

SOME SPIES IN FICTION

IT HAS been suggested that since last August Mr. Sherlock Holmes has been at the head of the British system of espionage, and intimated that Dr. John Watson, serving in the medical corps of the army under Sir John French, and made a prisoner after the battle of Mons, was enabled to return safely back to the English lines through the influence of a bespectacled and bewhiskered officer of the German General Staff, who, in a discreet moment, and in very unguttural accents, whispered this cryptic message in the ear of the rather obtuse practitioner: "Steady, Watson, steady, and don't start! Comfortable, thank you, but sadly miss my shag. Meet you ten days hence in our Upper Baker Street diggings." Of course, Holmes has had as able assistants in the service Mr. E. W. Hornung's Raffles, and perhaps even the sinister Professor Moriarty, for abnormal criminal instincts are not entirely inconsistent with sentiments of patriotism, and from his name Moriarty was an Irishman, and when have Irishmen failed England when England has needed them? In the French secret service will certainly be found, among others, Arsène Lupin, Joseph Rouletabille of the *Mystery of the Yellow Room* and *The Perfume of the Lady in Black*, the Invincible Crochard of Mr. Stevenson's *The Boule Cabinet* and *The Destroyer*, and the shades of Gaboriau's Lecoq and Père Tiraclair, and Archibald Clavering Gunter's Maurice de Vernay. For that matter, there is no reason why the last-named should not be much more substantial than a shade, for he was but seven and twenty when, on the eve of the Franco-Prussian War of 1870, he met all comers as the Masked Wrestler of Paris, and foiled the scheme of the Alsatian conspirators for the assassination of the Prince Imperial. All of which invites allusion to the spy in fiction, who, from what we have learned

in recent months, differs radically from the average secret service in actual life, where the really effective man is the inconspicuous pawn, Herr Müller, the grocer of Soissons, or Herr Strum, the hairdresser of Aldershot.

As a matter of fact, there are very few of the conspicuous martial figures of fiction who have not, at some time or other, practised the game of espionage. Athos, Comte de la Fère, is one of the last heroes to whom the reader would be likely to apply the term spy in an opprobrious sense. But how about his behaviour at the inn near La Rochelle, where, from his place of concealment, he overheard the conversation between Miladi and Cardinal Richelieu which enabled him to send the futile warning to the Duke of Buckingham? How about d'Artagnan, eavesdropping to discover the meaning of the seventeenth-century mousetrap in the house of Bonacieux? Were not all four, Athos, Porthos, Aramis and d'Artagnan, playing the rôles of spy when they joined the forces of Colonel Harrison, conveying King Charles to London, in the hopes of effecting a rescue? What were d'Artagnan, Porthos but spies in the secret passages of Mazarin at Reuil? And, like masters, men; Grimaud, the servant of Athos, was an accomplished spy, the prime factor in the escape of the Duc de Beaufort. Dumas's musketeers have Polish counterparts in the novels of Henryk Sienkiewicz, *Fire and Sword*, *The Deluge* and *Pan Michael*. At every turn in that trilogy those heroes resort to espionage, and Zagloba is the master spy of them all.

The spy is not conspicuous in the romances of Sir Walter Scott, although in *Ivanhoe* Cedric the Saxon unwillingly played the rôle for a brief moment in making his escape from the castle of Front de Bœuf in the priest's garments conveyed to him by Wamba the Jester.

Thackeray's *Esmond* boasts a spy of the most approved modern fashion in the person of Father Holt, the agent of a vast secret organisation placed in England for the purpose of bringing about the restoration of the Stuarts; while the plot, toward the end of the same book, engineered by Henry Esmond, and failing because the Prince rode away to Castlewood in pursuit of Beatrix, is accompanied by a vast network of secret planning. The foundations of the scheme were laid in that ingenious cypher letter from Paris which, with the *Roundabout Paper*, "The Notch on the Axe" and the discarded plan for the ending of *Pendennis*, indicated Thackeray's great but undeveloped powers as a novelist after the manner of G. P. R. James.

Reverting again to Conan Doyle, there is, of course, the inimitable Etienne Gerard. The dashing Lieutenant-Colonel of Hussars had scruples, but he did not allow them to interfere with what he conceived to be his duty to his Imperial Master. It was under the robe of a monk that he made his way into Saragossa, and lighted the fuse to the mine that, exploding, made the breach in the walls, enabling the French troops to take the city. Although wearing his own uniform, it was as a spy behind the English lines in Portugal that he participated in the fox hunt of the British officers, and performed a feat of which he

himself was immensely proud, but which in England made him the most abhorred of all the officers in the French service. It was in the rôle of a spy that he undertook the adventure that led him to fall into the hands of Manuel the Smiler, and it was as a spy that, at Waterloo, he watched from the attic of a roadside inn the movements of the unexpected Prussians, whom Marshal Grouchy had been sent to intercept.

But perhaps the most finished portrait of a spy in fiction is that of Goliath in Zola's *The Downfall*. Goliath was one of the invisible army builded up by Carl Stieber, one of the thirty-five thousand Germans planted in northern France in preparation for the invasion of 1870. In that army he was of the lowest rank. His mission was not the drawing of plans of fortifications in the guise of innocent landscapes. It was in the humble capacity of a field hand that he worked, silently and effectively, among French peasants and French dairymaids, cunningly observant of roads and resources, to disappear with the outbreak of the war, and to come back as a guide to the advance lines of the armies of von Moltke. However perilous his predicament, the conventional spy of fiction is usually extricated at the last moment. Goliath is the exception, in that he paid the penalty of his calling, the penalty of a terrible and lingering death at the hands of the *franc-tireurs*.