacles the loyal Potsdamers had ever seen. Even the Emperor, with all his wild dreams of world-power, could never for a moment have foreseen what a great factor aeroplanes would be in the war which he was so carefully plotting.

At last Wright came down in a spiral, banked slightly, steadied himself, and then came lightly to earth within a few yards of where we stood, having been the first to exhibit to the great War-Lord how completely the air had been conquered.

Then, quiet, rather unassuming man that he was, he advanced to receive the Imperial congratulations, and to be handed the signed photograph which, at the proper moment, I produced like a conjurer from my dispatch-box. Afterwards, though it had now grown dark, the Emperor, by the powerful headlamps of the three cars, thoroughly examined the American's aeroplane, the aviator explaining every detail.

From that moment for months afterwards the Kaiser was constantly talking of aviation. He commanded photographs of various types of aeroplanes, together with all literature on the subject, to be placed before him. Indeed, he sent over to Britain, in secret, two officers to attend the aeroplane meetings held at Doncaster and Blackpool, where a large number of photographs were secretly taken, and duly found their way to his table.

Indeed, it would greatly surprise your English friends, my dear Le Queux, if they had only seen the many secret reports and secret photographs of all kinds regarding Britain's military, naval, and social life, which I have found upon the Emperor's table.

During my appointment I had through my hands many amazing reports concerning the financial and social position of well-known English politicians and officials, reports made with one ulterior motive—that of

attempted bribery. The Emperor meant war, and he knew that before he could hope for success he must thoroughly "Germanize" Great Britain—with what result we all now know.

I have recalled the Emperor's first sight of an aeroplane in flight, in company with Herr Anton Reitschel and Professor Vambéry, because of an incident which occurred that same day. Just before midnight the Emperor, seated in his room in the Berlin Schloss, was giving me certain instructions to be sent to Carlton House Terrace, when the door opened without any knock of permission, and upon the threshold there stood that arch-intriguer, Frau Kleist, in her stiff black silk gown, and wearing a gleaming diamond brooch, the glitter of which was cold as her own steely eyes.

"Have I Your Majesty's permission to enter?" she asked, in her high-pitched voice.

"Of course, of course," replied the Emperor, turning in his chair. "Come in and close the door. It has turned quite cold to-night. Well?" he asked, looking at her inquiringly.

The Emperor is a man of very few words, except when he tells a story.

The Court dancing-mistress hesitated for a second. Their eyes met, and in that glance I saw complete understanding.

"May I speak in confidence with Your Majesty?" she asked, advancing into the room, her stiff, wide skirts rustling. Except the Court ladies she was the only female at Court whom the sentries stationed at the end of the corridor allowed to pass to His Majesty's private cabinet.

But Frau Kleist had access everywhere. Her eyes were the eyes of the Emperor. Many a diplomat, financier, military or naval commander has been raised to position of favourite because he first secured—by payment, of course, according to his means—the good graces of the ex-ballerina. And, alas! many a good, honest man has been cast out of the Potsdam circle into oblivion, and even to death, because of the poisonous declaration of that smiling, bejewelled old hag.

"Of what do you wish to speak?" inquired the Emperor, who, truth to tell, was very busy upon a most important matter concerning the building of new submarines, and was perhaps a little annoyed by the intrusion, though he did not betray it, so clever was he.

"Of the Reitschel affair," was the old woman's low reply.

At her words the Kaiser frowned slightly, and dismissed me. I bowed myself out, and closed the door upon the Emperor and his clever female spy.

That she should have at that late hour come from Potsdam—for, looking down into the courtyard, I saw the lights of her big Mercédès—showed that some underhand work was in progress.

Only a week before I had been discussing Anton Reitschel and his position with my intimate friend, old Von Donaustauf, Master of Ceremonies, who was supposed to control the ex-dancer, but who in reality was in a subordinate position to her, because she had the ear of the Emperor at any hour. Petty jealousies, dastardly plots, and constant intrigues make up the daily life around the Throne. Half the orders given in the Emperor's name are issued without his knowledge, and many an order transmitted to the provinces without his authority.

By handling, as I did, hundreds of those secret reports which reached the Emperor I had learned much concerning Herr Anton Reitschel, and from old Von Donaustauf I had also been able to obtain certain missing links concerning the intrigue.

Reitschel, a burly, round-faced, fair-haired Prussian of quite superior type, held the position of Chief Director of the German-Ottoman Bank in Constantinople. His duty for the past three years had been to conciliate the Sultan and to lend German money to any industrial enterprise in which any grain of merit could possibly be discovered. He had been singled out, taken from the Dresdner Bank, and sent to Constantinople by the Kaiser in order to play Germany's secret game in Turkey—especially that of the Bagdad Railway—and to combat with German gold Great Britain's diplomacy with Tewfik Pasha and old Abdul Hamid, in view of "The Day," which the Emperor had long ago determined should soon dawn. Was he not the War-Lord? And must not a War-Lord make war?

As old Von Donaustauf had put it, between the whiffs of one of those exquisite cigarettes, a consignment of the Sultan's own which came from the Yildiz Kiosk to Potsdam weekly:

"Our Emperor intends that, notwithstanding Britain's policy in the Near East, Germany shall soon rule from Berlin to Bagdad. Herr Reitschel is in reality charged with the work of "Germanizing" the Ottoman Empire."

That I already knew by the many secret reports of his which arrived so constantly from Constantinople, reports which showed quite plainly that though the great German Embassy, with its huge eagles of stone set at each end, might have been built for the purpose of impressing the Turks, yet the

shrewd, farseeing Herr Anton, as head of that big financial corporation, held greater sway at that rickety set of offices known to us as the Sublime Porte than did his Excellency the Ambassador, with all his beribboned crowd of underlings.

Truly the game which the Emperor was playing in secret against the other Powers of Europe was a crooked and desperate one. On the one hand the Kaiser was making pretence of fair dealing with Great Britain and France, yet on the other his agent, Herr Reitschel, was ever busy lending money in all directions, and bribing Turkish officials in order to secure their favour in Germany's interest.

Yet a further game was being played—one that, in addition to the Imperial Chancellor, I alone knew—namely, that while the Kaiser was making pretence of being the best friend of the Sultan Abdul Hamid, visiting Constantinople and Palestine, building fountains, endowing institutes, and bestowing his Imperial grace in so many ways, yet he was also secretly supporting the Young Turk party so as to effect the Sultan's downfall as part of his sly, Machiavellian policy—a plot which, as you know, ultimately succeeded, for poor old Abdul the Damned and his harem were eventually packed off, bag and baggage, to Salonika, notwithstanding His Majesty's wild entreaty to Berlin for protection.

I happened to be with the Emperor on the Imperial yacht at Tromsö when he received by telegram the personal appeal addressed to him from his miserable dupe, and I well recollect how grimly he smiled as he remarked to me that it needed no response.

Well, at the period of which I am making the present disclosure, Herr Anton had been paying a number of flying visits to Berlin, and had had many private audiences of both Kaiser and Sultan, and had on several occasions been invited informally to the Imperial luncheon table, a mark of esteem bestowed by the Kaiser upon those who may at the moment be serving his interests particularly well.

Suddenly all of us were surprised by the announcement that the Kaiser's favoured civilian in Turkey had married Mademoiselle Julie de Lagarenne, daughter of Paul de Lagarenne, son of the great French sugar refiner, and secretary of the French Embassy at Rome. We heard also that, having married in Italy, he was bringing his wife to Berlin. Indeed, a week after that news was spread I met them both in Kranzler's in Unter den Linden, and there he introduced me to a pretty, dark-haired, vivacious young Frenchwoman, who spoke German well, and who told me that her husband had already given in her name for presentation at the next Court.

That was about a month prior to Orville Wright's flight and the midnight visit of Frau Kleist to the Emperor.

Truth to tell, the old woman's mention of Herr Reitschel's name caused me considerable misgivings, because three weeks before I had gathered certain strange facts from a secret report of a spy who in Constantinople had been set to watch Herr Reitschel's doings. That spy was Frau Kleist's son.

The Kaiser trusts nobody. Even his favourites and most intimate cronies are spied upon, and reports upon those familiar blue papers are furnished regularly. In view of what I had read in that report from Karl Kleist, I stood amazed when, at the grand Court a week later, I had witnessed Herr Reitschel's French wife bow before the Emperor and Empress and noticed how graciously the Kaiser had smiled upon her. Truly the Emperor is sphinx-like and imperturbable. Outside the privacy of his own room, that chamber of cunning plots and fierce revenge, he never allows his sardonic countenance to betray his inner thoughts, and will grasp the hand of his most hated enemy with the hearty warmth of friendship, a Satanic volte-face in which danger and evil lurk always, a trait inherited to its full degree by the Crown-Prince.

The days that followed Frau Kleist's midnight visit were indeed busy, eventful days. Certain diplomatic negotiations with Washington had been unsuccessful; Von Holleben, the Ambassador, had been recalled, and given an extremely bad half-hour by both Kaiser and Chancellor. In addition, some wily American journalist had fathomed the amazing duplicity of Prince Henry's visit to the States and Germany's Press Bureau in America, while the Yellow Press of New York had published a ghastly array of facts and figures concerning the latter, together with facsimile documents, all of which had sent His Majesty half-crazy with anger.

Nearly three months passed.

Herr Reitschel often came from Constantinople, and frequently brought his handsome young wife with him, for he was persona grata at Court. To me this was indeed strange in view of the reports of the ex-opera dancer's son—who, by the way, lived in Constantinople in the unsuspecting guise of a carpet-dealer, and unknown to the bank director.

The latter had, assisted by his wife's fortune, inherited from her grandmother, purchased the Schloss Langenberg, the splendid ancestral castle and estates of the Princes of Langenberg, situate on a rock between Ilmenau and Zella, in the beautiful Thuringian Forest, and acknowledged to be one of the most famous shooting estates in the Empire. It was not,

therefore, surprising that the Emperor, to mark his favour, should express a desire to shoot capercailzie there—a desire which, of course, delighted Herr Reitschel, who had only a few days before been decorated with the Order of the Black Eagle.

One afternoon in mid-autumn the Emperor, accompanied by the Crown-Prince and myself, together with the suite, arrived by the Imperial train at the little station of Ilmenau, where, of course, Reitschel and his pretty wife, with the land-rats, head and under foresters, and all sorts of civil officials in black coats and white ties bowed low as the All-Highest stepped from his saloon. The Kaiser was most gracious to his host and hostess, while the schloss, we found, was almost equal in beauty and extent to that of Prince Max Egon zu Fürstenberg at Donau-Eschingen, which place we always visited once, if not twice, each year.

The Emperor had complained of a slight cold, and in consequence, just before we left Berlin, I had been instructed to summon by telegraph a certain Dr. Vollerthun from Augsburg, who was a perfect stranger to us all, but who had, I supposed, been recommended to the Emperor by somebody who, for some consideration, wished to advance him in his profession.

While the Emperor and his host were out shooting, the Crown-Prince and several of the suite being of the party, I remained alone in a big, circular, old-world room in one of the towers of the Castle, where the long, narrow windows overlooked the forest, dealing with a flood of important State papers which a courier had brought from Berlin two hours before. Papers followed us daily wherever we might be, even when yachting at Cowes or in the Norwegian fjords.

About midday Dr. Vollerthun was ushered in to me—a short, stout, guttural-speaking man of about sixty, rather bald, and wearing big, round, gold-rimmed spectacles. I quickly handed him over to the major-domo. He was a stranger, and no doubt one who sought the Emperor's favour, therefore as such I took but little interest in him.

About three o'clock that same afternoon, however, a light tap came at the door, and on looking round, I saw my hostess standing upon the threshold.

She was quietly but elegantly dressed, presenting the true type of the smart Parisienne, but in an instant I realized that she was very pale and agitated. Indeed her voice trembled when she asked permission to enter.

Since her marriage I had many times chatted with her, for she often came to the Palace when her husband visited Berlin, as he did so frequently. I had

danced with her; I had taken her in to dinner at various houses where we met, always finding her a bright and very intellectual companion.

She quietly closed the door, and, crossing the room with uneven steps, advanced to the table from which I had risen.

"Count von Heltzendorff!" she exclaimed in a low, strained voice. "I—I have come to seek your aid because—well, because I'm distracted, and I know that you are my husband's friend," she exclaimed in French.

"And yours also, Madame," I said earnestly, bowing and pulling forward a chair for her.

"My husband is out with the Emperor!" she gasped in a curious, unnerved tone. "And I fear; oh, I fear that we are in great peril—deadly peril every hour—every moment!"

"Really, Madame, I hardly follow you," I said, standing before the dark-haired, handsome French girl—for she was little more than a girl—who had inherited the whole fortune of the biggest sugar refinery in Europe, the great factory out at St. Denis which supplied nearly one-sixth of the refined sugar of the world.

"My husband, whom I love devotedly, has done his best in the interests of his Emperor. You, Count, know—for you are in a position to know—the real aims of the Kaiser in Turkey. These last six months I have watched, and have learned the truth! I know how, when the Emperor went to Constantinople five months ago in pretence of friendship towards the Sultan, with Professor Vambéry as interpreter, he practically compelled Abdul Hamid to give him, in return for certain financial advances, those wonderful jewels which the Empress Catherine, wife of Peter the Great, gave in secret to the Grand Vizier to secure the escape of the Russian Army across the Pruth. I know how the Emperor seized those wonderful emeralds, and, carrying them back to Potsdam, has given them to the Empress. I know, too, how he laughed with my husband at the cleverness by which he is fooling the too trustful Turks. I——"

"Pardon, Madame," I said, interrupting her, and speaking in French, "but is it really wise to speak thus of the Emperor's secrets? Your husband is, I fear, guilty of great indiscretion in mentioning such matters."

"I am his wife, Count, and he conceals little, if anything, from me."

I looked the pretty young woman straight in the face in fear and regret.

Possession of those ancient jewels which, with reluctance, Abdul Hamid had brought out from his treasury, was one of the Kaiser's greatest secrets, a secret of Potsdam known to no more than three people, including myself. The Emperor had specially imposed silence upon me, because he did not wish the Powers to suspect his true Eastern policy of bribery and double-dealing, blackmail and plunder.

And yet she, the daughter of a French diplomat, knew the truth!

Instantly I realized the serious danger of the secret being betrayed to France.

"Madame," I said, leaning against the writing-table as I spoke in deepest earnestness. "If I may be permitted, I would urge that the Emperor's diplomacy neither concerns your husband, as an official, nor yourself. It is his own private affair, and should neither be discussed nor betrayed."

"I know," she said. "That is just why I have ventured to come here to consult you, M'sieur! You have been my good friend as well as my husband's, and here to-day, while the Emperor is our guest beneath our roof, I feel that I am in greatest peril!"

"Why?" I asked with considerable surprise.

"The Emperor has already learnt that I know the truth regarding his secret," was her slow reply. "By what means His Majesty has discovered it, I, alas! know not. But I do know from a confidential quarter that I have incurred the Emperor's gravest displeasure and hatred."

"Who is your informant?" I inquired sternly, eager to further investigate the great intrigue.

"A certain person who must be nameless."

"Have you spoken to anybody of the Emperor's secret plans in Turkey, or of his possession of the Empress Catherine's jewels?"

"I have not uttered a word to a single soul except my husband. I swear it."

"Your husband was extremely indiscreet in revealing anything," I declared again quite frankly.

"I fully admit that. But what can I do? How shall I act?" she asked in a low, tense voice. "Advise me, do."

For some moments I remained silent. The situation, with a pretty woman seeking my aid in such circumstances, was difficult.

"Well, Madame," I replied after reflection, "if you are really ready to promise the strictest secrecy and leave the matter to me, I will endeavour to find a way out of the difficulty—providing you—good German that you are by marriage—will take, before the Emperor himself, an oath of complete secrecy?"

"I am ready to do anything—anything for my dear husband's sake," the handsome young woman assured me, tears welling in her fine dark eyes.

"In that case, then, please leave the matter entirely in my hands," I said. And later on she left.

That same night, about ten o'clock, the Emperor, in the dark-green uniform which he always wears at dinner after hunting or shooting, entered the room to which I had just returned to work.

"Send Frau Kleist to me," he snapped. "And I will summon you later when I want you, Heltzendorff."

Frau Kleist! I had no idea the woman had arrived at the castle. But I dispatched one of the servants to search for her, and afterwards heard her high-pitched voice as she ascended the stairs to hold secret and, no doubt, evil counsel with His Majesty.

Below I found the fat, fair-haired little doctor from Augsburg, who was still an enigma, but eager to see his Imperial patient, and with him I smoked a cigarette to while away the time. I was anxious to return to His Majesty, and, as became my duty as his adjutant, to explain what I had learnt from the lips of our French hostess.

Suddenly one of the Imperial flunkeys bowed at the door, commanding the doctor to the Royal presence, and he left me, hot and flurried, as all become who are unused to the Court atmosphere, its rigid etiquette, and its constant bows.

Had the Emperor called the unknown doctor into consultation with Frau Kleist?

Inquiries I had made concerning the doctor from Augsburg showed that he was quite a well-known specialist on mental diseases, and he had also written a text-book upon bacteriology and the brain. Why had the Kaiser summoned him? He required no brain specialist.

"We leave to-morrow at noon," the Emperor exclaimed brusquely when, an hour later, I was summoned to his room. This amazed me, for our

arrangements were to remain three days longer. I recollected Madame Reitschel's words.

"I do not feel at all well," His Majesty added, "and this Dr. Vollerthun orders me rest at Potsdam."

In silence I bowed, and then ventured to refer to what was uppermost in my mind.

"May I be permitted to speak to your Majesty upon a certain confidential subject?" I begged, standing against the table whereat I had been writing the greater part of that day.

"What subject?" snapped the All-Highest.

"Your Majesty's negotiations with the Sultan of Turkey. Frau Reitschel has learnt of them, but she is eager to come before you and take oath of entire secrecy."

The Kaiser's eyes narrowed and glowed in sudden anger.

"A woman's oath!" he cried. "Bah! Never have I believed in silence imposed upon any woman's tongue—more especially that of a born enemy! I appreciate your loyalty and acumen, Von Heltzendorff, but I have, fortunately, known this for some little time, and in strictest secrecy have taken certain measures to combat it. Remember that these words have never been uttered to you! Remember that! You are adjutant, and I am Emperor. Understand! I fully appreciate and note your loyal report, but it is not woman's sphere to enter our diplomacy, except as a secret agent of our Fatherland. Let us say no more."

Ten minutes later, being dismissed, I wandered back through the great, silent, echoing corridors of the ancient castle to my own room. A great human drama, greater than any ever placed upon the stage, was now being enacted. Throwing his loaded dice, the Emperor, with all his craft, cunning, and criminal unscrupulousness behind his mask of Christianity, and aided by his unprincipled son, the Crown-Prince, was actually plotting the downfall of the Turkish Empire and the overthrow of Islam in Europe. Between the All-Highest One and the realization of those dastardly plans for world-power so carefully and cleverly thought out in every detail night after night in the silence of that dull, faded green room upstairs at Potsdam, stood one frail little Parisienne, the vivacious, well-meaning Madame Reitschel!

Next day we left the Schloss Langenberg, but before doing so we heard with regret that our charming little hostess had been suddenly taken ill during the night, and the Kaiser, as a mark of favour, had ordered his doctor, Vollerthun, to remain behind to attend her. That Herr Reitschel was in great distress I saw from his face as he stood taking leave of his Imperial guest on the little platform at Ilmenau.

Back in Berlin, I wondered what was in progress in that far-off Schloss in Thuringia, but a week later the truth became vividly apparent when I read in the Staats-Anzeiger an announcement which disclosed to me the terrible truth.

I held my breath as my eyes followed the printed lines.

Frau Reitschel, the young wife of the famous Anton Reitschel of Constantinople, had, the journal reported, been seized by a sudden and somewhat mysterious illness on the night prior to the Emperor's departure from the Schloss Langenberg, and though His Majesty had graciously left his own physician behind to attend her, the unfortunate lady had developed insanity to such a hopeless degree that it had been necessary to confine her in the Rosenau private asylum at Coburg.

In a second I realized how the dancing-mistress and the mental specialist from Augsburg had been the tools of the Emperor. That "mysterious illness," developing into madness, was surely not the result of any natural cause, but had been deliberately planned and executed by means of a hypodermic syringe, in order that the woman who had learnt the secret of the Emperor's double cunning in the Near East should be for ever immured in a madhouse.

Outside the trio responsible for the cruel and dastardly act, I alone knew the truth how, by the Emperor's drastic action, he had prevented the secret of his chicanery leaking out to the Powers.

Poor Madame Reitschel! She died early in 1913, a raving lunatic. Her devoted husband, having served the Emperor's purpose, had been recalled to Berlin, where, bereft of the Kaiser's favour, he predeceased her by about six months, broken-hearted, but in utter ignorance of that foul plot carried out under his very nose and in his own castle.

SECRET NUMBER FIVE

THE GIRL WHO KNEW THE CROWN-PRINCE'S SECRET

Late on the night of November 18th, 1912, I was busily at work in the Crown-Prince's room—that cosy apartment of which I possessed the key—at the Marble Palace at Potsdam.

I, as His Imperial Highness's personal-adjutant, had been travelling all day with him from Cologne to Berlin. We had done a tour of military inspections in Westphalia, and, as usual, "Willie's" conduct, as became the heir-apparent of the psalm-singing All-Highest One, had not been exactly exemplary.

With his slant eyes and sarcastic grin he openly defied the Emperor, and frequently referred to him to his intimates as "a hoary old hypocrite"—the truth of which recent events have surely proved.

On the night in question, however, much had happened. The Emperor had, a month before, returned from a visit to England, where he had been engaged by speeches and hand-shakes, public and private, blowing a narcotic dust into the nostrils of your dear but, alas! too confiding nation.

You British were all dazzled—you dear English drank the Imperial sleeping-draught, prepared so cunningly for you and your Cabinet Ministers in what we in Berlin sometimes called "the Downing-Strasse." You lapped up the cream of German good-fellowship as a cat laps milk, even while agents of our Imperial War Staff had held Staff-rides in various parts of your island. All of you were blind, save those whom your own people denounced as scaremongers when they lifted their voices in warning.

We at Potsdam smiled daily at what seemed to us to be the slow but sure decline of your great nation from its military, naval, and commercial supremacy. The Kaiser had plotted for fourteen years, and now he was being actively aided by his eldest son, that shrewd, active agnostic with a criminal kink.

"Heltzendorff!" exclaimed the Crown-Prince, as he suddenly entered the room where I was busy attending to a pile of papers which had accumulated during our absence in Westphalia, and which had been sorted into three heaps by my assistant during our absence. "Do get through all those letters and things. Burn them all if you can. What do they matter?"

"Many of them are matters of grave importance. Here, for instance, is a report from the Chief of Military Intelligence in Washington."

"Oh, old Friesch! Tear it up! He is but an old fossil at best. And yet, Heltzendorff, he is designed to be of considerable use," he added. "His Majesty told me to-night that after his visit to England he has conceived the idea to establish an official movement for the improvement of better relations between Britain and Germany. The dear British are always ready to receive such movements with open arms. At Carlton House Terrace they strongly endorse the Emperor's ideas, and he tells me that the movement should first arise in commercial and shipping circles. Herr Ballin will generate the idea in his offices in London and the various British ports, while His Majesty has Von Gessler, the ex-Ambassador at Washington, in view as the man to bring forth the suggestion publicly. Indeed, to-night from the Wilhelmstrasse there has been sent a message to his schloss on the Mosel commanding him to consult with His Majesty. Von Bernstorff took his place at Washington a few months ago."

"But Von Gessler is an inveterate enemy of Britain," I exclaimed in surprise, still seated at my table.

"The world does not know that. The whole scheme is based upon Britain's ignorance of our intentions. We bring Von Gessler forward as the dear, good, Anglophile friend with his hand outstretched from the Wilhelmstrasse. Oh, Heltzendorff!" he laughed. "It is really intensely amusing, is it not?"

I was silent. I knew that the deeply-laid plot against Great Britain was proceeding apace, for had I not seen those many secret reports, and did I not possess inside knowledge of the evil intentions of the Emperor and his son.

"Get through all that—to-night if you can, Heltzendorff," the Crown-Prince urged. "The Crown-Princess leaves for Treseburg, in the Harz, to-morrow, and in the evening we go to Nice."

"To Nice!" I exclaimed, though not at all disinclined to spend a week or so on the Riviera.

"Yes," he said. "I have a friend there. The Riviera is only pleasant before the season, or after. One cannot go with the crowd in January or February. I have already given orders for the saloon to leave at eleven to-morrow night. That will give us ample time."

A friend there! I reflected. I, knowing his partiality to the eternal petticoat, could only suppose that the attraction in Nice was of the feminine gender.

"Then the lady is in Nice!" I remarked, for sometimes I was permitted, on account of my long service with the Emperor, to speak familiarly.

"Lady, no!" he retorted. "It is a man. And I want to get to Nice at the earliest moment. So get through those infernal documents. Burn them all. They are better out of the way," he laughed.

And, taking a cigarette from the golden box—a present to him from "Tino" of Greece—he lit it, and wishing me good night, strode out.

Just before eleven o'clock on the following night we left the Marmor Palace. His Imperial Highness travelled incognito as he always did when visiting France, assuming the name of Count von Grünau. With us was his personal valet, Schuler, the military secretary, Major Lentze, and Eckardt, the Commissioner of Secret Police for His Highness's personal protection, who travelled with us wherever we went. In addition, there was an under-valet, and Knof, the Crown-Prince's favourite chauffeur. When abroad cars were either bought and afterwards re-sold, or else hired, but Knof, who was a celebrated racing motorist and had driven in Prince Henry's tour of exploration through England, and who had gained many prizes on the various circuits, was always taken as "driver."

After a restless night—for there were many stoppages—I spent next day with the Crown-Prince in long and tiring discussions on military affairs as we travelled due south in the beautifully-fitted Imperial car, replete with its smoking saloon with wicker chairs, its four bathrooms, and other luxuries. I endeavoured to obtain from him some reason why we were proceeding to Nice, but to all my inquiries he was smilingly dumb. He noticed my eagerness, and I saw that he was amused by it.

Yet somehow, as we travelled towards the Italian frontier—for our road lay through Austria down to Milan, and thence by way of Genoa—he seemed to become unduly thoughtful and anxious.

Only a fortnight before he had had one of those ever-recurring and unseemly quarrels with his long-suffering wife.

"Cilli is a fool!" he had declared openly to me, after she had left the room in anger.

We had been busy arranging a programme of official visits in Eastern Germany, when suddenly the Crown-Princess entered, pale with anger, and disregarding my presence—for I suppose I was regarded as one who knew all the happenings of the palace, and whose discretion could be relied upon—began to demand fiercely an explanation of a certain anonymous letter which she held in her hand.

"Kindly read that!" she said haughtily, "and explain what it means!"

The Crown-Prince grinned idiotically, that cold, sinister expression overspreading his countenance, a look which is such a marked characteristic of his.

Then, almost snatching the letter from his young wife's fingers, he read it through, and with a sudden movement tore it up and flung it upon the carpet, saying:

"I refuse to discuss any unsigned letter! Really, if we were to notice every letter written by the common scum we should, indeed, have sufficient to do."

His wife's arched brows narrowed. Her pale, delicate face, in which the lines of care had appeared too prematurely, already betrayed fiercest anger.

"I happen to have inquired, and I now know that those allegations are correct!" she cried. "This dark-haired singer-woman, Irene Speroni, has attained great success on the variety stage in Italy. She is the star of the Sala Margherita in Rome."

"Well?" he asked in defiance. "And what of it, pray?"

"That letter you have destroyed tells me the truth. I received it a few days ago, and sent an agent to Italy in order to learn the truth. He has returned to-night. See!" And suddenly she produced a crannied snapshot photograph, of postcard size, of the Crown-Prince in his polo-playing garb, and with him a smartly-dressed young woman, whose features were in the shadow. I caught sight of that picture, because when he tossed it from him angrily without glancing at it, I picked it up and handed it back to the Crown-Princess.

"Yes," she cried bitterly, "You refuse, of course, to look upon this piece of evidence! I now know why you went to Wiesbaden. The woman was singing there, and you gave her a pair of emerald and diamond earrings which you purchased from Vollgold in Unter den Linden. See! Here is the bill for them!"

And again she produced a slip of paper.

At this the Crown-Prince grew instantly furious, and, pale to the lips, he roundly abused his long-suffering wife, telling her quite frankly that, notwithstanding the fact that she might spy upon his movements, he should act exactly as his impulses dictated.

That scene was, indeed, a disgraceful one, ending in the poor woman, in a frantic paroxysm of despair, tearing off the splendid necklet of diamonds at

her throat—his present to her on their marriage—and casting it full into his face.

Then, realizing that the scene had become too tragic, I took her small hand, and, with a word of sympathy, led her out of the room and along the corridor.

As I left her she burst into a sudden torrent of tears; yet when I returned again to the Crown-Prince I found his manner had entirely changed. He treated his wife's natural resentment and indignation as a huge joke, and it was then that His Imperial Highness declared to me:

"Cilli is a fool!"

That sunny afternoon the Crown-Prince had sprawled himself on the plush lounge of the smoking car as the train travelled upon that picturesque line between Genoa and the French frontier at Ventimiglia, the line which follows the coast for six hours. With the tideless sapphire Mediterranean lapping the yellow beach on the one side and high brown rocks upon the other, we went through Savona, Albenga, the old-world Porto Maurizio to the glaring modern town of San Remo and palm-embowered Bordighera, that beautiful Italian Riviera that you and I know so well.

"Listen, Heltzendorff," his Highness exclaimed suddenly between the whiffs of his cigarette. "In Nice I may disappear for a day or two. I may be missing. But if I am, please don't raise a fuss about it. I'm incognito, and nobody will know. I may be absent for seven days. If I am not back by that time then you may make inquiry."

"But the Commissary of Police Eckardt! He will surely know?" I remarked in surprise.

"No. He won't know. I shall evade him as I've so often done before," replied His Imperial Highness. "I tell you of my intentions so that you may curb the activities of our most estimable friend. Tell him not to worry, and he will be paid a thousand marks on the day Count von Grüнау reappears."

I smiled, for I saw the influence of the eternal feminine.

"No, Heltzendorff. You are quite mistaken," he said, reading my thoughts, and putting down his cigarette end. "There is no lady in this case. I am out here for secret purposes of my own. For that reason I take you into my confidence rather than that unnecessary inquiry should be made and some of those infernal journalists get hold of the fact that the Count von Grüнау and the Crown-Prince are one and the same person. I was a fool to take this

saloon. I ought to have travelled as an ordinary passenger, I know, but," he laughed, "this is really comfortable and, after all, what do we care what the world thinks—eh? Surely we can afford to laugh at it when all the honours of the game are already in our hands."

And at that moment we ran into the pretty, flower-decked station of San Remo, the place freshly painted for the attraction of the winter visitors who annually went south for sunshine.

His words mystified me, but I became even more mystified by his actions a few days later.

I was in ignorance that a fortnight before Hermann Hardt, one of His Highness's couriers, had left Potsdam and on arrival at Nice had rented for three months the fine Villa Lilas—the winter residence of the American millionaire leather merchant, James G. Jamieson, of Boston, who had gone yachting to Japan.

You know Nice, my dear Le Queux—you know it as well as I do, therefore you know the Villa Lilas, that big white mansion which faces the sea on Montboron, the hill road between the port of Nice and Villefranche. Half hidden among the mimosa, the palms, and grey-green olives, it is after the style of Mr. Gordon Bennett's villa at Beaulieu, with a big glass front and pretty verandas, with climbing geraniums flowering upon the terraces.

We soon settled there, for the household staff had arrived three days before, and on the evening of our arrival I accompanied the Crown-Prince down into the town to the Jetée promenade, the pier-pavilion where the gay cosmopolitan world disports itself to chatter, drink and gamble.

It was a glorious moonlit night, and "Willie," after strolling through the great gilded saloons, in one of which was a second-rate variety entertainment—the season not having yet commenced—went outside. We sat at the end of the pier smoking.

"Nice is dull as yet, is it not?" he remarked, for each year he always spent a month there incognito, the German newspapers announcing that he was away shooting. But "Willie," leading the gay life of the Imperial butterfly, much preferred the lively existence of the Côte d'Azur to the remote schloss in Thuringia or elsewhere.

I agreed with him that Nice had not yet put on the tinsel and pasteboard of her Carnival attractions. As you know, Carnival in Nice is gay enough, but, after all, it is a forced gaiety got up for the profit of the shops and hotels,

combined with the "Cercle des Bains" of Monaco—the polite title of the Prince's gilded gambling hell.

We smoked together and chatted, as we often did when His Imperial Highness became bored. I was still mystified why we had come to the Riviera so early in the season, because the white and pale green paint of the hotels was not yet dry, and half of them not yet open.

Yet our coming had, no doubt, been privately signalled, because within half an hour of our arrival at the Villa Lilas a short, stout old Frenchman, with white, bristly hair—whom I afterwards found out was Monsieur Paul Bavouzet, the newly-appointed Prefect of the Department of Alpes-Maritimes—called to leave his card upon the Count von Grünau.

The Imperial incognito only means that the public are to be deluded. Officialdom never is. They know the ruse, and support it all the world over. His Highness the Crown-Prince was paying his annual visit to Nice, and the President had sent his compliments through his representative, the bristly-haired little Prefect.

Soon after eleven that night the Crown-Prince, after chatting affably with me, strolled back to the Promenade des Anglais, where Knof, the chauffeur, awaited us with a big open car, in which we were whizzed around the port and up to Montboron in a few minutes.

As I parted from the Crown-Prince, who yawned and declared that he was tired, he said:

"Ah! Heltzendorff. How good it is to get a breath of soft air from the Mediterranean! We shall have a port on this pleasant sea one day—if we live as long—eh?"

That remark showed the trend of events. It showed how, hand in hand with the Emperor, he was urging preparations for war—a war that had for its primary object the destruction of the Powers which, when the volcano erupted, united as allies.

The bright autumn days passed quite uneventfully, and frequently I went pleasant motor runs into the mountains with His Highness, up to the frontier at the Col di Tenda, to La Vésubie, Puget-Théniers, and other places. Yet I was still mystified at the reason of our sojourn there.

After we had been at the Villa Lilas about ten days I was one afternoon seated outside the popular Café de l'Opéra, in the Place Masséna, when a lady, dressed in deep mourning and wearing the heavy veil in French style,

passed along the pavement, glanced at me, and then, hesitating, she turned, and, coming back, advanced to the little table in the corner whereat I was sitting.

"May I be permitted to have a word with you, Monsieur?" she asked in French, in a low, refined voice.

"Certainly," was my reply, and, not without some surprise, I rose and drew a chair for her.

She glanced round quickly, as though to satisfy herself that she would not be overheard, but, as a matter of fact, at that hour the chairs on the terraces of the café were practically deserted. At the same moment, viewing her closely, I saw that she was about twenty-four, handsome, dark-haired, with well-cut features.

"I know, Monsieur, that I am a complete stranger to you," she exclaimed with a smile, "but to me you are quite familiar by sight. I have passed you many times in Berlin and in Potsdam, and I know that you are Count von Heltzendorff, personal-adjutant to His Highness the Crown-Prince—or Count von Grünau, as he is known here in France."

"You know that!" I exclaimed.

She smiled mysteriously, replying:

"Yes. I—well, I happen to be a friend of His Highness."

I held my breath. So this pretty young Frenchwoman was one of my young Imperial master's friends!

"The fact is, Count," she went on, "I have travelled a considerable distance to see you. I said that I was one of the Crown-Prince's friends. Please do not misunderstand me. I know that he has a good many lady friends, but, as far as I am concerned, I have never been introduced to him, and he does not know me. I am his friend because of a certain friendliness towards him."

"Really, Madame, I don't quite understand," I said.

"Of course not," she answered, and then, glancing round, she added: "This place is a little too public. Cannot we go across to the garden yonder?"

At her suggestion I rose and walked with her to a quiet spot in the gardens, where we sat down, and I listened with interest to her.

She told me that her name was Julie de Rouville, but she would give no account of where she lived, though I took it that she was a young widow.

"I have ventured to approach you, Count, because I cannot approach the Crown-Prince," she said presently. "You probably do not know the true reason of his visit here to Nice?"

"No," I said. "I admit that I do not. Why is he here?"

"It is a secret of his own. But, curiously enough, I am aware of the reason, and that is why I have sought you. Would it surprise you if I told you that in a certain quarter in France it will, in a few days, be known that the German Emperor is establishing a movement for an entente between Germany and Britain, and that the whole affair is based upon a fraud? The Emperor wants no entente, but only war with France and with Britain. The whole plot will be exposed in a few days!"

"From what source have you derived this knowledge?" I asked, looking at her in amazement that she should know one of the greatest State secrets of Germany.

But she again smiled mysteriously, and said:

"I merely tell you this in order to prove to you that I am in possession of certain facts known to but few people."

"You evidently are," I said. "But who intends to betray the truth to France?"

"I regret, Count, that I cannot answer your question."

"If you are, as you say, the Crown-Prince's friend, it would surely be a friendly act to let us know the truth, so that steps may be taken, perhaps, to avoid the secret of Germany's diplomacy from leaking out to her enemies."

"All I can tell you, Count, is that the matter is one of gravest importance."

"But will you not speak openly, and give us the actual facts?"

"I will—but to His Imperial Highness alone," was her answer.

"You wish to meet him, then?" I asked, rather suspicious that it might after all be only a woman's ruse. And yet what she had said showed that she knew the Emperor's secret, for she had actually mentioned Von Gessler's name in connection with the pretended Anglo-German entente.

"If His Highness will honour me with an interview, then I will reveal all I know, and, further, will suggest a means of preventing the truth from leaking out."

"But you are French," I said.

"I have told you so," she laughed. "But probably His Highness will refuse to see Julie de Rouville, therefore I think it best if you show him this."

From her little gold chain-purse she produced a small, unmounted photograph of herself, and handed it to me.

"When he recognizes who wishes to see him he will fully understand," she said, in a quiet, refined voice. "A letter addressed to Julie de Rouville at the Post Restante at Marseilles will quickly find me."

"At Marseilles?" I echoed.

"Yes. I do not wish the letter to be sent to me here. From Marseilles I shall duly receive it."

I was silent for a few moments.

"I confess," I exclaimed at last. "I confess I do not exactly see the necessity for an interview with His Highness, when whatever you tell me—as his personal-adjutant—will be regarded as strictly in confidence."

Truth to tell, I was extremely suspicious of her. She might be desirous of meeting the Prince with some evil intent.

"I have already said, Count Heltzendorff, that I am His Highness's friend, and wish to approach him with motives of friendship."

"You wish for no payment for this information, eh?" I asked suspiciously, half believing that she might be a secret agent of France.

"Payment—of course not!" she answered, half indignantly. "Show that photograph to the Crown-Prince, and tell him that I apply for an interview."

Then, rather abruptly, she rose, and, thanking me, wished me good afternoon, and walked away, leaving me with her photograph in my hand.

The Crown-Prince was out motoring, and did not get back to the Villa until after seven o'clock.

As soon as I heard of his return I went to his room, and recounted my strange adventure with the dark-haired young woman in black. He became

keenly interested, and the more so when I told him of her secret knowledge of the Kaiser's intended establishment of a bogus entente with Great Britain.

"She wishes to see you," I said. "And she told me to give you her photograph."

I handed it to him.

At sight of it his face instantly changed. He held his breath, and then examined the photograph beneath the light. Afterwards I noticed a strange, hard look at the corners of his mouth, while his teeth set themselves firmly.

Next second, however, he had recovered his self-possession, and with a low laugh said:

"Yes. Of course, I know her. She wants me to write to Julie de Rouville at the Post Restante at Marseilles, eh? H'm—I'll think it over."

And I could see that sight of the photograph had not only displeased him, but it also caused him very considerable uneasiness.

Late in the afternoon, two days later, His Highness, who had been walking alone, and who had apparently evaded the vigilance of the ever-watchful Eckardt, returned to the Villa with a stranger, a tall, rather thin, fair-haired man, undoubtedly a German, and the pair were closeted together, holding counsel evidently for a considerable time. Where His Highness met him I knew not, but when later on I entered the room I saw that the pair were on quite friendly terms.

His Highness addressed him as Herr Schäfer, and when he had left he told me that he was from the Wilhelmstrasse, and had been attached to the Embassy at Washington, and afterwards in London, "for affairs of the Press"—which meant that he was conductor of the German Press propaganda.

It seemed curious that the young man Schäfer should be in such high favour with the Crown-Prince.

I watched closely. Whatever was in progress was a strict secret between the pair. The more I saw of Hans Schäfer the more I disliked him. He had cruel eyes and heavy, sensuous lips—a coarse countenance which was the reverse of prepossessing, though I could see that he was a very clever and cunning person.

For a full fortnight the Crown-Prince and the man Schäfer were almost inseparable. Was it for the purpose of meeting Schäfer that we had gone to

Nice? The man had been back from London about two months, and had, I learnt, been lately living in Paris.

One evening while strolling in the sunset by the sea along the tree-lined Promenade des Anglais, I suddenly encountered Julie de Rouville, dressed in mourning, a quiet, pathetic figure, just as we had last met.

I instantly recollected that since the evening when I had given her photograph to the Crown-Prince he had never mentioned her, and I could only believe that for some mysterious reason sight of the picture had recalled some distasteful memory.

"Ah, Count!" she cried, as I halted and raised my hat. "This is, indeed, a welcome meeting! I have been looking out for you for the past two days."

"I've been staying over at Cannes," was my reply. "Well?"

She indicated a seat, and upon it we sat together.

"I have to thank you for giving my photograph and message to His Highness," she said in that sweet, refined voice that I so well remembered.

"I trust that the Crown-Prince has written to you—eh?"

She smiled, a trifle sadly I thought.

"Well, no——" was her rather vague reply.

"Then how are you aware that I gave your message?"

She shook her head and again smiled.

"I had my own means of discovery. By certain signs I knew that you had carried out your promise," she said. "But as I have heard nothing, I wish you, if you will, to deliver another message—a very urgent one. Tell him I must see him, for I dread daily lest the truth of the Kaiser's real intentions be known at the Quai d'Orsay."

"Certainly," was my polite reply. "I will deliver your message this evening."

"Tell him that my sole desire is to act in the interests of the Emperor and himself," she urged.

"But, forgive me," I said, "I cannot see why you should interest yourself in the Crown-Prince if he declines to communicate with you."

"I have my reasons, Count von Heltzendorff," was her rather haughty reply. "Please tell him that the matter will not brook further delay."

I had seen in the London newspapers during the past week how eagerly the English journalists, with the dust cast into their eyes, were blindly advocating that the British public should welcome the great German national movement, headed by Baron von Gessler, supported by Ballin, Delbrück, and Von Wedel, with the hearty co-operation of the Emperor and the Imperial Chancellor—the movement to establish better relations with Great Britain.

I knew that the secret should at all hazards be kept, and that night I told the Crown-Prince of my second meeting with the pretty woman in black and her urgent request.

He laughed, but made no remark. Yet I knew by his tone that he was not so easy in his mind as he desired me to believe.

It also seemed strange why, if the young Frenchwoman was so desirous of meeting him, she did not call at the Villa.

About a week later it suddenly occurred to me to endeavour to discover the real identity of the lady in black, but as I was not certain whether she actually lived in Nice it was rather difficult. Nevertheless, by invoking the aid of my friend Belabre, inspector of the Sûreté of Nice, and after waiting a few days I made an astounding discovery, namely, that the lady who called herself De Rouville was an Italian café concert singer named Irene Speroni—the woman who had aroused the jealousy of the Crown-Princess! And she knew that important State secret of Germany!

The situation was, I saw, a most serious one. Indeed, I felt it my duty to mention my discovery to His Highness, when, to my surprise, he was not in the least angry. He merely said:

"It is true, Heltzendorff—true what the Crown-Princess declared—that I went to Wiesbaden and that I gave the woman a pair of emerald earrings which I ordered from old Vollgold. But there was no reason for jealousy. I saw the woman, and gave her the present in the hope of closing her lips."

In a moment I understood. The pretty variety artiste was endeavouring to levy blackmail. But how could she, in her position, have learnt the secret of the Emperor's intentions?

She was, I found, living as Signorina Speroni, with her maid, at the Hôtel Bristol over at Beaulieu, just across the blue bay of Villefranche, and as the

days went on I realized the imminent danger of exposure, and wondered if the Kaiser knew of it.

I made a remark to that effect to His Highness one morning, whereupon he replied:

"Don't disturb yourself, my dear Heltzendorff! I have not overlooked the matter, for it is one that closely concerns both the Emperor and myself. The woman obtained the secret by opening the dispatch-box of one who believed her to be his friend, and then she attempted to use her knowledge in order to drag me into her net. But I do not think I am very likely to be caught—eh?"

At that moment Herr Schäfer entered the room, therefore further discussion was out of the question.

From inquiries I made later on I found that the concert singer had suddenly left the hotel, therefore I went over to Beaulieu and had an instructive chat with the hall porter, a German of course. From him I learnt that the Signorina had been staying there ever since the date when we had arrived at Nice, and, further, that two gentleman had been frequently in the habit of calling upon her. One was a smart young Frenchman who came in a motor-car, and the other was a German. From the description of the latter I at once came to the conclusion that it was none other than Herr Schäfer!

"The one gentleman did not know of the other's visits," said the bearded porter, with a laugh. "The Signorina always impressed silence upon me, because she thought one would be jealous of the other. The German gentleman seemed very deeply in love with her, and she called him Hans. He accompanied her when she left here for San Remo."

I reported this to His Highness, but he made no remark. That some devilish plot was being carried out I suspected. The Hohenzollerns are ready to go to any length to prevent their black secrets from leaking out.

My surmise proved correct, for, a week later, some fishermen found upon the brown rocks near Capo Verde, beyond San Remo, the body of a woman, fully dressed, afterwards identified as that of Irene Speroni, the singer so popular in Rome.

It was proved that on the previous night she had been seen by two peasants walking along the sea road near San Lorenzo, accompanied by a tall, thin man, who seemed greatly excited, and was talking in German. It was believed by the Italian police that the unknown German, in a fit of jealousy, threw her into the sea.

From facts I gathered some months later I realized that the whole plot had been most cunningly conceived by the Crown-Prince. Schäfer, after his return from America, had met the woman Speroni, who was performing in London, and she had, unknown to him, opened his dispatch-box, and from some secret correspondence had learned the real truth regarding the proposed entente which the Emperor contemplated.

Schäfer, alarmed at the woman's knowledge, and yet fascinated by her charms, had gone to the Crown-Prince, and he, in turn, had seen the woman in Wiesbaden. Finding her so dangerous to the Emperor's plans, His Highness then conceived a fiendish plot. He first introduced her to a young French Marquis, de Vienne by name, who pestered her with his attentions, and followed her to Beaulieu. Having so far succeeded, the Crown-Prince went to Nice, and cleverly played upon Schäfer's love for the woman, pointing out that she was playing a double game, and urging him to watch.

He did so, and discovered the truth. Then there occurred the tragedy of jealousy, exactly as the police believed.

Herr Schäfer, the tool of His Imperial Highness, had, however, escaped to Germany, and the police of San Remo are still in ignorance of his identity.

SECRET NUMBER SIX

THE AFFAIR OF THE HUNCHBACKED COUNTESS

I suppose that none of your British friends have ever heard the name of Thyra Adelheid von Kienitz.

She was a funny little deformed person, aged, perhaps, seventy, widow of the great General von Kienitz, who had served in the Franco-German campaign, and who, before his death, had been acknowledged to be as great a strategist as your own Lord Roberts, whom every good German—I did not write Prussian—salutes in reverence.

Countess von Kienitz was the daughter of a certain Countess von Borcke, and after living for many years in retirement in her picturesque old schloss perched on a rock not far from the famous wine district of Berncastel, on the winding Mosel river, became suddenly seized with an idea to re-enter Berlin society.

With this view she rented a fine house not far from the Liechtenstein Bridge, and early in 1911 commenced a series of wildly-extravagant entertainments—luncheons, dinners, and supper concerts, at which were artistes to whom three-thousand-mark fees were often paid—with a view, as it seemed to me, to attract the more modern and go-ahead section of Berlin society.

At first the smarter set looked askance at the ugly, deformed, painted-up old woman with the squeaky voice, and they strenuously declined invitations to her splendid, newly-furnished mansion in the Stulerstrasse. Indeed, the name of the Countess von Kienitz became synonymous for all that was grotesque, and her painted, doll-like countenance and yellow wig were the laughing-stock of both the upper and middle classes.

Nevertheless she strenuously endeavoured to surround herself with young society of both sexes, and many smart dances were given at the Stulerstrasse during the season—dances at which the swaggering Prussian officer was seen at his gorgeous best.

One afternoon, seated by the Crown-Prince as he drove recklessly his great Mercédès car along the Bismarckallee in the direction of Potsdam, we passed an overdressed old woman, very artificial, with yellow hair, and short of stature.

"Look, Heltzendorff! Is she not like that old crow, Von Kienitz?"

"Yes, her figure is very similar," I admitted.

"Ah! The old woman was introduced to me the other night at Bismarck-Bohlen's house. Himmel! What a freak! Have you seen her wig?"

I replied that I had visited once or twice at the Stulerstrasse, and that the company I had met there were certainly amusing. I mentioned some of their names, among them that of young Von Ratibor, Major Gersdorff, of the Death's Head Hussars, Von Heynitz, of the Königsjäger, a well-known man about town, his friend Winterfeld, together with a number of ladies of the very ultra go-ahead set. At this His Highness seemed highly interested.

"She certainly seems a very curious old person," he laughed. "Fancies that she's but twenty-five, and actually had the audacity to dance at Bismarck-Bohlen's. Somebody was cruel enough to ask her to sing a French chansonnette!"

"Did she?" I inquired.

"Of course. She put herself into a martial attitude, and sang something about 'Le drapeau' of 'Jacques Bonhomme,' as though we wished to know anything about it. The man who suggested the song was sorry."

I laughed heartily. Sometimes the Crown-Prince could be humorous, and it certainly must have been distinctly quaint when, as a result of the joke played upon the old Countess, she so completely turned the tables upon the party by singing a song full of French sentiment.

That circumstance told me that she must be a very clever old lady, even though she wore that tow-coloured wig which sometimes on nights of merriment got a trifle askew.

Judge my great surprise, however, when, about six weeks later, Frau von Alvensleben, the pretty Grande Maîtresse of the Court of the Crown-Princess, stopped me in one of the corridors of the Marmor Palace and, drawing me aside, whispered:

"I have news for you, my dear Count. We have a new arrival at Court—Frau Yellow-Wig."

I looked at her, for the moment puzzled. She saw that I did not follow her.

"Countess von Kienitz—a friend of yours, I believe."

"Friend of mine!" I echoed. "I've only been to her house three or four times, just in a crowd, and out of curiosity."

"Oh, là là! Well, she has told the Crown-Princess that you are her friend, and, in brief, has entirely fascinated Her Imperial Highness."

I gasped. At what a pass we had arrived when the Crown-Princess was receiving that old woman whose reputation was of the gayest and most scandalous!

What the Grande Maîtresse had told me was perfectly correct, for three days later a dance was held, and as I entered the room I saw amid that gay assemblage the yellow-haired old widow of the long-forgotten military hero wagging her lace fan and talking quite familiarly with Her Imperial Highness. To my utter amazement also, His Majesty the Emperor, in the gay uniform of the 3rd Regiment of Uhlans of Saxony—of whom he was chief, among a hundred-and-one other high military distinctions—advanced and smiled graciously upon her as she bowed as low as rheumatism and old age allowed.

The fascination which the ugly, shrill-voiced old woman exercised over "Cilli" was quickly remarked, and, of course, gossip became more rife than ever, especially when, a week later, it was announced that she had actually been appointed a lady-in-waiting.

The Crown-Prince, too, soon became on friendly terms with her, and many times I saw them chatting together as though exchanging confidences. Why?

His Highness, usually so utterly piggish towards ladies, given to snubbing even the highest-born in the Empire, was always smiling and gracious towards her.

"I can't make it out," declared Von Behr, the Chamberlain du service, to me one day two months later, while I was smoking with him in his room. "The old woman has the most complete control over Her Highness. Because she was averse to the journey, we are not going to Norway this year. Besides, since her appointment she has succeeded in plotting the dismissal of both Countess von Scheet-Plessen and Countess von Brockdorff."

"I know," I replied. I had been discussing it only a few hours before with Major von Amsberg, aide-de-camp of the Prince Eitel Frédéric, and he, too, had expressed himself both mystified and disgusted with the mysterious power exercised by the old woman in the yellow wig. "It seems so extraordinary," I went on, "that the Court should so utterly disregard the woman's reputation."

"Bah, my dear Heltzendorff!" laughed the Chamberlain. "When a woman arrives at seventy she has outlived all the peccadilloes of youth. And, after all, the reputations of most of us here are tarnished—more or less—eh?"

His remarks were indeed true. Nevertheless, it did not lessen the mystery of the appointment of the little old Countess as a lady-in-waiting, nor did it account for the strange influence which she held over the Imperial pair.

One evening I went to the Countess's house in the Stulerstrasse to a dinner-party, at which there were present the Crown-Prince, Admiral von Spee from Kiel, and Von Ilberg, the Emperor's doctor, together with the old Duke von Trachenberg, who held the honorary and out-of-date office of grand cupbearer to the Emperor, and the eternal "Uncle" Zeppelin. With us were a number of ladies, including their Serene Highnesses the Princess von Radolin and the Duchess von Ratibor, both ladies of the Court of the Kaiserin, and several others of the ultra-smart set.

After the meal there was a small dance, and about midnight, after waltzing with a pretty girl, the daughter of the Baron von Heintze-Weissenrode, we strolled together into the fine winter garden with its high palms, its plashing fountains, and its cunningly-secreted electric lights.

I was seated with her, chatting gaily, for we had met in July at Stubbenkammer, on the island of Rügen. She had been staying with her father at Eichstadt's, in Nipmerow, and we had all three been on some pleasant excursions along the Baltic coast, with its picturesque beech woods, white cliffs, and blue bays.

We were recalling a delightful excursion up to the Herthaburg, on the road to Sassnitz, that "altar of sacrifice" which tradition connects with the mysterious rites of the beautiful goddess Hertha, mentioned by Tacitus, when suddenly we overheard voices.

Two persons were approaching somewhere behind us, conversing in Italian—a man and a woman.

"Hush!" I whispered mischievously. "Listen! Do you know Italian?"

"Alas! no," was her reply. "Do you?"

I did not answer, for I had already recognized the voices as those of our hostess and the Crown-Prince.

Next moment, however, my companion's quick ears caught that unmistakable squeaky voice.

"Why, it's the Countess!" she exclaimed.

I made no reply, but continued to recall that glorious summer's day beside the blue Baltic, while His Highness and the little old lady-in-waiting seated themselves out of sight a short distance away, and continued a very confidential discussion in an undertone in the language in which, after German, I happened perhaps to be most proficient.

The pair were discussing somebody named Karl Krah1, and the curious discussion was undoubtedly regarding some evil intent.

"I saw the Emperor to-day," declared the old woman in her sibilant Italian, so that no one should understand, for Italian is seldom spoken in Germany. "His Majesty shares my views now, though he did not do so at first. Indeed, I was very near being dismissed in disgrace when I first broached the affair. But, fortunately, he now knows the truth and sees the advantage of—well, you know, eh?"

"Certo, Contessa," replied the Crown-Prince, who speaks Italian extremely well, though not with half the fluency of his hostess. "I quite foresee the peril and the force of your argument."

"How shall we act?" asked the old woman. "It remains for you to devise a plan. At any moment matters may approach a crisis. One can never account for the confidences exchanged by those who love each other. And, remember, Krah1 is in love."

The Crown-Prince grunted, but as several couples entered at that moment the pair suddenly broke off their confidential chat, and, rising, went out together.

Who was this Karl Krah1 against whom some deep-laid plot was levelled?

I searched various directories, lists of persons engaged in the Government offices in the Wilhelmstrasse, the Leipzigerstrasse, and Unter den Linden; I consulted the Director of Berlin Police, Von Jagow; the well-known Detective Schunke, and Heinrich Wesener, Assistant-Director of the Secret Service of the General Staff; but nobody knew Karl Krah1. There seemed to be no record of him anywhere.

In October I went with the Crown-Prince and the Emperor upon a round of ceremonial military inspections to the garrisons in Silesia—namely, Breslau, Leignitz, and Oppeln—and afterwards to Lübeck, where we presented new colours to two regiments. Thence, while the Emperor and his Staff returned direct to Berlin, I accompanied His Imperial Highness to Ballenstedt, the

beautiful schloss in the Harz Mountains. Here once or twice each season the Crown-Prince's habit was to invite a few of his most intimate chums to shoot in the forests of Stecklenberg and the Lauenberg, and along that curious sandstone ridge known as the Teufelsmauer, or "Devil's Wall."

The sport was always excellent, especially about the romantic district of Neue Schenke, near Suderode.

The guns consisted of five well-known officers from Berlin, together with Dr. Zeising, the Master-General of Forests, and Lieut.-General von Oertzen, the fat old Inspector-General of Cavalry. As usual, we all had a most enjoyable time.

On the third day, after a champagne luncheon taken at the forester's little house at Neue Schenke, we were about to resume our sport. Indeed, all the guests had gone outside, preparing to go to their allotted stations, when the head forester, a stalwart man in green livery, entered, and, addressing the Crown-Prince, said:

"There is a man to see Your Imperial Highness, and refuses to leave. He gives his name as Karl Krah!."

In an instant I pricked up my ears.

His Highness's brows narrowed for a second, which showed his annoyance, then, smiling affably, so clever was he, like his Imperial father, in the concealment of his real feelings—he replied:

"Oh, yes—Krah! I recollect. Yes, I will see him here."

Next moment the person whom I had heard discussed so strangely in the little old woman's beautiful winter garden was ushered in.

He was dark-haired, aged about twenty-eight, I judged, with small, shrewd black eyes, dressed in a well-cut suit of grey country tweeds, and but for his German name I should have taken him for an English tourist, one of those familiar objects of the Harz in peace time. His appearance instantly interested me, the more so owing to the fact that he had come to that remote spot and at that hour to pay a visit to the Emperor's son.

"Come in, Karl!" exclaimed the Crown-Prince affably, as he grasped his visitor's hand. His Highness did not often offer his manicured hand to others, and at this I was, I admit, greatly surprised. "The forester did not know you, of course. Well, I am very pleased to see you. Have you come straight here?"

"Yes, your Highness. I went first to Berlin, and learning that you were here I thought I had better lose no time."

"Quite right," laughed his Highness who, turning to me, said: "Heltzendorff, will you tell the others to go on—that I am detained for an hour on State business, and—and that I will join them as soon as possible. I will find you in the woods, on the left of the Quedlinburg Road, before one comes to the Wurmthal. Apologize for me, but the delay is inevitable. I have a conference with Herr Krahle."

While His Highness remained behind at the forester's house to chat alone with the mysterious Karl Krahle, we went out among the birds and had some excellent sport. Yet the sight of that ferret-eyed young man, whom I had long endeavoured in vain to trace, caused me considerable wonderment. Who was that young fellow in whom the little old Countess seemed to take such deep and peculiar interest? What was his offence that she, with the Crown-Prince, should concoct, as it seemed to me, such a plot as that I had partly overheard?

That there was a woman in the case I felt assured, but her name had not been mentioned, and I had no suspicion of whom it could be. I realized, however, that something important must be in progress, otherwise His Highness, devoted to sport as he was, would never have given up the best afternoon to consult with that stranger in grey tweeds.

The forester and beaters had come with us, as the Crown-Prince had, at his own request, been left alone with his mysterious visitor.

After a couple of short beats we arrived at the spot on the forest road to Quedlinburg, a most romantic and picturesque gorge, where His Highness had arranged to meet us, and there we sat down and waited. Both Von Oertzen and Dr. Zeising, being unduly stout, had been puffed in coming up the steep mountain side, and as we sat we gossiped, though impatient to set forth again.

A full half-hour had passed, yet the head forester, who was keeping a look-out along the road, did not signal His Highness's approach.

"I wonder what can have detained him?" remarked the Inspector-General of Cavalry.

I explained that a strange young man had come to the forester's house.

"Well," laughed a smart young lieutenant of Uhlans, "I could have understood the delay if it had been a lady!"

An hour went past. The light would soon fade, and we, knowing "Willie's" utter disregard for his appointments, at last decided to continue the shoot, leaving one of the foresters to tell His Highness the direction we had taken.

The Crown-Prince did not, however, join us, and darkness had fallen ere we returned to the forester's house. Of His Highness there was no sign, a fact which much surprised us. In the room wherein I had left him his gun and green Tyrolese hat were lying upon a chair, and the fact that all the cars were still ranged outside showed that he had not driven back to the castle.

The Crown-Prince had disappeared!

Knof, His Highness's chauffeur, who had been walking with us, was sent back post-haste to the schloss to ascertain whether he had been seen there, for His Highness's movements were often most erratic. We knew that if the whim took him he would perhaps go off in an opposite direction, or trudge back to the castle with utter disregard of our natural anxiety.

Lights were lit, and we enjoyed cigars awaiting Knof's return. In an hour he was back with the news that nothing had been heard of His Highness. Soon after we had left that morning, however, a young man in a grey suit had called and seen the major-domo, who had directed him where His Highness might be found.

Upon Eckardt—the commissary of police responsible for His Highness's safety—the onus rested. Yet, had he not been sent out with the party, as His Highness had expressed to me a wish to be left alone with the stranger, whose name I alone knew.

While we were discussing the most judicious mode of action—for I scented much mystery in this visit of Karl Krah!—one of the party suddenly discovered, lying upon the ledge of the window, a lady's small and rather elegant handbag of black moiré silk.

"Hulloa!" I cried when he held it up for inspection. "This reveals to us one fact—a woman has been here!"

I opened the bag, and within found a small lawn handkerchief with a coronet embroidered in its corner, a tiny tortoise-shell mirror, and four one-hundred-mark notes, but no clue whatever as to its owner.

The mystery was increasing hourly, but the gay party, knowing "Willie's" susceptibility where the fair sex were concerned, only laughed and declared that His Highness would assuredly turn up before the evening was over.

Truth to tell, I did not like the situation. His Highness's disappearance was now known to fifty or so persons, beaters, and others, and I feared lest it might get into the Berlin papers. With that object I called them together and impressed upon them that most complete silence must be maintained regarding the affair.

Then Knof drove me alone back to the schloss. I wondered if His Highness, wishing to get away unobserved, returning in secret there, had left me a written message in his room. He had done that on one occasion before.

I dashed up to the small, old-world room which by day overlooked the romantic and picturesque valley, but upon the table whereat I had been writing early that morning there was nothing.

As I turned to leave I heard a footstep, and next instant saw the little deformed old Countess facing me.

Her appearance quite startled me. Apparently she had just arrived, for she was in a dark blue bonnet and warm travelling coat.

"Ah! Count von Heltzendorff!" she cried in that squeaky, high-pitched voice of hers. "Is His Imperial Highness here? I must see him immediately."

"No, Countess. His Imperial Highness is not here," was my reply. "This afternoon he mysteriously disappeared from the forester's lodge at Neue Schenke, and we are unable to trace him."

"Disappeared!" gasped the old lady, instantly pale and agitated.

"Yes," I said, looking her straight in the face.

"Do you know whether he had a visitor to-day—a young, dark-haired man?"

"He had, Countess. A man called, and saw him. At His Highness's request I left him alone with his visitor at the forester's house. The man's name was Karl Krahle."

"How did you know his name?" she asked, staring at me with an expression of distinct suspicion.

"Because—well, because I happen to have learnt it some time ago," I said. "And, further, on returning to the house we found this little bag in the room wherein I had left the Crown-Prince."

"Why!—a lady's bag!" she exclaimed as I held it out for inspection.

"Yes," I said in a somewhat hard tone. "Do you happen to recognize it?"

"Me? Why?" asked the old woman.

"Well, because I think it is your own property," I said with a sarcastic smile. "I have some recollection of having seen it in your hand!"

She took it, examined it well, and then, with a hollow, artificial laugh, declared:

"It certainly is not mine. I once had a bag very similar, but mine was not of such good quality."

"Are you really quite certain, Countess?" I demanded in a low, persuasive voice.

"Quite," she declared, though I knew that she was lying to me. "But why trouble about that bag while there is a point much more important—the safety and whereabouts of His Imperial Highness?" she went on in a great state of agitation. "Tell me, Count, exactly what occurred—as far as you know."

I recounted to her the facts just as you have already written them down, and as I did so I watched her thin, crafty old face, noticing upon it an expression full of suspicion of myself. She was, I now realized, undecided as to the exact extent of my knowledge.

"How did you know that the young man's name was Krah!?" she asked eagerly. "You had perhaps met him before—eh?"

But to this leading question I maintained a sphinx-like silence. That the little old woman who had so unexpectedly become a lady-in-waiting was playing some desperate double game I felt sure, but its exact import was still an enigma.

"In any case," she said, "would it not be as well to return to the Neue Schenke and make search?"

I smiled. Then, in order to let her know that I was acquainted with Italian, the language she had spoken on that well-remembered night in her own conservatory, I exclaimed:

"Ahe! alle volte con gli occhi aperti si far dei sogni." (Sometimes one can dream with one's eyes open.)

Her thin eyebrows narrowed, and with a shrug of her shoulders the clever old woman replied:

"Dal false bene viene il vero male." (From an affected good feeling comes a real evil.)

I realized at that moment that there was more mystery in the affair than I had yet conceived. His Imperial Highness was certainly missing, though the female element of the affair had become eliminated by my recognition of her own handbag. She, too, had been in secret to the forester's house—but with what object?

Half an hour later we were back at the little house in the forest.

The guests had all returned to the castle, and only Eckardt, the police commissary, remained, with the forester and his underlings. Already search had been made in the surrounding woods, but without result. Of his Imperial Highness there was no trace.

In the long room, with its pitch-pine walls, and lit by oil lamps, the crafty old Countess closely questioned Eckardt as to the result of his inquiries. But the police official, who had become full of nervous fear, declared that he had been sent off by His Highness, and had not since found any trace of him. He spoke of the little black silk bag, of course, and attached great importance to it.

Within half an hour we had reorganized the beaters from the neighbourhood and, with lanterns, set out again to examine some woods to the east which had not been searched. About ten o'clock we set forth, the Countess accompanying us and walking well, notwithstanding her age, though I could see that it was a fearful anxiety that kept her active. To the men with us every inch of the mountain side was familiar, and for hours we searched.

Suddenly, not far away, a horn was blown, followed by loud shouts. Quickly we approached the spot, and Eckardt and myself, as we came up, looked upon a strange scene. Close to the trunk of a great beech tree lay the form of the Crown-Prince, hatless, outstretched upon his face.

Instantly I bent, tore open his shooting jacket, and to my great relief found that his heart was still beating. He was, however, quite unconscious, though there seemed no sign of a struggle. As he had left his hat and gun in the house, it seemed that he had gone forth only for a moment. And yet we were quite a mile from the forester's house!

The Countess had thrown herself upon her knees and stroked his brow tenderly when I announced that he was still living. By her actions I saw that she was filled by some bitter self-reproach.

With the lanterns shining around him—surely a weird and remarkable scene which would, if described by the journalists, have caused a great sensation in Europe—the Crown-Prince was brought slowly back to consciousness, until at last he sat up, dazed and wondering.

His first words to me were:

"That fellow! Where is he? That—that glass globe!"

Glass globe! Surely His Highness's mind was wandering.

An hour later he was comfortably in bed in the great old-world room in the castle, attended by a local doctor—upon whom I set the seal of official silence—and before dawn he had completely recovered.

Yet, even to me, he declared that he retained absolutely no knowledge of what had occurred.

"I went out quickly, and I—well, I don't know what happened," he told me soon after dawn, as he lay in bed. Strangely enough, he made no mention of the man, Karl Krah!.

Later on he summoned the Countess von Kienitz, and for twenty minutes or so he had an animated discussion with her. Being outside the room, however, I was unable to hear distinctly.

Well, I succeeded, by bribes and threats, in hushing up the whole affair and keeping it out of the papers, while by those who knew of the incident it was soon forgotten.

I suppose it must have been fully three months later when one evening, having taken some documents over to the Emperor for signature at the Berlin Schloss, I returned to the Prince's private room in the Palace, when, to my great surprise, I found the man Karl Krah! seated there. He looked very pale and worn, quite unlike the rather athletic figure he presented at the forester's house.

"If you still refuse to tell me the truth, then I shall take my own measures to find out—severe measures! So I give you full warning," the Crown-Prince was declaring angrily, as I entered so unexpectedly.

I did not withdraw, pretending not to notice the presence of a visitor, therefore His Highness himself beckoned the young man, who followed him down the corridor to another room.

The whole affair was most puzzling. What had happened on that afternoon in the Harz Mountains I could not at all imagine. By what means had His Highness been rendered unconscious, and what part could the little old Countess have played in the curious affair?

In about half an hour the Crown-Prince returned in a palpably bad humour, and, flinging himself into his chair, wrote a long letter, which he addressed to Countess von Kienitz. This he sealed carefully, and ordered me to take it at once to the Stulerstrasse and deliver it to her personally.

"The Countess left for Stockholm this morning," I was informed by the bearded manservant. "She left by the eight o'clock train, and has already left Sassnitz by now."

"When do you expect her to return?"

The man did not know.

On going back to His Highness and telling him of the Countess's departure, he bit his lip and then smiled grimly.

"That infernal old woman has left Germany, and will never again put her foot upon our soil, Heltzendorff," he said. "You may open that letter. It will explain something which I know must have mystified you."

I did so. And as I read what he had written I held my breath. Truly, it did explain much.

Imposing the strictest silence upon me, the Crown-Prince then revealed how utterly he and the Crown-Princess had been misled, and how very narrowly he had escaped being the victim of a cunning plot to effect his death.

The little old Countess von Kienitz had, it seemed, sworn to avenge the degradation and dismissal of her son, who had been in the famous Death's Head Hussars. She had secretly traced the Crown-Prince as author of a subtle conspiracy against him, the underlying motive being jealousy. With that end in view she had slowly wormed her way into His Highness's confidence, and introduced to him Karl Krahle, a neurotic young Saxon who lived in London, and who pretended he had unearthed a plot against the Kaiser himself.

"It was to tell me the truth concerning the conspiracy that Krah1 came to me in secret at Ballenstedt. He remained with me for half an hour, when, to my great surprise, we were joined by the Countess. The story they told me of the plot against the Emperor was a very alarming one, and I intended to return at once to Berlin. The Countess had left to walk back to the schloss, when presently we heard a woman's scream—her voice—and we both went forth to discover what was in progress. As I ran along a little distance behind Krah1, suddenly what seemed like a thin glass globe struck me in the chest and burst before my face. It had been thrown by an unknown hand, and, on breaking, must have emitted some poisonous gas which was intended to kill me, but which happily failed. Until yesterday the whole affair was a complete mystery, but Krah1 has now confessed that the Countess conceived the plot, and that the hand that had thrown the glass bomb was that of her son, who had concealed himself in the bushes for that purpose."

Though, of course, I hastened to congratulate His Highness upon his fortunate escape, yet I now often wonder whether, if the plot had succeeded, the present world-conflict would ever have occurred.

SECRET NUMBER SEVEN

THE BRITISH GIRL WHO BAULKED THE KAISER

"How completely we have put to sleep these very dear cousins of ours, the British!" His Imperial Highness the Crown-Prince made this remark to me as he sat in the corner of a first-class compartment of an express that had ten minutes before left Paddington Station for the West of England—that much-advertised train known as the Cornish-Riviera Express.

The Crown-Prince, though not generally known, frequently visited England and Scotland incognito, usually travelling as Count von Grüнау, and we were upon one of these flying visits on that bright summer's morning as the express tore through your delightful English scenery of the Thames Valley, with the first stopping-place at Plymouth, our destination.

The real reason for the visit of my young hotheaded Imperial Master was concealed from me.

Four days before he had dashed into my room at the Marmor Palace at Potsdam greatly excited. He had been with the Emperor in Berlin all the morning, and had motored back with all speed. Something had occurred, but what it was I failed to discern. He carried some papers in the pocket of his military tunic. From their colour I saw that they were secret reports—those documents prepared solely for the eyes of the Kaiser and those of his precious son.

He took a big linen-lined envelope and, placing the papers in it, carefully sealed it with wax.

"We are going to London, Heltzendorff. Put that in your dispatch-box. I may want it when we are in England."

"To London—when?" I asked, much surprised at the suddenness of our journey, because I knew that we were due at Weimar in two days' time.

"We leave at six o'clock this evening," was the Crown-Prince's reply. "Koehler has ordered the saloon to be attached to the Hook of Holland train. Hardt has already left Berlin to engage rooms for us at the 'Ritz,' in London."

"And the suite?" I asked, for it was one of my duties to arrange who travelled with His Imperial Highness.

"Oh! we'll leave Eckardt at home," he said, for he always hated the surveillance of the Commissioner of Secret Police. "We shall only want Schuler, my valet, and Knof."

We never travelled anywhere without Knof, the chauffeur, who was an impudent, arrogant young man, intensely disliked by everyone.

And so it was that the four of us duly landed at Harwich and travelled to London, our identity unknown to the jostling crowd of Cook's tourists returning from their annual holiday on the Continent.

At the "Ritz," too, though we took our meals in the restaurant, that great square white room overlooking the Park, "Willie" was not recognized, because all photographs of him show him in elegant uniform. In a tweed suit, or in evening clothes, he presents an unhealthy, weedy and somewhat insignificant figure, save for those slant animal eyes of his which are always so striking in his every mood.

His Imperial Highness had been on the previous day to Carlton House Terrace to a luncheon given by the Ambassador's wife, but to which nobody was invited but the Embassy staff.

And that afternoon in the great dining-room, in full view of St. James's Park and Whitehall, the toast of "The Day" was drunk enthusiastically—the day of Great Britain's intended downfall.

That same evening an Imperial courier arrived from Berlin and called at the "Ritz," where, on being shown into the Crown-Prince's sitting-room, he handed His Highness a sealed letter from his wife.

"Willie," on reading it, became very grave. Then, striking a match, he lit it, and held it until it was consumed. There was a second letter—which I saw was from the Emperor. This he also read, and then gave vent to an expression of impatience. For a few minutes he reflected, and it was then he announced that we must go to Plymouth next day.

On arrival there we went to the Royal Hotel, where the Crown-Prince registered as Mr. Richter, engaging a private suite of rooms for himself and his secretary, myself. For three days we remained there, taking motor runs to Dartmoor, and also down into Cornwall, until on the morning of the fourth day the Crown-Prince suddenly said:

"I shall probably have a visitor this morning about eleven o'clock—a young lady named King. Tell them at the bureau to send her up to my sitting-room."

At the time appointed the lady came. I received her in the lobby of the self-contained flat, and found her to be about twenty-four, well-dressed, fair-

haired and extremely good-looking. Knowing the Crown-Prince's penchant for the petticoat, I saw at once the reason of our journey down to Plymouth.

Miss King, I learned, was an English girl who some years previously had gone to America with her people, and by the heavy travelling coat and close-fitting hat she wore I concluded that she had just come off one of the incoming American liners.

One thing which struck me as I looked at her was the brooch she wore. It was a natural butterfly of a rare tropical variety, with bright golden wings, the delicate sheen of which was protected by small plates of crystal—one of the most charming ornaments I had ever seen.

As I ushered her in she greeted the Crown-Prince as "Mr. Richter," being apparently entirely unaware of his real identity. I concluded that she was somebody whom His Highness had met in Germany, and to whom he had been introduced under his assumed name.

"Ah! Miss King!" he exclaimed pleasantly in his excellent English, shaking hands with her. "Your boat should have been in yesterday. I fear you encountered bad weather—eh?"

"Yes, rather," replied the girl. "But it did not trouble me much. We had almost constant gales ever since we left New York," she laughed brightly. She appeared to be quite a charming little person. But his fast-living Highness was perhaps one of the best judges of a pretty face in all Europe, and I now realized why we had travelled all the way from Potsdam to Plymouth.

"Heltzendorff, would you please bring me that sealed packet from your dispatch-box?" he asked, suddenly turning to me.

The sealed packet! I had forgotten all about it ever since he had handed it me at the door of the Marmor Palace. I knew that it contained some secret reports prepared for the eye of the Emperor. The latter had no doubt seen them, for the Crown-Prince had brought them with him from Berlin.

As ordered, I took the packet into the room where His Highness sat with his fair visitor, and then I retired and closed the door.

Hotel doors are never very heavy, as a rule, therefore I was able to hear conversation, but unfortunately few words were distinct. The interview had lasted nearly half an hour. Finding that I could hear nothing, I contented myself in reading the paper and holding myself in readiness should "Mr. Richter" want me.

Of a sudden I heard His Highness's voice raised in anger, that shrill, high-pitched note which is peculiar both to the Emperor and to his son when they are unusually annoyed.

"But I tell you, Miss King, there is no other way," I heard him shout. "It can be done quite easily, and nobody can possibly know."

"Never!" cried the girl. "What would people think of me?"

"You wish to save your brother," he said. "Very well, I have shown you how you can effect this. And I will help you if you agree to the terms—if you will find out what I want to know."

"I can't!" cried the girl, in evident distress. "I really can't! It would be dishonest—criminal!"

"Bah! my dear girl, you are looking at the affair from far too high a standpoint," replied the man she knew as Richter. "It is a mere matter of business. You ask me to assist you to save your brother, and I have simply stated my terms. Surely you would not think that I should travel from Berlin here to Plymouth in order to meet you if I were not ready and eager to help you?"

"I must ask my father. I can speak to him in confidence."

"Your father!" shrieked Mr. Richter in alarm. "By no means. Why, you must not breathe a single word to him. This affair is a strict secret between us. Please understand that." Then, after a pause, he asked in a lower and more serious voice:

"Your brother is, I quite admit, in direst peril, and you alone can save him. Now, what is your decision?"

The girl's reply was in a tone too low for me to overhear. Its tenor, however, was quickly apparent from the Crown-Prince's words:

"You refuse! Very well, then, I cannot assist you. I regret, Miss King, that you have had your journey to England for nothing."

"But won't you help me, Mr. Richter?" cried the girl appealingly. "Do, do, Mr. Richter!"

"No," was his cold answer. "I will, however, give you opportunity to reconsider your decision. You are, no doubt, going to London. So am I. You will meet me in the hall of the Carlton Hotel at seven o'clock on Thursday evening, and we will dine together."

"But I can't—I really can't do as you wish. You surely will not compel me to—to commit a crime!"

"Hush!" he cried. "I have shown you these papers, and you know my instructions. Remember that your father must know nothing. Nobody must suspect, or you will find yourself in equal peril with your brother."

"You—you are cruel!" sobbed the girl. "Horribly cruel!"

"No, no," he said cheerfully. "Don't cry, please. Think it all over, Miss King, and meet me in London on Thursday night."

After listening to the appointment I discreetly withdrew into the corridor on pretence of summoning a waiter, and when I returned the pretty English girl was taking leave of "Mr. Richter."

Her blue eyes betrayed traces of emotion, and she was, I saw, very pale, her bearing quite unlike her attitude when she had entered there.

"Well, good-bye, Miss King," said His Highness, grasping her hand. "It was really awfully good of you to call. We shall meet again very soon—eh? Good-bye."

Then, turning to me, he asked me to conduct her out.

I walked by her side along the corridor and down the stairs, but as we went along she suddenly turned to me, remarking:

"I wonder if all men are alike?"

"Alike, why?" I asked, surprised.

"Mr. Richter—ah! he has a heart of stone," she declared. "My poor brother!" she added, in a voice broken in emotion. "I have travelled from America in order to try and save him ere it is too late."

"Mr. Richter is your friend—eh?" I asked as we descended.

"Yes. I met him at Frankenhausem two years ago. I had gone there with my father to visit the Barbarossa Cavern."

"Then you have lived in Germany?"

"Yes, for several years."

By this time we were at the door of the hotel, and I bowed to her as she smiled sadly and, wishing me adieu, passed out into the street.

On returning to the Crown-Prince, I found him in a decidedly savage mood. He was pacing the floor impatiently, muttering angrily to himself, for it was apparent that some deeply-laid plan of his was being thwarted by the girl's refusal to conform to his wishes and obtain certain information he was seeking.

The Crown-Prince, when in a foreign country, was never idle. His energy was such that he was ever on the move, with eyes and ears always open to learn whatever he could. Hence it was at two o'clock that afternoon Knof brought round a big grey open car, and in it I sat beside the Emperor's son while we were driven around the defences of Plymouth, just as on previous occasions we had inspected those of Portsmouth and of Dover.

On the following Thursday evening we had returned to London, and the Crown-Prince, without telling me where he was going, left the Ritz Hotel, merely explaining that he might not be back till midnight. It was on that occasion, my dear Le Queux, you will remember, that I dined with you at the Devonshire Club, and we afterwards spent a pleasant evening together at the "Empire."

I merely told you that His Highness was out at dinner with a friend. You were, naturally, inquisitive, but I did not satisfy your curiosity. Secrecy was my duty.

On returning to the hotel I found the Crown-Prince arranging with Knof a motor run along the Surrey hills on the following day. He had a large map spread before him—a German military map, the curious marks upon which would have no doubt astonished any of your War Office officials. The map indicated certain spots which had been secretly prepared by Germany in view of the projected invasion.

To those spots we motored on the following day. His Imperial Highness, at the instigation of the Emperor, actually made a tour of inspection of those cunningly-concealed points of vantage which the Imperial General Staff had, with their marvellous forethought and bold enterprise, already prepared right beneath the very nose of the sleeping British lion.

From the Crown-Prince's jaunty manner and good spirits I felt assured that by the subtle persuasive powers he possessed towards women—nearly all of whom admired his corseted figure and his gay nonchalance—he had brought the mysterious Miss King into line with his own cunningly-conceived plans—whatever they might be.

We lunched at the Burford Bridge Hotel, that pretty old-fashioned house beneath Box Hill, not far from Dorking.

After our meal in the long public room, newly built as an annexe, we strolled into the grounds for a smoke.

"Well, Heltzendorff," he said presently, as we strolled together along the gravelled walks, "we will return to the Continent to-morrow. Our visit has not been altogether abortive. We will remain a few days in Ostend, before we return to Potsdam."

Next afternoon we had taken up our quarters at a small but very select hotel on the Digue at Ostend, a place called the "Beau Séjour." It was patronized by old-fashioned folk, and "Herr Richter" was well known there. There may have been some who suspected that Richter was not the visitor's real name, but they were few, and it always surprised me how well the Crown-Prince succeeded in preserving his incognito—though, of course, the authorities knew of the Imperial visit.

Whenever "Willie" went to Ostend his conduct became anything but that of the exemplary husband. Ostend in the season was assuredly a gay place, and the Crown-Prince had a small and select coterie of friends there who drank, gambled and enjoyed themselves even more than they did at Nice in winter.

But his mind was always obsessed by the coming war. Indeed, on that very evening of our arrival, as we strolled along the gaily-illuminated Digue towards the big, bright Kursaal, he turned to me suddenly and said:

"When the hour comes, and Prussia in her greatness strikes them, this place will soon become German territory. I shall make that building yonder my headquarters," and he jerked his thumb in the direction of the summer palace of the King of the Belgians.

The following day, about three o'clock, while the Crown-Prince was carelessly going through some letters brought by courier from Potsdam, a waiter came to me with a message that a Miss King desired to see Mr. Richter.

In surprise I received her, welcoming her to Ostend. From the neat dress of the pretty English girl I concluded that she had just crossed from Dover, and she seemed most anxious to see His Highness. I noted, too, that she still wore the beautiful golden butterfly.

When I entered his room to announce her his slant brows knit, and his thin lips compressed.

"H'm! More trouble for us, Heltzendorff, I suppose!" he whispered beneath his breath. "Very well, show her in."

The fair visitor was in the room for a long time—indeed, for over an hour. Their voices were raised, and now and then, curiously enough, I received the impression that, whatever might have been the argument, the pretty girl had gained her own point, for when she came out she smiled at me in triumph, and walked straight forth and down the stairs.

The Crown-Prince threw himself into a big arm-chair in undisguised dissatisfaction. Towards me he never wore a mask, though, like his father, he invariably did so in the presence of strangers.

"Those accursed women!" he cried. "Ah! Heltzendorff, when a woman is in love she will defy even Satan himself! And yet they are fools, these women, for they are in ignorance of the irresistible power of our Imperial house. The enemies of the Hohenzollerns are as a cloud of gnats on a summer's night. The dew comes, and they are no more. It is a pity," he added, with a sigh of regret. "But those who are either conscientious or defiant must suffer. Has not one of our greatest German philosophers written: 'It is no use breathing against the wind'?"

"True," I said. Then, hoping to learn something further, I added: "Surely it is a nuisance to be followed and worried by that little English girl!"

"Worried! Yes. You are quite right, my dear Heltzendorff," he said. "But I do not mind worry, if it is in the interests of Prussia, and of our House of Hohenzollern. I admit the girl, though distinctly pretty, is a most irritating person. She does not appeal to me, but I am compelled to humour her, because I have a certain object in view."

I could not go further, or I might have betrayed the knowledge I had gained by eavesdropping.

"I was surprised that she should turn up here, in Ostend," I said.

"I had written to her. I expected her."

"She does not know your real rank or station?"

"No. To her I am merely Herr Emil Richter, whom she first met away in the country. She was a tourist, and I was Captain Emil Richter, of the Prussian Guards. We met while you were away on holiday at Vienna."

I was anxious to learn something about Miss King's brother, but "Willie" was generally discreet, and at that moment unusually so. One fact was plain,

however, that some secret report presented to the Emperor had been shown to her. Why? I wondered if His Highness had been successful in coercing her into acting as he desired.

Certainly the girl's attitude as she had left the hotel went to show that, in the contest, she had won by her woman's keen wit and foresight. I recollected, too, that she was British.

A fortnight afterwards we were back again at Potsdam.

About three months passed. The Crown-Prince had accompanied the Emperor to shoot on the Glatzer Gebirge, that wild mountainous district beyond Breslau. For a week we had been staying at a great, high-up, prison-like schloss, the ancestral home of Prince Ludwig Lichtenau, in the Wölfelsgrund.

The Emperor and his suite had left, and our host had been suddenly called to Berlin by telegram, his daughter having been taken ill. Therefore, the Crown-Prince and we of the suite had remained for some further sport.

On the day after the Emperor's departure I spent the afternoon in a small panelled room which overlooked a deep mountain gorge, and which had been given up to me for work. I was busy with correspondence when the courier from Potsdam entered and gave me the battered leather pouch containing the Crown-Prince's letters. Having unlocked it with my key, I found among the correspondence a small square packet addressed to His Imperial Highness, and marked "Private."

Now, fearing bombs or attempts by other means upon his son's precious life, the Emperor had commanded me always to open packets addressed to him. This one, however, being marked "Private," and, moreover, the inscription being in a feminine hand, I decided to await His Highness's return.

When at last he came in, wet and very muddy after a long day's sport, I showed him the packet. With a careless air he said:

"Oh, open it, Heltzendorff. Open all packets, whether marked private or not."

I obeyed, and to my surprise found within the paper a small leather-covered jewel-case, in which, reposing upon a bed of dark blue velvet, was the beautiful ornament which I had admired at the throat of the fair-haired British girl—the golden butterfly.

I handed it to His Highness just as he was taking a cigarette from the box on a side table.

The sight of it electrified him! He held his breath, standing for a few seconds staring wildly at it as though he were gazing upon some hideous spectre, sight of which had frozen his senses.

He stood rigid, his thin countenance as white as paper.

"When did that arrive?" he managed to ask, though in a hoarse voice, which showed how completely sight of it had upset him.

"This afternoon. It was in the courier's pouch from Potsdam."

He had grasped the back of a chair as though to steady himself, and for a few seconds stood there, with his left hand clapped over his eyes, endeavouring to collect his thoughts.

He seemed highly nervous, and at the same time extremely puzzled. Receipt of that unique and beautiful brooch was, I saw, some sign, but of its real significance I remained in entire ignorance.

That it had a serious meaning I quickly realized, for within half an hour the Crown-Prince and myself were in the train on our two-hundred-mile journey back to Berlin.

On arrival His Imperial Highness drove straight to the Berlin Schloss, and there had a long interview with the Emperor. At last I was called into the familiar pale-green room, the Kaiser's private cabinet, and at once saw that something untoward had occurred.

The Emperor's face was dark and thoughtful. Yet another of the black plots of the Hohenzollerns was in process of being carried out! Of that I felt only too confident. The Crown-Prince, in his badly-creased uniform, betraying a long journey—so unlike his usual spick-and-span appearance—stood nervously by as the Kaiser threw himself into his writing-chair with a deep grunt and distinctly evil grace.

"I suppose it must be done," he growled viciously to his son. "Did I not foresee that the girl would constitute a serious menace? When she was in Germany she might easily have been arrested upon some charge and her mouth closed. Bah! our political police service grows worse and worse. We will have it entirely reorganized. The Director, Laubach, is far too sentimental, far too chicken-hearted."

As he spoke he took up his pen and commenced to write rapidly, drawing a deep breath as his quill scratched upon the paper.

"You realize," he exclaimed angrily to his son, taking no notice of my presence there, because I was part and parcel of the great machinery of the Court, "you realize what this order means?" he added, as he appended his signature. "It is a blow struck against our cause—struck by a mere slip of a girl. Think, if the truth came out! Why, all our propaganda in the United States and Britain would be nullified in a single day, and the 'good relations' we are now extending on every hand throughout the world in order to mislead our enemies would be exposed in all their true meaning. We cannot afford that. It would be far cheaper to pay twenty million marks—the annual cost of the whole propaganda in America—than to allow the truth to be known."

Suddenly the Crown-Prince's face brightened, as though he had had some sudden inspiration.

"The truth will not be known, I promise you," he said, with a strange, evil grin. I knew that expression. It meant that he had devised some fresh and devilish plan. "The girl is defiant to-day, but she will not remain so long. I will take your order, but I may not have occasion to put it in force."

"Ah! You have perhaps devised something—eh? I hope so," said the Emperor. "You are usually ingenious in a crisis. Good! Here is the order; act just as you think fit."

"I was summoned, Your Majesty," I said, in order to remind him of my presence there.

"Ah! Yes. You know this Miss King, do you not?"

"I received her in Plymouth," was my reply.

"Ah! then you will again recognize her. Probably your services may be very urgently required within the next few hours. You may go," and His Majesty curtly dismissed me.

I waited in the corridor until His Imperial Highness came forth. When he did so he looked flushed and seemed agitated.

There had, I knew, occurred a violent scene between father and son, for to me it seemed as though "Willie" had again fallen beneath the influence of a pretty face.

He drove me in the big Mercédès over to Potsdam, where I had a quantity of military documents awaiting attention, and, after a change of clothes, I tackled them.

Yet my mind kept constantly reverting to the mystery surrounding the golden butterfly.

After dinner that night I returned again to my workroom, when, upon my blotting-pad, I found a note addressed to me in the Crown-Prince's sprawling hand.

Opening it, I found that he had scribbled this message:

"I have left. Tell Eckardt not to trouble. Come alone, and meet me to-morrow night at the Palast Hotel, in Hamburg. I shall call at seven o'clock and ask for Herr Richter. I shall also use that name. Tell nobody of my journey, not even the Crown-Princess. Explain that I have gone to Berlin.—Wilhelm, Kronprinz."

I read the note through a second time, and then burned it.

Next day I arrived at the Palast Hotel, facing the Binnenalster, in Hamburg, giving my name as Herr Richter.

At seven o'clock I awaited His Highness. Eight o'clock came—nine—ten—even eleven—midnight, but, though I sat in the private room I had engaged, no visitor arrived.

Just after twelve, however, a waiter brought up a note addressed to Herr Richter.

Believing it to be meant for me, I opened it. To my great surprise, I found that it was from the mysterious Miss King, and evidently intended for the Crown-Prince. It said:

"My brother was released from the Altona Prison this evening—I presume, owing to your intervention—and we are now both safely on our way across to Harwich. You have evidently discovered at last that I am not the helpless girl you believed me to be. When your German police arrested my brother Walter in Bremen as a spy of Britain I think you will admit that they acted very injudiciously, in face of all that my brother and myself know to-day. At Plymouth you demanded, as the price of Walter's liberty, that I should become attached to your secret service in America and betray the man who adopted me and brought me up as his own daughter. But you never dreamed the extent of my knowledge of your country's vile intrigues; you did not know that, through my brother and the man who adopted me as his daughter, I know the full extent of your subtle propaganda. You were, I admit, extremely clever, Herr Richter, and I confess that I was quite charmed when you sent me, as souvenir, that golden butterfly to the hotel in

Frankenhausen—that pretty ornament which I returned to you as a mark of my refusal and defiance of the conditions you imposed upon me for the release of my brother from the sentence of fifteen years in a fortress. This time, Herr Richter, a woman wins! Further, I warn you that if you attempt any reprisal my brother will at once expose Germany's machinations abroad. He has, I assure you, many good friends, both in Britain and America. Therefore if you desire silence you will make no effort to trace me further. At Frankenhausen you called me 'the golden-haired butterfly,' but you regarded me merely as a moth! Adieu!"

Twelve hours later I handed that letter to the Crown-Prince in Potsdam. Where he had been in the meantime I did not know. He read it through; then, with a fierce curse upon his thin, curled lips, he crushed it in his hand and tossed it into the fire.

SECRET NUMBER EIGHT

HOW THE CROWN-PRINCE WAS BLACKMAILED

The Crown-Prince had accompanied the Emperor on board the Hohenzollern on his annual cruise up the Norwegian fjords, and the Kaiserin and the Crown-Princess were of the party.

I had been left at home because I had not been feeling well, and with relief had gone south to the Lake of Garda, taking up my quarters in that long, white hotel which faces the blue lake at Gardone-Riviera. A truly beautiful spot, where the gardens of the hotel run down to the lake's edge, with a long veranda covered with trailing roses and geraniums, peaceful indeed after the turmoil and glitter of our Court life in Germany.

One morning at luncheon, however, just as I had seated myself at my table set in the window overlooking the sunlit waters, a tall, rather thin-faced, bald-headed man entered, accompanied by an extremely pretty girl, with very fair hair and eyes of an unusual, child-like blue. The man I judged to be about fifty-five, whose blotchy face marked him as one addicted to strong liquors, and whose dress and bearing proclaimed him to be something of a roué. He walked jauntily to the empty table next mine, while his companion stared vacantly about her as she followed him to the place which the obsequious maître d'hôtel had indicated.

The stranger's eyes were dark, penetrating, and shifty, while there was something about the young girl's demeanour that aroused my interest. Her face, undeniably beautiful, was marred by a stare of complete vacancy. She glanced at me, but I saw that she did not see. It was as though her thoughts were far away, or else that she was under the spell of some weird fascination.

That strange, blank expression in her countenance caused me to watch her. On the one hand, the man had all the appearance of a person who had run the whole gamut of the vices; while the fair-haired, blue-eyed girl was the very incarnation of maiden innocence.

Perhaps it was because I kept my eyes upon her that the dark-eyed man knit his brows and stared at me in defiance. Instinctively I did not like the fellow, for as they started their meal I saw plainly the rough, almost uncouth, manner in which he treated her.

At first I believed that they might be father and daughter, but this suggestion was negatived when, on inquiry at the bureau, I was told that the

man was Martinez Aranda, of Seville, and that his companion was his niece, Lola Serrano.

The latter always appeared exquisitely dressed, and the gay young men, Italian officers and others, were all eager to make her acquaintance. Yet it seemed to me that the man Aranda forbade her to speak to anyone. Indeed, I watched the pair closely during the days following, and could plainly discern that the girl went in mortal fear of him.

On the third day, while walking along the terrace facing the lake, I came across the Spaniard, who, in affable mood, started a conversation, and as we leaned upon the stone balustrade, smoking and gossiping, the pretty girl with hair so fair even though she were a Southerner came up, and I was introduced.

She wore a cool white linen gown, a big sun-hat, and carried a pale blue sunshade. But my eye, expert where a woman's gown is concerned, told me that that linen frock was the creation of one of the Paris men-dressmakers, whose lowest charge for such a garment is one thousand francs. Aranda and his pretty niece were certainly persons of considerable means.

"How very beautiful the lake always appears at any hour!" the girl exclaimed in French after her uncle had exchanged cards with me. "Truly Italy is delightful."

"Ah, Mademoiselle," I replied. "But your brilliant Spain is ever attractive."

"You know Spain?" inquired the bald-headed man at once.

"Yes, I know Spain, but only as a spring visitor," was my reply.

And from that conversation there grew in a few days quite an affable friendship. We went together on excursions, all three of us, once by the steamer up to Riva, where on landing and passing through the Customs we sat at the café and sipped that delicious coffee topped by a foam of cream, the same as one got at the "Bristol" in Vienna, or the "Hungaria" in Budapest. Then at evening, while the pretty Lola gossiped with a weedy old Italian Marchioness, whose acquaintance she had made, her uncle played billiards with me, and he was no bad player either!

As soon as the Spaniard learnt of my position as personal-adjutant of His Imperial Highness the Crown-Prince he became immediately interested, as most people were, and plied me with all sorts of questions regarding the truth of certain scandals that were at the moment afloat concerning "Willie."

As you know, I am usually pretty discreet. Therefore, I do not think that he learned very much from me.

We were alone in the billiard-room, having a game after luncheon one day, when a curious conversation took place.

"Ah, Count! You must have a very intimate knowledge of life at the Berlin Court," he remarked quite suddenly, in French.

"Yes. But it is a strenuous life, I assure you," I declared, laughing.

"The Crown-Prince sometimes goes abroad incognito," he said, pausing and looking me straight in the face.

"Yes—sometimes," I admitted.

"He was in Rome in the first week of last December. He disappeared from Potsdam, and the Emperor and yourself were extremely anxious as to what had become of him. He had gone to Berlin alone, without any attendant, and completely disappeared. Yet, while you were all making secret inquiries, and fearing lest the truth should leak out to the Press, His Imperial Highness was living as plain Herr Wilhelm Nebelthau in an apartment at Number Seventeen, Lungtevere Mellini. Isn't that so?"

I stared agape at the Spaniard.

I thought myself the only person who knew that fact—a fact which the Crown-Prince had revealed to me in the strictest secrecy.

Could this man Martinez Aranda be an agent of police? Yet that seemed quite impossible.

"You appear to have a more intimate knowledge of His Highness's movements than I have myself," I replied, utterly amazed at the extent of the man's information.

His dark, sallow face relaxed into a mysterious smile, and he bent to make another stroke without replying.

"His Highness should be very careful in the concealment of his movements when he is incognito," he remarked presently.

"You met him there, eh?" I asked, eager to ascertain the truth, for that secret visit to Rome had been a most mysterious one, even to me.

"I do not think I need reply to that question," he said. "All I can say is that the Crown-Prince kept rather queer company on that occasion."

Those words only served to confirm my suspicions. Whenever "Willie" disappeared alone from Potsdam I could afterwards always trace the disappearance to his penchant for the eternal feminine. How often, indeed, had I been present at scenes between the Crown-Princess and her husband, and how often I had heard the Emperor storm at his son in that high-pitched voice so peculiar to the Hohenzollerns when unduly excited.

The subject soon dropped, but his statements filled me with apprehension. It was quite plain that this well-dressed, bald-headed Spaniard was in possession of some secret of the Crown-Prince's, a secret which had not been revealed to me.

More than once in the course of the next few days, when we were alone together, I endeavoured to learn something of the nature of the secret which took his Highness to the Eternal City, but Aranda was very clever and discreet. In addition, the attitude of the girl Lola became more than ever strange. There was a blank look in those big, beautiful eyes of hers that betrayed something abnormal. But what it was I failed to decide.

One evening after dinner I saw her walking alone in the moonlight along the terrace by the lake, and joined her. So preoccupied she seemed that she scarcely replied to my remarks. Then suddenly she halted, and as though unable to restrain her feelings longer I heard a low sob escape her.

"Mademoiselle, what is the matter?" I asked in French. "Tell me."

"Oh, nothing, Monsieur, nothing," she declared in a low, broken voice. "I—I know I am very foolish, only——"

"Only what? Tell me. That you are in distress I know. Let me assist you."

She shook her handsome head mournfully.

"No, you cannot assist me," she declared in a tone that told me how desperate she had now become. "My uncle," she exclaimed, staring straight before her across the moonlit waters, whence the dark mountains rose from the opposite bank. "Count, be careful! Do—my—my uncle."

"I don't understand," I said, standing at her side and gazing at her pale countenance beneath the full light of the moon.

"My uncle—he knows something—be careful—warn the Crown-Prince."

"What does he know?"

"He has never told me."

"Are you in entire ignorance of the reason of the visit of His Highness to Rome? Try and remember all you know," I urged.

The girl put both her palms to her brow, and, shaking her head, said:

"I can remember nothing—nothing—oh! my poor head! Only warn the man who in Rome called himself Herr Nebelthau!"

She spoke in a low, nervous tone, and I could see that she was decidedly hysterical and much unstrung.

"Did you meet Herr Nebelthau?" I asked eagerly.

"Me? Ah, no. But I saw him, though he never saw me."

"But what is the secret that your uncle knows?" I demanded. "If I know, then I can warn the Crown-Prince."

"I do not know," she replied, again shaking her head. "Only—only—well, by some means my uncle knew that you had left Potsdam, and we travelled here on purpose to meet you to obtain from you some facts concerning the Crown-Prince's movements."

"To meet me?" I echoed in surprise. In a moment I saw that Aranda's intentions were evidently evil ones. But just at that juncture the Spaniard came forth in search of his niece.

"Why are you out here?" he asked her gruffly. "Go in. It is too cold for you."

"I came out with the Count to see the glorious panorama of the lake," explained the girl in strange humbleness, and then, turning reluctantly, she obeyed him.

"Come and have a hand at bridge," her uncle urged cheerfully. "The Signora Montalto and young Boileau are ready to make up the four."

To this I agreed, and we followed the girl into the big, white-panelled lounge of the hotel.

Two days later, about four o'clock in the afternoon, Aranda received a telegram, and an hour later left with his niece, who, as she parted from me, whispered:

"Warn the Crown-Prince, won't you?"

I promised, and as they drove off to the station I stood waving my hand to the departing visitors.

A week later I had word from Cuxhaven of the arrival of the Hohenzollern from Trondhjem, and at once returned to the Marmor Palace, where on the night of my arrival the Crown-Prince, wearing his Saxon Uhlan uniform, entered my room, gaily exclaiming:

"Well, Heltzendorff, how are things on the Lake of Garda, eh?"

I briefly explained where I had been, and then, as he lit a cigarette, standing astride near the fireplace, I asked permission to speak upon a confidential matter.

"More trouble, eh?" he asked, with a grin and a shrug of the shoulders.

"I do not know," I said seriously, and then, in brief, I related how the man Aranda had arrived with the girl Lola at the hotel, and what had followed.

As soon as I mentioned the Lungtevere Mellini, that rather aristocratic street, which runs parallel with the Tiber on the outskirts of Rome, His Highness started, his face blanched instantly, and he bit his thin lip.

"Himmel!" he gasped. "The fellow knows that I took the name of Nebelthau! Impossible!"

"But he does," I said quietly. "He is undoubtedly in possession of some secret concerning your visit to Rome last December."

In His Highness's eyes I noticed a keen, desperate expression which I had scarcely ever seen there before.

"You are quite certain of this, Heltzendorff, eh?" he asked. "The man's name is Martinez Aranda?"

"Yes. He says he is from Seville. His niece, Lola Serrano, told me to warn you that he means mischief."

"Who is the girl? Do I know her?"

"No."

"Why does she warn me?"

"I cannot say," was my reply. "As you are aware, I have no knowledge of the nature of Your Highness's visit to Rome. I merely report all that I could gather from the pair, who evidently went to Gardone to meet me."

"Where are they now?"

"In Paris—at the Hotel Terminus, Gare St. Lazare. I found out that they had taken tickets to Verona and thence to Paris, therefore I telegraphed to my friend Pinaud, of the Sûreté, who quickly found them and reported to me by wire within twenty-four hours."

"H'm! This is serious, Heltzendorff—infernally serious," declared the Crown-Prince, with knit brows, as he commenced to pace the room with his hands clasped behind his back.

Suddenly he halted in front of me and smoothed his hair—a habit of his when perplexed.

"First, the Emperor must know nothing, and the Crown-Princess must be kept in entire ignorance at all costs," he declared. "I can now foresee a great amount of trouble. Curse the women! I trusted one, and she—ah! I can see it all now."

"Is it very serious?" I asked, still anxious to glean the truth.

"Serious!" he cried, staring at me wildly. "Serious! Why, Heltzendorff, it means everything to me—everything!"

The Crown-Prince was not the kind of man to exhibit fear. Though degenerate in every sense of the word, and without the slightest idea of moral obligations, yet he was, nevertheless, utterly oblivious to danger of any sort, being wildly reckless, with an entire disregard of consequences. Here, however, he saw that the secret, which he had fondly believed to be his alone, was known to this mysterious Spaniard.

"I cannot understand why this girl, Lola—or whatever she calls herself—should warn me. I wonder who she is. What is she like?"

I described her as minutely as I could, more especially the unusual fairness of her hair, and the large, wide-open, blue eyes. She had a tiny mole upon her chin, a little to the left.

The description seemed to recall some memory, for suddenly he exclaimed:

"Really, the girl you describe is very like one that I met about a year ago—a thief-girl in the Montmartre, in Paris, called Lizette Sabin. I came across her one night in one of the cabarets."

As he spoke he went across to a big antique chest of drawers, one of which he unlocked with his key, and after a long search he drew out a cabinet photograph and handed it to me.

I started. It was a picture of the pretty Lola!

He watched my face, and saw that I recognized it.

Then he drew a long sigh, tossed his cigarette away savagely, and throwing back the photograph into the drawer, relocked it.

"Yes," he declared, turning to me again. "The situation is most abnormally disturbing, Heltzendorff. A storm is brewing, without a doubt. But the Emperor must know nothing, remember—not the slightest suspicion. Ah! What an infernal fool I was to believe in that woman. Bah! They are all alike. And yet—" and he paused—"and yet if it were not for the petticoat Germany's secret diplomacy—the preparation for the great 'Day' when we shall stagger the world—could not proceed. This, my dear Heltzendorff, has shown me that you may with advantage use a woman of whatever age as your catspaw, your secret agent, your bait when angling for important information, or your go-between in secret transactions; but never trust one with knowledge of your own personal affairs."

"Then I take it that this girl-thief of the Montmartre whom you met when out for an evening's amusement is the cause of all this trouble? And yet she said that she did not know you!"

"Because it was to her advantage to disclaim knowledge of me. Personally I do not think that the pretty Lizette is my enemy or she would not warn me against this infernal Spaniard, whoever he may be."

"If the matter is so serious, had I not better go to Paris to-morrow and see Pinaud?" I suggested.

"Excellent!" he exclaimed. "Watch must be kept upon them. The one thing to bear in mind, however, is that neither the Emperor nor my wife learn anything. Go to Paris to-morrow, and tell Pinaud from me to do his best on my behalf."

Next morning I left for Paris, and on arrival spent half an hour with Georges Pinaud in his room at the Sûreté.

"So His Imperial Highness does not wish the arrest of the girl Lizette Sabin?" he exclaimed presently. "I have her dossier here," and he indicated a cardboard portfolio before him. "It is a pretty bad one. Her last sentence was one of twelve months for robbing an English baronet at a dancing-hall in the Rue du Bac."

"His Highness does not wish for her arrest. He only desires the pair to be kept under close observation."

"The man Aranda is, I have discovered, a dangerous person," said the famous detective, leaning back in his chair. "He has served a sentence at Cayenne for the attempted murder of a woman in Lyons. He is, of course, an adventurer of the most expert type."

I longed to reveal to my friend Pinaud the whole facts, but this was against my instructions. I merely asked him as a favour to institute a strict vigilance upon the pair, and to report to me by telegraph if either of them left Paris.

Aranda was still living at the Hotel Terminus, but the pretty Lizette had gone to stay with two girl friends, professional dancers, who lived on the third floor of a house half-way up the Rue Blanche. So having discharged my mission, I returned on the following day to Potsdam, where, on meeting me, the Crown-Prince seemed much relieved.

His only fear—and it was a very serious one—was that to the Emperor there might be revealed the reason of that secret visit of his to Italy. I confess that I myself began to regard that visit with considerable suspicion. Its nature must have been, to say the least, unusual if he had been so aghast at the real truth being discovered.

In the strenuous days that followed, weeks, indeed, I frequently reflected, and found myself much mystified. More than once His Highness had asked me: "Any news from Pinaud?" And when I replied in the negative "Willie's" relief was at once apparent.

One day I had been lunching in Berlin at the "Bristol," in Unter den Linden, at a big party given by the Baroness von Bülow. Among the dozen or so present were Von Ruxeben, the Grand Marshal of the Court of Saxe-Coburg-Gotha; Gertrud, Baroness von Wangenheim, Grand Mistress of the Court of the Duchess; the Minister Dr. Rasch; and, of course, old "Uncle" Zeppelin, full of plans, as always, of new airships and of the destruction of London. Indeed, he sat next me, and bored me to death with his assurances that on "The Day" he would in twenty-four hours lay London in ruins.

The guests around the table, a gay and clever circle, saw that "Uncle" had button-holed me, and knew from my face how utterly bored I was. Truth to tell, I was much relieved when suddenly, when the meal was nearly over, a waiter whispered that somebody wished to see me out in the lounge.

It was a messenger from Potsdam with a telegram that had come over the private wire. It read: "Aranda left Paris two days ago. Destination unknown.—Pinaud."

The information showed that the fellow had cleverly evaded the agents of the Sûreté, a very difficult feat in such circumstances. That very fact went to prove that he was a cunning and elusive person.

Half an hour later I was sitting with Heinrich Wesener, Assistant-Director of the Secret Service of the General Staff. I sought him in preference to the famous detective, Schunke, because, while matters passing through the Secret Service Bureau were always regarded as confidential, those submitted to the Berlin police were known to many subordinates who had access to the dossiers and informations.

I told Wesener but little—merely that His Imperial Highness the Crown-Prince was desirous of knowing at the earliest moment if a Spaniard named Martinez Aranda should arrive in Berlin.

The curiosity of the Assistant-Director was immediately aroused. So many scandals were rife regarding "Willie" that the stout, fair-haired official was hoping to obtain some further details.

"Excuse me for a moment," he said, and, after ringing his bell, a clerk appeared. To the man he gave orders to go across and inspect the police register of strangers, and ascertain if the man Aranda had arrived in the capital.

Ten minutes later the clerk returned, saying that a Spaniard named Aranda had arrived from Paris early that morning with a young lady named Sabin, and that they were staying at the Central Hotel, opposite the Friedrich-Strasse Station.

Upon this information I went to the "Central," and from the hall-porter discovered that Aranda had left the hotel an hour before, but that his supposed niece was upstairs in her room.

Afterwards I hurried back to Potsdam as quickly as possible, only to find that the Crown-Prince was out with Knof motoring somewhere. Of the

Crown-Princess I inquired whither he had gone, but, as usual, she had no idea. "Willie" was ever erratic, and ever on the move.

Six o'clock had already struck when he returned, and the sentry informed him that I was extremely anxious to see him. Therefore, without removing his coat, he ascended to my room, where he burst in breezily.

When I told him what I had discovered in Berlin the light died instantly out of his face.

"Is the fellow really here, Heltzendorff?" he gasped. "I had a letter from him a week ago declaring his intention to come here."

"You did not reply, I hope?"

"No. The letter I found upon my dressing-table, but I have not discovered who placed it there," he said. "The fellow evidently intends to carry out his threat and expose me to the Emperor."

"What can he expose?" I queried.

But "Willie" was not to be caught like that. He merely replied:

"Well—something which must at all hazards be concealed. How this Spaniard can know I cannot in the least imagine—unless that woman gave me away!"

For the next two days I was mostly out with his Highness in the car, and in addition the Kaiser reviewed the Prussian Guard, a ceremony which always gave me much extra work.

On the third day I had in the morning been out to the Wildpark Station, and, passing the sentries, had re-entered the Palace, when one of the footmen approached me, saying:

"Pardon, Count, but there is a gentleman to see his Imperial Highness. He will give no name, and refuses to leave. I called the captain of the guard, who has interrogated him, and he has been put into the blue ante-room until your return."

At that moment I saw the captain of the guard striding down the corridor towards me.

"A bald-headed man is here to see His Highness, and will give no name," he told me. "He is waiting now. Will you see him?"

"No," I said, my suspicions aroused. "I will first see the Crown-Prince."

After some search I found the latter lolling at his ease in his own smoking-room in the private apartments, reading a French novel and consuming cigarettes.

"Hulloa, Heltzendorff! Well, what's the trouble?" he asked. "I see something is wrong from your face."

"The man Aranda is here," I replied.

"Here!" he gasped, starting up and flinging the book aside. "Who let him in?"

"I don't know, but he is below demanding to see you."

"Has he made any statement? Has he told anybody what he knows?" demanded the Crown-Prince, who at that moment presented what might be termed a white-livered appearance, cowed, and even trembling. In his slant eyes showed a look of undisguised terror, and I realized that the truth, whatever it might be, was a damning and most disgraceful one.

"I can't see him, Heltzendorff," he whined to me. "See him; hear what he has to say—and—and you will keep my secret? Promise me."

I promised. And I should have kept that promise were it not for his brutal and blackguardly acts after the outbreak of war—acts which placed him, with his Imperial father, beyond the pale of respectable society.

I was turning to leave the room, when he sprang towards me with that quick agility of his, and, placing his white, manicured hand upon my arm, said:

"Whatever he may say you will not believe—will you?"

"And if he wants money?" I asked.

"Ascertain the amount, and come here to me."

A quarter of an hour later Martinez Aranda sat in my room opposite my table. I had told him that unfortunately His Imperial Highness was engaged, for the Emperor had come over from the Neues Palace for luncheon. Then I inquired the nature of his business.

"Well, Count, you and I are not altogether strangers, are we?" was his reply, as he sat back calmly and crossed his legs, perfectly at his ease. "But my business is only with His Highness, and with nobody else."

"His Highness sees nobody upon business. I am appointed to deal with all his business affairs, and anything told to me is the same as though spoken into his ear."

The Spaniard from Montmartre was silent for a moment.

"If that is the case, then I would be glad if you will obtain his permission for me to speak. He will remember my name."

"I already received orders before I invited you up," I said. "His Highness wishes you to deal with me. He knows that you are here to settle some delicate little piece of business concerning that secret visit of his to Rome—eh?"

"Yes," he answered, after a few seconds' pause. "I am well aware, Count, that for mention of the reason I am here you might call the guard to arrest me for blackmail. But first let me assure His Highness that such action would not be advisable in the interests of either himself or of the Emperor. I have already made arrangements for exposure in case His Highness endeavours to close my mouth by such means."

"Good. We understand each other. What is your complaint?" I inquired.

"I know the truth concerning the mysterious death of the woman, Claudia Ferrona, in Rome last December," he said briefly.

"Oh!" I exclaimed. "Perhaps you will tell me next that the Crown-Prince is an assassin? Come, that will be really interesting," I laughed. "Perhaps you will tell me how it all happened—the extent of your knowledge."

"Why should I do that? Go to the Crown-Prince and tell him what I allege—tell him that the girl, Lizette Sabin, whom he knows, was a witness."

"Well, let us come to business," I said. "How much do you want for your silence?"

"I want nothing—not a sou!" was the hard reply. "All I want is to reveal to the Emperor that his son is responsible for a woman's death. And that is what I intend doing. You hear that! Well, Count von Heltzendorff, please go and tell him so."

Quickly realizing the extreme gravity of the situation, I returned to the Crown-Prince and told him the startling allegation made against him.

His face went as white as paper.

"We must pay the fellow off. Close his mouth somehow. Help me, Heltzendorff," he implored. "What can I do? He must not reveal the truth to the Emperor!"

"Then it really is the truth!" I exclaimed, astounded.

The Crown-Prince hung his head, and in a low, hoarse voice replied:

"It is my accursed luck! The woman must have told the truth to this scoundrel of a Spaniard before—before she died!"

"And Lizette?" I asked. "She is a witness, the fellow says."

"No, no!" cried His Highness wildly, covering his white face with his hands as though to hide the guilt written upon his countenance. "Say no more! Ask the fellow's price, and pay him. We must not allow him to go to the Emperor."

Three minutes later I went back to my room, but it was empty. The Spaniard had walked out, and would, no doubt, be wandering somewhere in the private apartments.

At that instant the telephone rang, and, answering it, I heard that His Majesty had just arrived by car, and was on his way up to the room wherein I stood—the room in which he generally met his son.

For a moment I was perplexed, but a few seconds later I held my breath when I saw coming down the corridor the Emperor, and walking with him the adventurer, who had apparently met him on his way downstairs.

I confess that at that most dramatic moment I was entirely nonplussed. I saw how cleverly Aranda had timed his visit, and how, by some means, he knew of the internal arrangements of the Marmor Palace.

"Yes," the Emperor exclaimed to the Spaniard. "You wish to have audience. Well?"

In a second I broke in.

"May I be permitted to say a word, Your Majesty?" I said. "There is a little business matter pending between this gentleman and His Imperial Highness the Crown-Prince—a little dispute over money. I regret that Your Majesty should be disturbed by it. The matter is in course of settlement."

"Oh, money matters!" exclaimed the Emperor, who always hated mention of them, believing himself to be far too important a person to trouble about

them. "Of course, you will see to a settlement, Count." And the Emperor turned his back deliberately upon the man who accosted him.

"It is not money that I want," shouted the adventurer from Paris, "but I——"

I did not allow him to conclude his sentence, but hustled him into an adjoining room, closing the door after him.

"Now, Monsieur Aranda, you want money, I know. How much?" I asked determinedly.

"Two hundred thousand marks," was his prompt reply, "and also fifty thousand for Lola."

I pretended to reflect. He saw my hesitation, and then added:

"For that sum, and not a sou less, I am prepared to sign a statement that I have lied, and that there is no truth in the allegation."

"Of what? Tell me the facts, as you know them, and I will then repeat them to His Imperial Highness."

For a few seconds he was silent, then in a cold, hard voice he revealed to me what was evidently the truth of the Crown-Prince's secret visit to Rome. I listened to his statement utterly dumbfounded.

The allegations were terrible. It seemed that a popular Spanish variety actress, whom the populace of Rome knew as "La Bella," but whose real name was Claudia Ferrona, lived in a pretty apartment on the Lungtevere Mellini, facing the Tiber. His Highness had met her in Coblenz, where she had been singing. "La Bella" had as her particular friend a certain high official in the Italian Ministry of War, and through him she was enabled to furnish the Crown-Prince with certain important information. The General Staff in the Wilhelmstrasse were eager to obtain some very definite facts regarding Italy's new armaments, and His Highness had taken upon himself the task of obtaining it.

As Herr Nebelthau he went in secret to Rome as guest of the vivacious Claudia, whose maid was none other than the thief-girl of the Montmartre, Lizette Sabin. This girl, whose intellect had become weakened, was entirely under the influence of the clever adventurer Aranda. On the second night after the arrival of the Crown-Prince in Rome, he and the actress had taken supper together in her apartment, after which a fierce quarrel had arisen between them.

Seized by a fit of remorse, the variety singer blankly refused to further betray the man to whom her advancement in her profession was due, whereupon His Highness grew furious at being thwarted at the last moment. After listening to his insults, "La Bella" openly declared that she intended to reveal the whole truth to the Italian official in question. Then the Crown-Prince became seized by one of those mad, frenzied fits of uncontrollable anger to which he is at times, like all the Hohenzollerns, subject, and with his innate brutality he took up a bottle from the table and struck the poor girl heavily upon the skull, felling her like a log. Afterwards with an imprecation on his lips, he walked out. So terribly injured was the girl that she expired just before noon next day. Not, however, before she had related the whole circumstances to the maid, Lizette, and to the man Aranda, who, truth to tell, had placed the maid in the actress's service with a view of robbing her of her jewels. He saw, however, that, with the death of Claudia Ferrona, blackmail would be much more profitable.

Having heard this amazing story, I was careful to lock the Spaniard in the room, and then returned to where the Crown-Prince was so anxiously awaiting me.

Half an hour later the adventurer left the Palace, bearing in his pocket a draft upon the private banking house of Mendelsohn, in the Jägerstrasse in Berlin, for two hundred and fifty thousand marks.

In return for that draft the wily Spaniard signed a declaration that he had invented the whole story, and that there was not a word of truth in it.

It was only, however, when I placed that document into the hands of the Crown-Prince that His Imperial Highness breathed freely again.

SECRET NUMBER NINE

THE CROWN-PRINCE'S ESCAPE IN LONDON

It was five o'clock on a bright September morning when His Imperial Highness climbed with unsteady gait the three flights of stairs leading to the handsome flat which he sometimes rented in a big block of buildings half-way along Jermyn Street when he made secret visits to London.

As his personal-adjutant and keeper of his secrets I had been awaiting him for hours.

I heard him fumbling with the latch-key, and, rising, went along the hall and opened the door.

"Hulloa, Heltzendorff!" he exclaimed in a thick, husky voice. "Himmel! I'm very glad to be back."

"And I am glad to see Your Highness back," I said. "I was beginning to fear that something unpleasant had happened. I tell you frankly, I do not like you going out like this alone in London. Somebody is certain to discover you one day."

"Oh, bosh! my dear Heltzendorff. You are just like a pastor—always preaching." And as he tossed his crush hat upon the table and divested himself of his evening overcoat he gave vent to a half-drunken laugh, and then, just as he was, in his dress-coat and crumpled shirt-front, with the stains of overnight wine upon it, he curled himself upon the couch, saying:

"Tell that idiot of a valet not to disturb me. I'm tired."

"But don't you think you ought to go to bed?" I queried.

"Too tired to undress, Heltzendorff—too tired," he declared with an inane grin. "Oh, I've had a time—phew! my head—such a time! Oh, old Lung Ching is a real old sport!"

And then he settled himself and closed his eyes—surely a fine spectacle for the German nation if he could then have been publicly exhibited.

His mention of Lung Ching caused me to hold my breath. That wily Chinaman kept an establishment in the underworld of Limehouse, an opium den of the worst description, frequented by yellow men and white women of the most debased class.

A year before one of the Crown-Prince's friends, an attaché at the Embassy on Carlton House Terrace, had introduced him to the place. The fascinations of the opium pipe had attracted him, and he had been there many times to smoke and to dream, but always accompanied by others. The night before, however, he had declared his intention to go out alone, as he had been invited to dine by a great German financier living in Park Lane. It was now evident, however, that he had not been there, but had gone alone to that terrible den kept by Lung Ching.

There, in the grey light of dawn, I stood gazing down upon the be-drugged son of the Emperor, feeling relief that he was back again, and that no trouble had resulted from his escapade.

I called the valet, and, having handed his master over to him, I went out, and, finding a taxi, drove out to Lung Ching's place in Limehouse. I knew the sign, and was soon admitted into the close, sickly-smelling place, which reeked with opium. The villainous Chinaman, with a face like parchment, came forward, and instantly recognized me as the companion of the young German millionaire, Herr Lehnhardt. Of him I inquired what my master had been doing during the night.

"Oh, 'e smoke—'e likee pipee!" was the evil, yellow-faced ruffian's reply.

"Was he alone?"

"Oh, no. 'E no alonee. 'E lil ladee," and he grinned. "She likee pipee. Come, you see—eh?"

The fellow took me into the long, low-ceilinged room, fitted with bunks, in which were a dozen or so sleeping Chinamen. Suddenly he indicated a bunk wherein lay a girl huddled up—a well-dressed English girl. Her hat and jacket had been removed, and she lay, her face full in the light, her arm above her head, her eyes closed in sound slumber, with the deadly pipe beside her.

I bent to examine her pale countenance more closely. I started. Yes! I had not been mistaken. She was the young daughter of one of the best-known and most popular leaders of London society.

I had no idea until that moment that she and the Crown-Prince were such friends. A fortnight before the Crown-Prince, as Herr Lehnhardt, had attended a gay river party at Henley, and I had accompanied him. At the party the pair had been introduced in my presence. And now, within those few days, I found her oblivious to the world in the worst opium den in London!

After considerable effort, I aroused her. But she was still dazed from the effect of the drug, so dazed, indeed, that she did not recognize me. However, I got her into a taxi, and having ascertained her mother's address from the "Royal Blue Book" in the London club of which I was a member, and where I arrived at an unearthly hour, I took her to Upper Brocklion Street.

Of the woman who opened the door I learned, to my relief, that the family were at their place in Scotland, and that the house, enshrouded in dust-sheets, was in the hands of herself and her husband as caretakers.

When I half lifted the young lady—whom I will here call Miss Violet Hewitt for the sake of the good name of her family—out of the taxi the woman became greatly alarmed. But I assured her there was nothing wrong; her young mistress had been taken ill, but was now much better. A doctor was not needed.

For half an hour I remained there with her, and then, as she had recovered sufficiently, I rose to go, intending to let her make her own explanations to the caretaker.

We were alone, and she was seated in a big arm-chair. She saw my intention to leave, whereupon she struggled to her feet, for she now realized to her horror what had occurred.

"You are Count von Heltzendorff!" she exclaimed, passing her hand across her brow, as though suddenly recollecting. "We met at Henley. Ah! I know I—I can't help it. I have been very foolish—but I can't help it. The craving grows upon me."

"You met my friend Lehnhardt last night, did you not?"

"Yes, I did. Quite accidentally. I was waiting in the lounge of the 'Ritz' for a man-friend with whom I had promised to dine when Mr. Lehnhardt came in and recognized me. My friend had not turned up, so I accepted his invitation to have dinner at Claridge's. This we did, and during the meal he spoke of opium, and I admitted that I was fond of it, for I smoke it sometimes at a girl-friend's at Hampstead. Therefore we agreed to go together to Lung Ching's."

"He left you there," I said.

"I know. I certainly did not expect him to go away and leave me in such a place," said the girl, who was very pretty and not more than twenty, even though addicted to the terrible opium habit. "But," she added, "you will keep my secret—won't you?"

"Most certainly, Miss Hewitt," was my reply. "This should serve as a severe lesson to you."

Then I bade her farewell, and left her in the good hands of the caretaker.

On my return to Jermyn Street the Crown-Prince was in bed, sleeping soundly.

I remember standing at the window of that well-furnished bachelor's sitting-room—for the place was owned by an old German-American merchant, who, I expect, had a shrewd suspicion of the identity of the reckless young fellow named Lehnhardt who sometimes, through a well-known firm of house-agents, rented his quarters at a high figure. The Crown-Prince used eight different names when abroad incognito, Lehnhardt being one of them.

"His Highness is very tired," the valet declared to me, as he entered the room. "Before I got him to bed he asked for you. I said you had gone out."

"And what did he say?"

"Well, Count, all he said was, 'Ah, our dear Heltzendorff is always an early riser. He gets up before I go to bed!'" And the ever-faithful valet laughed grimly. When the Crown-Prince went upon those frequent debauches in the capitals of Europe, his valet always carried with him a certain drug, a secret known to the Chinese, an injection of which at once sobered him, and put both sense and dignity into him. I have seen him in the most extreme state of helpless intoxication at five in the morning, and yet at eight, he having received his injection, I have watched him mount his horse and ride at the head of his regiment to an inspection, as bright and level-headed as any trooper following.

The drug had a marvellous and almost instantaneous effect. But it was used only in case of great emergency, when, for instance, he was suddenly summoned by the Emperor, or perchance he had to accompany his wife to some public function.

That the drug had bad effects I knew quite well. I have often seen him pacing the room holding his hands to his head, when, three hours later, the dope was gradually losing its potency, leaving him inert and ill.

When the valet had retired, I stood gazing down into the growing life of Jermyn Street, deploring the state of society which had resulted in the pretty Violet Hewitt becoming, at twenty, a victim to opium.

Truly in the world of London, as in Berlin, there are many strange phases of life, and even I, familiar as I was with the gaieties of the capitals, and the night life of Berlin, the Montmartre in Paris, and the West End in London, here confess that when I discovered the pretty girl sleeping in that dirty bunk in that fetid atmosphere I was staggered.

Before three o'clock in the afternoon "Willie" reappeared, well groomed and perfectly dressed. I had been out lunching at the "Berkeley" with a friend, and on re-entering the chambers, found him in the sitting-room smoking a cigarette.

The effects of his overnight dissipation had entirely passed. He seated himself upon the arm of a chair and asked:

"Well, Heltzendorff, I suppose you've been out to lunch—eh? Anything interesting in this town?"

"The usual set at the 'Berkeley,'" I replied.

"Oh! The 'Berkeley!' Very nice, but too respectable. That is where one takes one's aunt, is it not?" he laughed.

I admitted that it was a most excellent restaurant.

"Good food and good amusement, my dear Heltzendorff, one can never find together. The worse the food the better the entertainment. Do you remember the 'Rat Mort'—eh?"

"No," I said sharply. "That is a long-past and unwelcome memory."

The Imperial profligate laughed heartily.

"Oh, my dear Heltzendorff, you are becoming quite pharisaical. You! Oh! that is really amusing!"

"The 'Rat Mort' never amused me," I said, "a café of the Montmartre where those who dined were——"

I did not finish my sentence.

"Were very pretty and interesting women, Heltzendorff," he declared. "Ah! don't you recollect when you and I dined there not long ago, all of us at a long table—so many charming ladies—oh!"

"I have forgotten it, Prince," I said, rebuking him. "It has passed from my memory. That place is just as unfitted for you as is Lung Ching's."

"Lung Ching's! Ah—yes, the old yellow fellow is a good sort," he exclaimed, as though recollecting.

"And the lady you took there—eh?"

"The lady?" he echoed. "Why, Gott! I left her there. I did not remember. Gott! I left little Miss Violet in that place!" he gasped.

"Well?" I asked.

"Well, what can I do. I must go and see."

I smiled, and then told him what I had done.

"H'm," he exclaimed. "You are always a good diplomat, Heltzendorff—always a good friend of the erratic Hohenzollerns. What can I do to-night—eh? Suggest something."

"I would suggest that you dined en famille at the Embassy," I replied.

"The Embassy! Never. I'm sick and tired of His Excellency and his hideous old wife. They bore me to death. No, my dear Heltzendorff. I wonder——"

And he paused.

"Well?" I asked.

"I wonder if Miss Hewitt would go to the theatre to-night—eh?"

"No," I snapped, for my long service gave me permission to speak my mind pretty freely. "She is, I admit, a very charming young lady, but remember she does not know your identity, and if her parents discover what happened last night there will be a most infernal lot of trouble. Recollect that her father, a financial magnate, is acquainted with the Emperor. They have raced their yachts against each other. Indeed, Henry Hewitt's won the Kiel Cup last year. So, personally, I think the game that your Imperial Highness is playing is a distinctly dangerous one."

"Bah! It is only amusement. She amuses me. And she is so fond of the pipe. She has been a visitor of Lung Ching's for over a year. She has a faithful maid who goes with her, and I suppose she pays the old Chinaman well."

"I suppose so," I remarked, for I knew that if the villainous old Ching were paid well he would guarantee her safety in that den of his.

I could see by the Crown-Prince's face that he was unimpressed by my warning. Too well did I know to what mad, impetuous lengths he would go

when of a sudden a pretty face attracted him. So utterly devoid is he of self-control that a woman's eyes could lead him anywhere. A glance at that weak chin of his will at once substantiate my statement.

His visit to Lung Ching's had left him somewhat muddled and limp, and the next few days passed uneventfully. We went down into Surrey to stay with a certain Baron von Rechberg, who had been a fellow-student of His Highness's at Bonn. He was now head of a German bank in London, and lived in a beautiful house surrounded by a large park high among the Surrey hills. Count von Hochberg, "Willie's" bosom friend, whom he always addressed as "Mickie," while the Count in turn called him "Cæsar," being in London at the time, accompanied us, and so merrily did the time pass that the incident at Lung Ching's went out of my memory.

One night when we had all three returned to London "Willie" and Von Hochberg spent the evening in the lounge of the Empire Theatre, and both returned to the Prince's rooms about one o'clock in the morning.

"Heltzendorff, Mickie is going with me to Scotland to-morrow morning," said His Highness, as he tossed his overcoat upon the couch of that luxurious little sitting-room within sight of the Maison Jules. "You will stay here and attend to anything that may come through from Potsdam. A courier should arrive to-morrow night, or is it Knof who is coming? I forget."

"Your Highness sent Knof over to get the correspondence," I reminded him, for it was necessary that all pressing matters should be attended to, or the Emperor's suspicions might be aroused that his son was absent abroad.

"Ah, the good Knof! Of course, he will be back to-morrow night. He will have seen the Princess and told her how ill I have been, and how I am gradually growing better," he laughed. "Trust Knof to tell a good, sound lie."

"All chauffeurs can do that, my dear Cæsar," exclaimed Von Hochberg, with a grin.

Naturally I was filled with wonder regarding the nature of the expedition which the pair were about to undertake, but, though we all three smoked together for an hour, "Willie" seemed unusually sober, and did not let drop a single hint regarding their mysterious destination.

Von Hochberg was living at the Coburg Hotel, and before he left "Willie" arranged to breakfast with him at eight o'clock next morning, so that they might leave Euston together by the ten o'clock express.

I roused the valet, who worked for an hour packing His Highness's suit-case.

"One case only," the Crown-Prince had ordered. "I shall only be up there a couple or three days. No evening clothes. I shall not want them."

That remark told me that he did not intend to pay any formal visit, as he had done on most of his journeys to Scotland.

"Your Imperial Highness will take guns, of course," I remarked.

"Guns!" he echoed. "No—no guns this time. If I want to shoot rabbits I can borrow a farmer's blunderbuss," he laughed.

That "Mickie," the hare-brained seeker after pleasure, was to be his companion caused me some uneasiness. It was all very well for the Crown-Prince to live in London as Herr Lehnhardt. London was a big place, and those who catered for his Imperial pleasures were paid well, and did not seek to inquire into his antecedents or whether he was really what he represented himself to be.

Money talks in the underground London, just as it does on the Stock Exchange. But it sometimes, I assure you, took a long purse to keep the foreign papers quiet regarding the wild escapades of the Kaiser's heir.

That night somehow I felt a good deal of apprehension regarding this mysterious flying visit to Scotland. That the pair had some deeply-laid scheme on hand I knew from their evasiveness. But what it was I failed to discover.

Early that morning I put "Cæsar" into a taxi with his suit-case. He wore a rough suit of tweeds, and took with him his walking-stick and a khaki-coloured waterproof coat, presenting the picture of a young man going North to shoot.

"I'll be back in a few days, Heltzendorff. Attend to the letters," he urged. "Throw away as many as you can. If I want you I will telegraph."

And with that he drove to the "Coburg" to meet his old chum, "Mickie."

About three o'clock that same afternoon, while walking along Piccadilly, I was surprised to come face to face with Von Hochberg.

"Why! I thought you had gone North!" I exclaimed.

"No, Heltzendorff. Cæsar went alone," he replied, somewhat confounded at our unexpected meeting. "He wanted to be alone, I think."

"Where has he gone?" I inquired. "He left me no address."

"No. And I have none either," the Count replied.

This set me thinking. The situation was even worse with the Crown-Prince wandering in Scotland alone. His indiscretions were such that his identity might very easily leak out, and the truth concerning his absence would quickly reach the Emperor's ears.

As I stood chatting with His Highness's gay companion I confess that I felt annoyed at the manner in which I had been tricked. He was often afraid of my caustic tongue when I spoke of his indiscretions, and it was further quite plain to me that Von Hochberg had simply pretended that he was accompanying his friend North.

That evening Knof arrived from Potsdam with a satchelful of correspondence, and until a late hour I was kept busy inventing replies which would eventually be taken to Holzemme, in the Harz Mountains, and posted from there. We always made arrangements for such things when His Highness was secretly out of Germany.

I snatched a meal at Jules', close by, and resumed my work till long after midnight, inventing some picturesque fictions in reply to many official documents.

One letter was from Her Imperial Highness. At her husband's order I opened it, read it, and sealed it up again. It contained reproaches, but nothing of extreme urgency. There had been occasions when I had read "Cilli's" letters in the absence of her erratic husband, and sent to her little untruths by wire, signed "Wilhelm, Kronprinz."

Truly my position was one of curious intimacy. Sometimes His Highness trusted me with his innermost secrets, while at others he regarded me with distinct suspicion. That the elegant Von Hochberg knew of "Willie's" whereabouts I felt convinced, but apparently His Highness had given him orders not to divulge it to me.

The next day and the next I waited in vain for some word from His Highness. I had sent Knof back to the Harz to post the replies I had written, and with nothing to do I idled about London.

On the third day, when I returned to Jermyn Street after lunch, I found a stout German, named Henkel, who carried on a hairdresser's business near High Street, Kensington, but who was really a secret agent. He was one of the few persons who knew of the Crown-Prince's visit, for each time we came to London we took this man into our confidence.

"I have received a telegram from Holzemme, Count," he said as I entered, and then he handed me the message, which, after a few minutes' examination—for though in plain language it was nevertheless not what it purported to be—I saw to my dismay was an important message to "Willie" from the Emperor, who was at that moment in Corfu.

The message had been received by Koch, my assistant, whom I had left at Holzemme. He had disguised it and re-transmitted it to Henkel to hand to me. We always took this precaution, because when abroad incognito, both the Crown-Prince and myself frequently changed our names. So, by employing Henkel in London and a man named Behm in Paris, we were always certain of receiving any important message.

When the spy Henkel had left I stood looking out of the window down into Jermyn Street, quite at a loss how to act. The message was one of the greatest importance, and, if not replied to at once, the Emperor would, I knew, institute inquiries, for he was well aware of his son's wild escapades.

My first impulse was to wire Koch a reply to be dispatched to His Majesty, but on reflection I realized that the question was one which I could not answer with truth. No. I must find His Highness at all hazards.

At once I went to the Coburg Hotel, and fortunately found Count von Hochberg, who at first refused to reveal where his friend was hidden. But when I showed him the telegram and explained the great urgency of a reply, in order to prevent the Emperor from inquiring and knowing the truth, he realized the necessity.

"Well, Heltzendorff," he said, somewhat reluctantly, "Cæsar is at some little place they call St. Fillans, in Scotland."

"I know it," I cried eagerly. "A place at the end of Loch Earn! We motored past it one day about two years ago. I shall go North at once."

"But you can telegraph to him," the Count suggested.

"To what address?"

"Ah! Why, of course, I don't know his address—only that he is at St. Fillans. I had a note yesterday."

Travelling by way of Perth and Gleneagles, I next morning found myself strolling along the picturesque village at the end of the beautiful loch, which presented a truly delightful picture in the autumn sunlight. At the hotel nothing was known of Mr. Lehnhardt, and though I devoted the whole

morning to making inquiries I could find no trace of His Highness. The latter would certainly not betray himself as a German, for, speaking English so well, he might very easily adopt an English name. I ate my lunch at the hotel which faces the loch, with Ben Voirlich rising high beyond, and afterwards resumed my wanderings. In many quarters I described my "friend" of whom I was in search, but nobody seemed to have seen him. The precious hours were flying, and I knew that the Emperor at Corfu was impatiently awaiting a reply.

I hired a car and drove seven miles to the farther end of the loch, to the village of Lochearnhead. There I made inquiry at the hotel and elsewhere, afterwards going on to Balquidder with similar result. It was past six o'clock when I returned to St. Fillans with the feeling that His Highness had deceived even his friend "Mickie," and that I had had my long journey and quest for nothing. Not a soul seemed to have seen anybody answering to "Willie's" description. I snatched another hasty meal at the hotel, and then, in the dusk, set off in the opposite direction along the pretty road which led to Comrie. The light was fast fading, but I knew that there would be a full moon, and the night was perfect.

I had walked about three miles, and had probably lost my way, for I was off the main road, when, on my left, saw the lighted windows of a comfortable-looking cottage standing back from the road behind a well-kept flower garden. There were woods on each side of the road, and I concluded that it was a keeper's house. As I passed I heard voices, and saw two figures standing at the garden gate—a man and a woman—chatting confidentially.

In the next second I recognized the man's voice as that of the Crown-Prince, and as quickly I stepped upon the grass so that they might not be attracted by my footsteps. Concealed by the shadow of the hedge on the opposite side of the road, I stealthily approached until I could distinguish, by the light from the open door of the cottage, that the woman was a stout, elderly person, probably the keeper's wife.

Both surprised and interested, I stood there watching. It seemed as though they were awaiting someone, for after a few moments, they both retired inside the cottage.

Presently, however, "Willie" emerged alone. He had on his hat and carried a stick, and as he swung through the gate and went forward he whistled softly to himself the air of a gay waltz of which he was particularly fond.

Within myself I chuckled at being thus able to watch his mysterious movements, for he seemed entirely preoccupied and quite unconscious of being followed, though I fear my footsteps fell heavily at times.

Suddenly, while passing along a part of the road overshadowed by woods on either side, he halted in the darkness. I heard him speak, and I also heard the welcome he received in a girl's voice. It was as I had surmised, and I drew a long breath.

I heard the pair talking, but from where I stood I could not overhear any of their conversation. I heard His Highness laugh gaily, and though he lit a cigarette his companion's face was turned from me so that I could not catch a glimpse of it in the fitful light.

Presently, after he had held her in his arms and kissed her, they turned back in my direction.

As they passed I heard the girl say:

"I've been waiting for quite a quarter of an hour, Mr. Lehnhardt. I thought perhaps something had prevented you from keeping the appointment."

"All my mistake, dear," was his reply. "My mistake. Forgive me."

"Of course," she said, laughing, and I saw that she had her arm linked in his as they walked back in the direction of the keeper's cottage.

I followed in wonder, and not without anger. For the Heir of the Hohenzollerns to ramble upon such rural escapades was, I knew, distinctly dangerous. Exposure might come at any moment.

They had strolled together nearly half a mile when of a sudden, as they again passed into the deep shadows, the girl gave vent to a loud scream for help, and at the same moment men's angry voices were heard.

The pair had been attacked by three men who had apparently been lying hidden in the wood.

I heard a man shout, and then a sharp crack like that of a whip. The Kaiser's son was shouting, too, while the girl was screaming and crying shame upon those who had attacked the man with whom she had been walking.

"You infernal German!" I heard one of the men shriek. "I'll teach you to come sneaking here and take my sister out for midnight walks! Take that—you cur—and that!—whoever you are!"

Next second the startling truth was plain to me.

His Imperial Highness the German Crown-Prince was being ignominiously and soundly thrashed by an irate brother!

I saw that it was high time that I interfered. The Crown-Prince had been flung upon the ground, and the angry young man was lashing him as I dashed in among them with my revolver drawn.

"Come, cease that," I shouted. "Down with that whip. You've attacked these people on the high road, and if you strike again I'll fire."

"Hulloa!" cried one man. "Why, here's another German!"

"German or not—enough!" I commanded, and bending down, assisted the fallen Prince to rise.

"You—you shall pay for this, I swear!" declared "Willie," angrily facing the man who had struck him. Then, turning to me, he apparently recognized my voice, for he asked—"How in the name of Fate did you come here, Heltzendorff?"

"I will explain later," I replied in German. "Let us get out of this."

"But I cannot leave Violet. I—I——"

He had replied in the same language, which the men apparently did not understand.

"Enough; come," I said. Then in English I added, "We will wish these gentlemen good-night."

I took his arm and led him away amid the derisive laughter of the irate brother and his two friends, leaving the girl with them.

When we were out of earshot I told him of the Emperor's telegram, and added:

"That lady was Miss Hewitt, was she not?"

"Yes. Her father's estate is a few miles from here. She's a perfect little fiend for opium—got bitten with the habit when she was travelling with her married sister in China, and Maggie, her old nurse, who lives in the cottage we shall pass in a minute, lets her go there on the quiet and smoke. I have had two or three pipes there lately," he added merrily.

"Himmel!" I gasped. "How dangerous! She has no idea of who you are, I hope?"

"Not in the least."

"Good. Let us attend to the Emperor's telegram at once."

And a quarter of an hour later we were discussing the Kaiser's inquiry in a clean, comfortable, but out-of-the-way cottage in which "Willie" had established himself so as to be near the pretty girl for whom he had conceived that passing fascination.

Until to-day Violet Hewitt has been entirely ignorant of the identity of the man who, like herself, was so addicted to opium. These lines, if they meet her eye, will reveal to her a curious and, no doubt, startling truth.

SECRET NUMBER TEN

HOW THE KAISER ESCAPED ASSASSINATION

"The Emperor commands you to audience at once in the private dining-room," said one of the Imperial servants, entering the Kaiser's study, where I was awaiting him.

It was seven o'clock on a cold, cheerless morning, and I had just arrived at Potsdam from Altona, the bearer of a message from the Crown-Prince to his father.

I knew that the Emperor always rose at five, and that he was breakfasting, as was his habit, alone with the Empress in that coquettish private dining-room of the Sovereigns, a room into which no servant is permitted, Augusta preparing and serving the coffee with her own hands. It was the one hour which the All-Highest before the war devoted to domesticity, when husband and wife could gossip and discuss matters alone and in secret.

As I passed downstairs to the room, to which entrance was forbidden even to the Crown-Prince himself, I naturally wondered why I had been commanded to audience there.

On tapping upon the mahogany door of the little private salon the Empress's hard voice gave permission to enter, whereupon I bowed myself into the cosy little place, hung with reseda silk and with pictures by Loncret, Perne and Watteau. Upon one side of the room was a beautiful buhl cabinet, and at the little round table placed near the window sat the Imperial pair.

The Empress was reading a letter, but His Majesty rose as I entered. He was wearing a grey tweed suit, a well-worn and, no doubt, easy one, in which nobody ever saw him, for he always changed into uniform before he went to his study.

"Have you any knowledge of the contents of the letter which you have brought from the Crown-Prince?" he asked me bluntly, and I saw by his eyes that he seemed somewhat mystified.

I replied in the negative, explaining that I had been with His Imperial Highness to Kiel, and afterwards to Altona, where the Crown-Princess had performed the opening ceremony of a new dock.

"Where are you going now?" he asked suddenly. "There are other engagements, I believe?"

"To Thorn. His Imperial Highness inspects the garrison there on Thursday," I said.

"Ah! of course. I intended to go, but it is impossible."

Then, after a pause, the Emperor looked me straight in the face and suddenly said:

"Heltzendorff, have you any knowledge of any man called Minckwitz?"

I reflected.

"I know Count von Minckwitz, Grand-Master of the Court of the Duke of Saxe-Altenbourg," was my reply.

"No. This is a man, Wilhelm Minckwitz, who poses as a musician."

I shook my head.

"You are quite certain that you have never heard the name? Try to recollect whether the Crown-Prince has ever mentioned him in your presence."

I endeavoured to recall the circumstance, for somehow very gradually I felt a distinct recollection of having once heard that name before.

"At the moment I fail to recall anything, Your Majesty," was my answer.

The Emperor knit his brows as though annoyed at my reply, and then grunted deeply in dissatisfaction.

"Remain here in Potsdam," he said. "Telegraph to the Crown-Prince recalling him at my orders, and I will cancel the inspection at Thorn. Tell the Crown-Prince that I wish to see him to-night immediately upon his return."

Then, noticing for the first time that the Emperor held a paper in his hand, I realized that by its colour it was one of those secret reports furnished for the Kaiser's eye alone—a report of one of the thousands of spies of Germany spread everywhere.

Minckwitz! I impressed that name upon my memory, and, being dismissed, bowed myself out of the Imperial presence.

Returning to the Marmor Palace I sent a long and urgent message over the private wire to "Willie" at Altona, repeating His Majesty's orders, and recalling him at once. Quite well I knew that such an unusual message would arouse His Highness's apprehension that for some offence or other he was about to receive a paternal castigation. But I could not be explicit,

because I had no knowledge of the reason the Emperor was cancelling our engagement at Thorn.

At nine o'clock that night the Crown-Prince, gay in his Hussar uniform, burst into the room wherein I was attending to the correspondence.

"What in the name of Fate does all this mean, Heltzendorff?" he demanded. "Why did the Emperor fail to reply to my message?"

"I delivered it," I said. And then I described what took place in the Emperor's private dining-room. When I mentioned the name of Minckwitz the Crown-Prince started and his cheeks blanched.

"Did he ask you that?" he gasped.

"Yes. I told him the only person I knew of that name was Count von Minckwitz."

"Ah, that little fat, old Master of the Court. Oh! The Emperor knows him well enough. It is somebody else he is referring to."

"Do you know him?" I asked eagerly.

"Me? Why—why, of course not!" was "Willie's" quick reply, in a tone which showed me that he was not telling the truth.

"His Majesty wishes to see you at once," I urged, full of wonder.

I could plainly see that His Imperial Highness had been much upset at mention of the mysterious person called Minckwitz. What could the Emperor know of him? Was there some scandal at the root of it all, some facts which the Crown-Prince feared might be revealed?

Travel-stained, and without changing his tunic, "Willie" went to the telephone and ordered Knof to bring back the car. And in it he drove across to the Neues Palais to see the Emperor.

I had an important appointment in Berlin that night, and waited until quite late for "Willie's" return. As he did not come I left for the capital, and on arrival at my rooms rang up Wolff's Agency, and gave out a paragraph to the Press that His Imperial Highness the Crown-Prince had been compelled to abandon his journey to Thorn, owing to having contracted a chill. His wife "Cilli"—the contraction for Cecilia—had, however, gone to visit Princess Henry of Rohnstock at Fürstenstein.

Several weeks went by, and one day we were at the ancient schloss at Oels, in far Silesia, the great estate which the Crown-Prince inherited on coming of age. The castle is a big, prison-like place, surrounded by wide lands and dense forests, lying between the town of Breslau and the Polish frontier, a remote, rural place to which "Willie" loved sometimes to retire with a few kindred spirits in order to look over the estate and to shoot.

The guests included old Count von Reisenach, Court Chamberlain, of the Prince of Schombourg-Lippe, who was a noted raconteur and bon-vivant, with Major von Heidkämper, of the 4th Bavarian Light Cavalry, a constant companion of "Willie's," and Karl von Pappenheim, a captain of the Prussian Guard, who had been educated at Oxford, and who was so English that it was often difficult for people from London to believe that he was a Prussian.

Von Pappenheim, a tall, good-looking, fair-moustached man under thirty, was one of "Willie's" new friends. He was the son of a great landowner of Erfurt, and the pair had for the past month been inseparable. He was a shrewd, keen-eyed man, who seemed ever on the alert, but, of course, obsessed by military dignity, and as full of swagger as any Prussian officer could be. He had a sister, Margarete, a pretty girl, a year or so his junior, who had been to the Marmor Palace on one occasion. The Crown-Princess had received her, but from the fact that she was not invited a second time I concluded that the inevitable jealousy had arisen, because in my presence "Willie" had more than once referred to her beauty.

I sometimes suspected that "Willie's" sudden and close friendship with Von Pappenheim had some connection with his intense admiration of the latter's sister. I, however, learnt the truth concerning their intimacy in a curious way while at the Schloss Oels.

One day I had accompanied the party out after stag, for, being a fair shot, I frequently snatched a day's sport. Soon after luncheon, which we took at a forester's house, we went forth again, and I concealed myself at a point of vantage, lying behind a screen of ferns and branches specially constructed as cover.

I was alone, at some considerable distance from the others, and had been there waiting for nearly an hour with my gun in readiness when suddenly I heard the cracking of dried wood not far away.

Something was moving. I raised my gun in breathless eagerness.

Next moment, however, I heard the voices of two men.—"Willie" and his friend, Von Pappenheim. They were approaching me, speaking in low, confidential tones.

"You quite understand," "Willie" was saying. "My position is a terrible one. I don't know how to extricate myself. If I dare reveal the truth then I know full well what their vengeance will be."

"But, my dear Cæsar," was Karl von Pappenheim's reply, for he was on such intimate terms that he called His Highness by the name Von Hochberg had bestowed upon him, "is it not your duty to risk all and tell the truth?" he suggested seriously.

The pair had halted only a few yards from me and taken cover behind a dead bush which had been cut down and placed conveniently at the spot, in case the shooting party were a large one and the screen behind which I had concealed myself was insufficient. So near were they that I could hear all that was said.

"The Emperor would neither believe me nor forgive me," "Willie" said. "Minckwitz is a clever devil. He would bring manufactured evidence which must implicate me."

Minckwitz! That was the name which the Emperor had uttered, asking me if I knew him! That incident at the Neues Palais flashed across my memory. I recollected, too, how, when I had referred to the circumstance, His Highness had become pale and agitated. Mention of the name had affected him curiously.

"But can he bring evidence?" asked his companion.

"Yes, curse him!—he can!"

"You can refute it, surely?"

"No, I can't. If I could I should make a clean breast of the whole matter," "Willie" declared. From the tone of his voice I realized how utterly bewildered he was.

"But cannot I help you? Cannot I see Minckwitz and bluff him?" his friend suggested.

"You don't know him," was the reply. "He holds me in the hollow of his hand."

"Ah! Then you have been horribly indiscreet—eh?"

"I have. I admit I have, Karl; and I do not see any way out of it."

"But, my dear Cæsar, think of the danger existing day by day—hour by hour!" cried Von Pappenheim. "Think what there is at stake! That letter you showed me this morning reveals only too plainly what is intended."

"It is a letter of defiance, I admit."

"And a catastrophe must inevitably occur if you do not act."

"But how can I act?" cried the Crown-Prince, in despair. "Suggest something—I cannot. If I utter a syllable Minckwitz will most certainly carry out his threat against me."

"Contrive to have him arrested upon some charge or other," Karl suggested.

"If I did he would produce the evidence against me," declared the Crown-Prince.

A silence then fell between the pair. Suddenly Karl asked:

"Does Von Heltzendorff know?"

"He knows nothing," was "Willie's" answer. "The Emperor questioned him, but he was in ignorance of Minckwitz's existence. He was naturally surprised, but I did not regard it as judicious to enlighten him."

"He is your confidential adjutant. If I were you I should tell him the truth. No time should be lost, remember."

Then, after a few seconds of silence. Von Pappenheim went on:

"Why, I never thought of it! My sister Margarete knows Minckwitz. She might perhaps be useful to us—eh?"

"Why, yes!" cried "Willie," "a woman can frequently accomplish a thing where a man would fail. A most excellent idea. Let us leave the others to their sport and get back to the schloss and discuss a line of action—eh?"

And in agreement the pair emerged from their ambush, and retraced their steps along the path they had come.

Still greatly puzzled at the nature of the secret which the Crown-Prince was withholding from me, I came out of my hiding-place and presently rejoined the party.

That night we all dined together, as was our habit when at Oels, but I saw that "Willie" was upset and nervous, and noticed that he drank his

champagne heavily. On the contrary, Von Pappenheim was wary and watchful.

Next evening Von Pappenheim's sister Margarete, fair-haired, petite and rather doll-like, arrived at the Castle.

During dinner an Imperial courier arrived from Berlin with a letter from the Emperor, and "Willie" opened it, read it, and then, excusing himself, left the table. I rose and followed him, as was my duty, but when outside the room His Highness sent me back, saying in a thick, husky voice:

"I shall not want you. Von Heltzendorff; I will write the reply myself."

On my return the guests were discussing the effect of the Emperor's message upon their host, Von Pappenheim being particularly anxious. He said something in a low voice to his sister, when the latter became at once thoughtful. Indeed, the remainder of the meal was a very dull affair, and it was with relief that we rose and went out into the big ancient hall, with its vaulted ceiling, where coffee was always served.

The courier had left on his return journey to the capital, yet "Willie" did not again reappear. At eleven o'clock I found him lying in a very advanced state of intoxication upon the sofa in the room set apart for me for my writing. Near him stood an empty brandy bottle and an empty syphon of soda-water.

I called his faithful valet, and together we half carried him to his room, where he was undressed and put to bed. Hardly had I returned to my room when Von Pappenheim entered in search of his host.

"His Highness is not well, and has retired to his room," I said. "He expressed a desire to see nobody to-night."

Von Pappenheim's face changed.

"Oh!" he cried in despair. "Why did he not see me and tell me the truth! Precious hours are flying, and we must act if the situation is to be saved."

"What situation?" I asked, in pretended ignorance.

"You know nothing, Von Heltzendorff, eh?" he asked, looking me straight in the face.

"Nothing," was my reply.

"You have no knowledge of the trap into which the Crown-Prince fell when he was in Paris with you six months ago, and when he and I first met?"

"A trap! What do you mean?"

"Has he told you nothing?"

"Not a syllable."

"Ah! Then I cannot be frank with you until I obtain His Highness's permission. He told me that you knew nothing, but I did not believe it. Knowing well what implicit confidence he places in you, I believed that you knew the ghastly truth."

"You alarm me," I said. "If the situation is grave, then I may be able to be of some assistance, more especially if time is pressing."

He hesitated, but refused to reveal a single fact before receiving the Crown-Prince's permission.

Into what trap had "Willie" fallen during our last visit to Paris I could not conceive. His wild orgies in the Montmartre, his constant absences alone, his terrible craving for excitement, his wild and reckless search for pleasure in the lowest haunts of vice, had ever been a source of anxiety to me. Times without number had I lifted a warning finger, only to be derided and ridiculed by the son of the All-Highest One.

Next day, soon after His Highness was dressed, he entered my room.

"Heltzendorff," he said, "I have been chatting with Von Pappenheim and his sister upon a little matter of business which closely concerns myself. I want you to leave in an hour's time and go to Hanover. In the Kirchröder Strasse, No. 16, out at Kleefeld there lives a certain man named Minckwitz—a Pole by birth. He has two nieces—one about twenty and the other two years older. With them you have no concern. All I want is that you engage a photographer, or, better, yourself take a snapshot of this man Minckwitz, and bring it to me. Be discreet and trust no one with the secret of your journey."

"Exactly. There is a doubt as to the man's identity, eh?"

"Willie" nodded in the affirmative.

Satisfied that I should at last see the mysterious person whose identity the Emperor had wished to establish, I set out from Oels on my long journey right across Germany.

In due course I arrived in Hanover, and found the house situate in the pleasant suburb. Here I found that "Willie's" suspicions were correct, and

the man Minckwitz was living under the name of Sembach and pretending to be a musician. I watched, and very soon with my own camera took in secret a snapshot of the mysterious individual as he walked in the street. With this I left two days later on my return to Oels.

The photograph was that of a thin, narrow-faced, deep-eyed man, with a scraggy, pointed beard—a typical Pole, and when I handed it to "Willie" he held his breath.

"Look!" he cried, turning to Von Pappenheim and his sister, who were both present. "Look! There is no mistake! That is the man. What shall we do? No time must be lost. How can I act?"

Brother and sister exchanged glances blankly. From inquiries I had made in Hanover, it seemed that the man was a stranger, a music-master, who had arrived there about a month ago. I feared to make inquiry through the police, because my official capacity as personal-adjutant to the Crown-Prince was too well known, and suspicion might have thus been aroused.

The trio again held secret counsel, but I was not told the nature of their deliberations. All I knew was that the Crown-Prince was in some terrible and most dangerous difficulty.

That afternoon I met the girl Margarete walking alone in the grounds near the Schloss. The autumn sun was pleasant, though there was a sharp nip in the air, which told of the coming of the early Silesian winter. Most of the trees were already bare, and the ground was carpeted with the gold-brown leaves of the great beeches.

We had walked together for some distance, when I suddenly halted and asked her point-blank why they were all in such great fear of Herr Minckwitz.

She started, staring at me with her big blue eyes.

"His Highness has not told you, Count. Therefore, it would ill become me to reveal his secret," was her cold rebuke.

"But if the situation is so grave, and if I have been entrusted with the secret mission to Hanover, I may, perhaps, be of service in the matter. I understand that you are acquainted with Herr Minckwitz, alias Sembach—eh?"

"Who told you that?"

"Nobody. I learnt it myself," I answered, with a smile.

For a second she reflected, then, with a woman's cleverness, she said:

"I can tell you nothing. Ask the Crown-Prince himself." And she refused to discuss the matter further. Indeed, she left the Castle two hours later.

That night I went boldly to "Willie," finding him alone in a little circular room in one of the towers of the Castle, to which he often retired to smoke and snooze.

I stood before him, and without mincing matters told him what I had overheard and all I knew.

The effect of my words was almost electrical. He sat up, staring at me almost dazed at my statement.

"It is true, Heltzendorff. Alas! True!" he replied. But he would even then give me no inkling of the reason of his fear.

"If this Herr Minckwitz means mischief, then surely it would be easy to secure his arrest for some offence or other, and you need not appear in it," I suggested.

"I've thought of all that. But if the police lay hands upon him, then he will revenge himself on me. He will carry out his threat—and—and, Heltzendorff, I could never hold up my head again."

"Why?"

"I can't be more explicit. I'm in a hole, and I cannot extricate myself."

I reflected for a moment. Then I said:

"You appear to fear some action of Minckwitz's. If that is so, I will return to Hanover and watch. If there is any hostile intent, I will endeavour to prevent it. Fortunately, he does not know me."

Next night I was back again in Hanover, having stopped in Berlin to pick up a friend of mine upon whose discretion I could rely implicitly—a retired member of the detective force named Hartwieg. Together we started to watch the movements of the mysterious Polish musician, and to our surprise we found that he had three friends, one of them a furrier living in the Burgstrasse, who visited him regularly each evening. They always arrived at the same hour, and generally left about eleven o'clock. Through five days we kept watch, alternately closely shadowing the man who called himself Sembach, and becoming acquainted with his friends, most of whom seemed of a very queer set.

There was no doubt that Minckwitz and the two young women were associates of some criminal gang, and, further, I was staggered one evening to watch the arrival at the house of a young man whom I recognized as Brosch, an under-valet of the Emperor's at the Neues Palais.

For what reason had he come from Potsdam?

He remained there till noon on the following day. When he emerged, accompanied by Minckwitz, the pair went into the city, and we followed, when, curiously enough, I came face to face with Von Pappenheim's sister, who was apparently there for the same purpose as myself! Happily she was too intent in her conversation with Minckwitz, whom she met as though accidentally, to notice my presence.

Then, at last, the musician raised his hat and left her, rejoining the young man Brosch.

The pair went to a bookshop in the Herschelstrasse, and presently, when they came forth again, Brosch was carrying a good-sized volume wrapped in brown paper.

My curiosity was aroused, therefore I went into the shop, made a purchase, and learned from the shopman that the younger of the pair had purchased a well-known German reference-book, Professor Nebendahl's "Dictionary of Classical Quotations."

Strange that such a book should be purchased by an under-valet!

Leaving the detective Hartweg to watch, I took the next train back to Potsdam, where I was fortunate enough to find the Emperor giving audience to the Imperial Chancellor. At the conclusion of the audience I sought, and was accorded, a private interview, at which I recalled His Majesty's anxiety to ascertain something regarding the man Minckwitz.

"Well—and have you found him?" asked the Emperor very eagerly.

I replied in the affirmative. Then he told me something which held me breathless, for, unlocking a drawer, he showed me an anonymous letter of warning he had received, a letter which, posted in Paris, stated that an attempt was to be made upon his life, and hinting that the Crown-Prince might be aware of it.

"Of course," he laughed, "I do not regard it seriously, but I thought we ought to know the whereabouts of this man Minckwitz, who is probably an anarchist."

"Will Your Majesty leave the matter entirely in my hands?" I suggested. "The police must not be informed."

"It shall be as you wish. I give you authority to act just as you deem best if you really anticipate danger."

"I do anticipate it," I replied, and a few moments later bowed myself out of the Imperial presence.

During that day I idled about the Palace, gossiping with the officials and dames du palais, awaiting the return of the young man Brosch. That night he did not come back, but he arrived at the Palace about seven o'clock on the following morning. The head valet was furious at his absence, but the young man made a very plausible excuse that his sister out at Lichtenberg was very dangerously ill.

I had had no sleep that night, but as soon as I was informed of the under-valet's return, I repaired to the Emperor's study and secreted myself beneath a great damask-covered settee which runs along the wall opposite the door. For nearly an hour I remained there, when the door was opened stealthily and there entered the young man whom I had seen in Hanover on the previous day. He carried a book in his hand. This he swiftly exchanged for another similar book of the same appearance, and a moment later crept out again, closing the door noiselessly.

Quickly I came forth and took up the classical dictionary, a copy of which was usually upon the Emperor's table. It presented just the same appearance as the book that Brosch had taken away, only it was considerably heavier.

Without delay I dashed out, sought the Emperor's valet, and was admitted to His Majesty's presence.

Three minutes later we were both in the study. I took up the book and held it to his ear. Just as I had heard, he could detect the faint ticking of a watch within.

The book had been hollowed out and a time bomb inserted! It was, no doubt, set to explode between eight and nine o'clock, when the Emperor would be at his desk.

"Take it out quickly!" shrieked the Kaiser in terror, when he realized the true import of the plot.

In obedience, handling the book very carefully, I rushed with it downstairs out into the open. I placed it on the grass some distance away, while the Emperor followed me, utterly astounded at the discovery.

Having deposited it, I dashed back to where the Emperor was standing upon the steps, greatly to the surprise of the sentries, when hardly had I reached him than there showed a blood-red flash, followed by a terrific report and concussion—an explosion which, had it occurred in the upstairs study, must have blown the Emperor's head off as he sat.

His Majesty stood white and rigid, instantly realizing what a narrow escape he had had, while the noise caused the greatest alarm, and people began rushing hither and thither to ascertain the cause.

In a few seconds His Majesty was calm again.

"Say nothing of this, Heltzendorff," he said. "Let it remain a mystery. Come upstairs and I will speak on the telephone to the police."

"Your Majesty gave the matter unreservedly into my hands," I reminded him.

"Ah! that is so. I forgot," he exclaimed, and after thanking me he added: "Take what steps you like, but have the offenders punished, and also try to discover who sent me that anonymous warning."

The young valet, who had been, no doubt, heavily bribed by Minckwitz to substitute the book, had already disappeared, and, as a matter of fact, has never been seen in Germany since.

The man Minckwitz had also, it seemed, suddenly left Hanover on the night of my departure, for Hartwieg, following him, reported to me by wire that he was in Paris.

Without delay I travelled to the French capital, saw my old friend Pinaud of the Sûreté, and told him the whole story, explaining in confidence that for some mysterious reason the Crown-Prince feared that if the man were arrested he might reveal something unpleasant.

"I quite understand," replied the French detective, with a smile. "I know that, six months ago, while the Crown-Prince was in Paris, he was one night enticed by a girl into the gaming-house kept by the notorious Minckwitz. There a quarrel ensued, and the Crown-Prince, fearing attack, drew his revolver, which went off and shot one of Minckwitz's confederates stone dead. The Crown-Prince has ever since been paying big sums to hush up the affair. Until recently Minckwitz conceived the idea that if the Emperor died

and the Crown-Prince came to the Throne it would mean to him considerably more money each year. Therefore he conceived that diabolical plot. I warned the Crown-Prince of it, and he threatened to expose Minckwitz and have him arrested. Minckwitz, in turn, threatened that if His Highness made the slightest movement to thwart his plans he would expose to the world that the German Crown-Prince, during his latest escapade in the Montmartre, had killed a man. Finding this to be the case, I myself wrote that anonymous letter of warning, which I addressed to the Emperor."

"And which has had the effect of saving His Majesty's life," I remarked.

That night Minckwitz found himself arrested upon a charge of blackmailing a Portugese nobleman, and was later on sentenced to fifteen years' imprisonment.

In his solitary hours in prison he often wonders, I expect, why his dastardly plot failed. Had it been successful, however, it certainly would have had a great effect upon the future history of the world.

THE END