



CAPTAIN GEORGE A. HILL, D.S.O.

Portrait Courtesy

GO SPY THE LAND

*Being the Adventures of I.K.3
of the British Secret Service*

By
CAPTAIN GEORGE A. HILL, D.S.O.

With Frontispiece



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GO SPY THE LAND

CHAPTER I

To the word "espionage," through use and misuse, is attached a stigma likewise associated with the word "spy," and all that spying stands for—a stigma undeserved yet easy to understand, for it is rooted in the fear of prying eyes from outside, of the stranger within the gates, of the traitor within the camp.

Spying is one of the oldest occupations in the world and, in course of time and by reason of the antipathy noted above, it has become so obscured by the accretion of legend and prejudice that I feel it necessary to define anew the meaning of the words "spy," "traitor," "*agent provocateur*" and "patriot" before I embark upon this story of mine, which has to do almost entirely with spying.

Espionage is the collection of evidence which enables one to appreciate the strength or intentions of an enemy, rival or opponent. It is a science blended of many parts. Spies exist all over the world. The greengrocer's assistant who watches the prices in the rival shop-window, the *couturière* who "lifts" a model from a rival designer, the theatrical thug who steals a colleague's ideas and embodies them in a production a week before the other opens his show, all these people are spies or employ spies, just as much as do rival states and nations.

Peace pacts or no peace pacts, the intelligence

departments of most nations are still prying into their neighbours' secrets. The rumour of a new gun, an aeroplane engine, a new poison gas or even a gear for releasing or locking an aeroplane will awaken into activity spies, traitors and patriots, and will be protected by patriots, counter-espionage agents, secret police and the C.I.D. of New Scotland Yard and its equivalents.

Let me define those words I have already mentioned:

SPY

The meaning of the word "spy" in its applied sense is very precisely defined. This is as it should be, for, by the Hague Convention, in time of war a spy if caught is liable to the death penalty. We cannot do better than quote Convention Four, Article Twenty, which informs us that a spy is a person who, acting clandestinely or on false pretences, obtains or endeavours to obtain information in the zone of operations of a belligerent with the intention of communicating it to a hostile party. A soldier in uniform is not a spy. A spy must not be shot without previous trial.

In time of peace a spy is one who secretly endeavours to obtain information concerning forces, armaments, fortifications or the defences of a country for the purpose of supplying it to another. A spy in peace time is not liable to the death penalty, but to a term of imprisonment.

In the United Kingdom the Official Secrets Act of 1889 makes it merely a misdemeanour wrongfully to obtain information concerning the Navy, Army, fortifications, naval dockyards, etc. But if such

information is communicated or intended for communication to a foreign country the offence becomes a felony. Most of the civilized countries of the world have similar legislation.

A spy carries his life in his hands. His existence is one long hazard, joyous or the contrary. Spies in the British service have commonly taken up their dangerous duty out of sheer love of adventure. British spies have slipped through the Khyber Pass disguised as Afghans, or loitered in Eastern bazaars in the dress of native traders, but it is difficult for a man, however much he has tarried amongst them, to imitate with faultless exactitude the accent, habits, ways of thought of an alien people, and for that reason the espionage agent finds himself again and again compelled to resort to the employment of nationals. It is because of this part of his work, because of the necessity imposed on him of associating with traitors, that a certain odium has come to be attached to the name of spy.

TRAITOR

A "traitor" is one who betrays those who trust him; is false to his allegiance to his Sovereign or to the Government of his country. His crime is called "treason." I am not dealing here with High Treason for which a man like Sir Roger Casement was tried and executed. Whether one regards him as a traitor or a patriot depends on the angle from which the question is approached. An ordinary traitor just sells his country's secrets for his own gain, and very often to save his own skin because of some fault he has committed. Whatever his rank or calling he is a pretty low specimen of humanity.

AGENT PROVOCATEUR

I am glad to say these are not very common in this country, although of late they have been (in my opinion unfortunately) used to get convictions against petty violations of existing licensing laws. The policeman or plain-clothes detective who dons a white tie and vest and takes a pretty companion to a night-club where, under the guise of an ordinary guest, he manages to persuade the proprietor or waiter to sell him and his guest drink out of hours is just a common *agent provocateur*.

But the Continental *agent provocateur* is a very much more dangerous person. He is used by the secret police of most countries to incite students, soldiers, or sailors to illegal activities in order that certain troubles may be artificially fomented, plots brought to light, or in order that people with certain political tendencies may fall into the net of the police. An *agent provocateur* is a more deadly reptile than an ordinary traitor and the history of the world's revolutions, bound up with secret service and secret societies as it is, unfortunately teems with examples of them.

For instance, Father Gapon, the Orthodox priest who for years was not only a hero to the masses of Russia but was respected throughout the world as the organizer of the Union of Factory Workers in Russia and was also a leader of the workpeople in St. Petersburg, was found to be an *agent provocateur* working under the direction of the secret police on that Sunday afternoon in January when a peaceful delegation was shot down outside the Winter Palace. That Sunday afternoon will go down in the history of the world as Bloody Sunday. Unfortunately Gapon's perfidy

was discovered too late, but he met a grisly fate one evening in the early spring of 1906 at Terioki, in Finland. Rutenberg, a prominent revolutionary, managed to make him betray himself during a *tête-à-tête* conversation, when a number of workmen were listening concealed in another room. The proof was overwhelming. Gapon was executed then and there.

Some time afterwards I met one of his executioners. He told me that none of them had ever killed a man before and did not quite know how to set about it. "Gapon," he said, "would not keep his head still when I tried to slip the noose over his head. He kept dodging it about. Finally I grabbed him by the hair and slipped the rope round his neck. Gapon complained that the rope was hurting his neck. I said, 'You may as well get used to it now, as it is going to hurt much more before you are dead.'" And so they strung him up. After the fall of the Tsarist Government, when the archives of the Ochrana were seized by the revolutionaries, the evidence of Gapon's guilt was still nestling in the secret dossiers and was made public.

Counter-espionage agents are those whose duty it is to nullify the efforts of spies. It is the most artful form of espionage, this spying on spies, and those engaged upon the work are often in greater danger even than the spy himself.

PATRIOT

The best type of a spy is a patriot in the highest sense, who for the sake of his country's freedom and rights lives a life of risk and self-sacrifice, knowing that his end, if he is caught, will be far from pleasant.

The spy must of course be familiar with the

language, habits, and ways of thought of the people among whom his field of operations lies. He must be gifted with a brain of the utmost agility, able to draw a deduction in a flash and make a momentous decision in an instant, possessed of infinite resource in pulling his neck out of the noose into which he will not infrequently thrust it, equipped with superlative qualities of tact, patience and perseverance. He must have a memory trained to register a photographic impression of a face or a document, and be able to retain with literal accuracy the contents of the latter.

Over and above all this, he must have a genius for organizing. What may be called the office work of espionage is apt to be overlooked through the appeal to the popular imagination of the adventurous aspect of spying, but on it the whole success of the undertaking depends. A thousand and one details have to be arranged by the master spy, assigning their several tasks to his assistants, keeping them primed with all vital information that comes to his ears, choosing the many places where they can report to him. Nine out of ten spies who are caught have faulty organization or communication to blame for their arrest and court martial.

Again, the most accurate and detailed information is valueless if it cannot be conveyed expeditiously to the quarters where it is required. In time of war the espionage agent is often in hostile country, and around him every line of communication is cut. Through the blockade which hems him in his messengers must be continually piercing and in this work many brave men die.

Clever and effective spies seldom get caught, *but the best are not even suspected.*

While I cannot, alas, claim that I was never suspected, I have the satisfaction of knowing that I was never caught.

I have never been caught! I do not say this boastfully, but in gratitude. My days as a spy were a joyful adventure in the pages of my life; had I been caught, the adventure would have come to an abrupt and by no means joyful conclusion.

I little thought as a young man that I should become a spy and be drawn into all the drama and melodrama of such sport during a war. And yet everything that happened to me in my boyhood days was fitting me out for that calling. If I had gone to a special school for years, studied espionage as a profession, I could not have had a better training than life gave me in my early days.

My father was a general merchant with a business that stretched over Russia across Siberia and down into Persia through Turkestan. As a small child I moved with my parents from London to Hamburg, Riga, St. Petersburg, Moscow, to the world's fair at Nijni-Novgorod, down the Volga to the Caspian Sea. For days we would stop at my father's depot at Enzalai, and then go by horses to Teheran, back to Krasnovodsk on the Caspian by sea, down the railway that was being built to Merv, by carriage to Samarkand and by camel sledges to Tashkent, back along the line across the Caspian to Baku, along the military roads of the Caucasus to Batum, and via the Black Sea to Constantinople and so back to England.

With my parents I always spoke English. My father was an English pioneer merchant of the best type and our life at home was the life lived by an

ordinary English family. English customs and traditions were maintained, nor did my parents ever become good linguists. But I? Well, I had a Russian nurse with whom I spoke Russian; our head man was a Tartar with whom I used to converse freely in Tartar; our coachman was a Persian and I was always in and out of the stables fussing about my pony. There was also a little boy with whom I romped on occasions, an Armenian a year or two older than myself. How I envied him because of the knowledge of life he had!

My parents, of course, had not the least idea as to the things that I heard discussed by various people in various tongues, how I knew the intrigues and love affairs of the people around our warehouses. Had they known I should have been whisked off at a tender age to a preparatory school in England.

As it was they employed excellent German and French governesses, with the result that when still a small boy I had half a dozen languages at the tip of my tongue, had learned to sum up the characteristic qualities and faults of a dozen nationalities, and had acquired an adaptability which has helped me all my life.

As an aftermath to the Russo-Japanese war in 1905 came "the first revolution" in Russia, marked by widespread disorder and bloodshed. Every stratum of society was affected. There was absolutely no political freedom of any kind, and those who wished for even the mildest and most conservative reforms were branded as dangerous revolutionists. Agitation was so rife throughout Russia that it spread even into the schools. Schoolboys were used for carrying illegal newspapers. They were used for carrying messages and, as a protest to the closing of uni-

versities by the authorities, many of the senior schoolboys came out on strike.

It was during this period that I met my first *agent provocateur*. He was a boy who kept the ball of discussion rolling and then reported the seditious remarks he heard to the police. I leave to the imagination of the reader how mild the sedition must have been in what roughly corresponded to an English fifth form, but we discovered that he was making reports to the police, and the following day he was nearly slain. At this school we wore a type of patent-leather belt with a very fine and rather heavy brass buckle. A dozen of us slipped off our belts and used the brass ends on the unfortunate youth, who never appeared at our school again. The school authorities and the police investigated the case, but never found out the cause of the thrashing.

Coming events, they say, cast their shadows before and, while never being a revolutionary myself, I was constantly mixed up with revolutionaries and counter-revolutionaries, a circumstance which gave me my first knowledge of espionage and counter-espionage work. While still at school I had a policeman friend. He was not really a policeman, but had been an officer in a crack regiment and had to leave it for financial reasons. He joined the *gendarmarie* which did a great deal of the political spy work in Russia.

He was a splendid looking man and, for a *gendarme*, very popular. I first met him during a sailors' Christmas-tree party which the English colony in Riga gave every year to British sailors in the port. Those parties were always jolly occasions which started with a dinner and ended with a sing-song,

the sailors as a rule supplying three-quarters of the programme. "Soldiers of the King," "Daisy Bell," "Hearts of Oak," "Clementine," and "She was Poor but She was Honest," were the favourites. The evenings always finished up with "God Save the King," followed by the Russian National Anthem. Yet such were the conditions in Russia that we were not allowed to hold this party without the presence of an official gendarme. That is how I got to know my friend. Young as I was, I discovered that he had a taste for whisky and so twice a week, about the time that has since become cocktail-time, he would drop in for a whisky-and-soda with my father.

I have since wondered whether possibly his visits had an ulterior purpose and whether he was not watching to see that we were not aiding and abetting some of our revolutionary friends.

One morning, walking down the Kalkstrasse, I saw the broad back of my policeman friend on his regular beat in front of me. He always passed down the Kalkstrasse at that time, and I quickened my step to overtake him. Just before I came up with him two men suddenly stepped out of the doorway ahead of him. My friend's right hand suddenly jerked in his pocket, there were two sharp and piercing cracks, and the two men who had stepped out of the doorway dropped to the pavement. Then there came a shattering explosion and I ran like a hare. I knew that my gendarme had shot them, but whether he had been blown up by the bomb or not I did not know. By the time I had recovered my nerve there were police at each end of the street and I went home and told my tale.

Imagine our surprise when at the usual time that

night my gendarme arrived at our house, handed his coat and sword to the maid, and unconcernedly came in for his whisky-and-soda.

We chatted on all manner of subjects, but he made no allusion to his morning adventure, so while he was talking to my father I slipped out of the room into the hall and looked at his coat. There, sure enough, were two singed holes through the lining of the pocket.

Then I went back and tackled him. His organization had been on the track of the two Nihilists who were known assassins and had come to Riga especially to murder the Governor-General. Had he waited to pull out his revolver instead of shooting from his pocket he would have been killed by the bomb.

Murder, assassination, and hold-ups in the street were the order of the day between 1905 and 1907. There were very large warehouses adjoining our house and one night, returning from the port where we had just seen off to England a ship which had been loading very late, we came across our foreman, Pavel Spiridonov, hanging on a disused lamp-post just outside our gate. It was a bitter night. Snow was on the ground. He had been strung up with barbed wire, and beneath the dangling form of the poor wretch was a little pool of blood. On his chest was pinned a notice with the one word "*Provocateur.*"

That summer my father and I went down the Volga as usual to Persia. On the boat, after we reached Kazan, I had my first encounter with a British Secret Service agent, Major Y.

At our table opposite us there was a rather tall German merchant. At our first meeting we bowed to him as Continental etiquette demands, and he rose

in his place and introduced himself in the German manner.

At the second meeting my father's attention was suddenly attracted, for the German had quite unconsciously given a Masonic sign. My father caught the German's eye and returned the sign. This led to the two men becoming very friendly, and we learned that our German companion was making for Barfurush, where we had a depot.

When we were well out in the Caspian our German friend confided to my father that he was really an Englishman and on special service. He took my father into his confidence because he wanted a place at Barfurush where he could stay and whence he could disappear in another disguise.

This was just before the Anglo-Russian agreement about Persia. Both Great Britain and Russia were sending spies into each other's territory and great hostility existed between the two countries.

Major Y. stayed at our house for several days and then, late one evening, the servants were told that he was going away. His bags were packed and he drove off towards Teheran. Late the following night he slipped back into our house after the servants had gone to bed, and next morning a grave, shaven-haired Persian left for Merv, from where, I believe, he departed disguised as an Afghan. During the six days that he was with us we felt that we were really helping the Empire's cause, and the excitement of aiding a British spy kept my father and myself happy for many days to come.

CHAPTER II

"MAXIM GORKI is in town"—excitedly the rumour swept the universities and was echoed among the senior schoolboys! Maxim Gorki, the writer on Russian life, the hero of the day, a man of the people, who knew the under-stratum of life and could write about it in a magic way. Maxim Gorki was in Riga. How I hated the idea of going back to school in England at such a time, for sooner or later, if he really were in Riga, he was bound to turn up at one of our friends' houses.

Months previously, intellectual Russia had raged when it became known that Maxim Gorki had been thrown into the prison of St. Peter and Paul. He had for some years been working with the Social Democrats, and he was imprisoned for the idiotic reason that he had been a member of an accredited delegation which had presented a petition for political reform to the Tsar's Ministers. The unfairness of the sentence rankled in the breasts of his admirers.

One or two letters sent by the novelist to his wife had been privately circulated, but everyone in the country was waiting for news of his release and to hear of his experiences.

Our home was open to any English people who happened to be visiting the town, and sooner or later most passers-by found their way to us for tea or some other meal. Among such chance visitors was an English journalist who had been waiting patiently

in Riga for some days. No one knew exactly why he was there.

On one occasion he was expected to lunch, but at the last minute he telephoned regretting that he could not come. I took the message. He asked me whether by chance I had a camera, and I replied that my father had one. "Could he bring it along, do you think, to the Hotel Commercial at once?"

I thought this request rather cool. Possibly I was disappointed at our acquaintance not coming, as I wanted to tell him of the Maxim Gorki rumour.

I said, "I suppose he can as soon as he has had lunch. By the way, it is rumoured that Maxim Gorki is in town."

"I know," said the surprising man, "I am with him now. Don't tell anyone, but that is why I want the camera."

I almost jumped out of my skin. "We'll be along in ten minutes." Slamming down the receiver, I rushed off to get my father.

We did not wait for lunch, but seized the camera and drove off in a sledge to the Commercial Hotel.

Spring had come early that year. The thaw had already set in. There was a slight mist hanging over the town, and the snow looked dirty and muddy. The iron sledge runners kept grating on the cobble stones which were appearing through the yellow slush. All this I remember keenly to this day, and how my heart was beating with excitement at the idea of meeting Maxim Gorki.

He was staying at the Commercial Hotel, under an assumed name, in room No. 7. We found our journalist friend and the author sipping tea out of glasses. There was a samovar gently boiling on the

table, and they were eating strawberry jam out of little glass dishes and occasionally cutting off hunks of black bread.

That was Gorki's lunch. He had come out of prison in St. Petersburg the day before. He had spent an hour with his wife and had learnt that he would most likely be re-arrested on a further charge which probably would mean his exile to Siberia. To avoid this fate his friends had arranged for him to go to Riga and from there to be smuggled out of Russia into Germany. Our journalist friend was very much in sympathy with the Social Democrats and so had been acquainted with Gorki's movements.

By the time we arrived Gorki had already told his story, had given our friend certain letters and made some sketches of his cell and a plan of the prison yard in which he took his exercise.

These letters, which had been written by Gorki in prison, had, of course, been examined by the prison authorities, and they had also been tested for secret writing with a mixture of cyanide which would develop any invisible ink.

Our journalist friend was afraid to send the originals out of the country, for if they came into the hands of the censor they would certainly be confiscated and destroyed. And that was why he wanted the camera.

Gorki was then about thirty-seven, though he looked very much older. He had a mop of hair which was constantly slipping down over his forehead and he had a trick of throwing his head back to get it out of his eyes. I think he had the saddest eyes of anyone I had ever met. He talked to us for an hour about his prison experiences. He was

planning to live abroad and to start an intensive anti-Tsarist campaign. We promised to say nothing to anyone until he had been twenty-four hours across the frontier, and he was leaving that evening secretly for the frontier where friends were waiting to smuggle him across.

Gorki escaped safely and finally settled at Capri. I did not see him again for thirteen years, when we met in Petrograd in very different circumstances.

Well, we photographed the documents, the four of us, there in Room No. 7 at the Commercial Hotel. And now the question arose, how were we to get the photographs to England? The censorship was so strict that it was impossible to think of using the post as a means of communication, and our journalist friend had some other people to see before returning to England.

I said at the commencement of this chapter that I was just about to return to school in England. I had come to Riga for my Christmas holidays, but had been taken ill and was returning very late in the term. We decided that the best chance was for me to take these photographs back with me in my silk hat.

As soon as the plates were developed and the photographs ready the lining of my hat was carefully removed, the photographs lightly gummed inside, and the lining very carefully put back and tightly gummed down.

I had always loathed that topper with particular venom, for it was uncomfortable and to my very cosmopolitan mind an idiotic form of headgear. But after I had safely crossed the frontier at Wirballen and was speeding towards England and school my

feelings changed towards it, and for many years I kept it by me for sentimental reasons.

I was very young and naturally longed to tell my friends in England of my adventure and how the photographs had reached the *Illustrated London News*, but I had already learnt that in the game into which I had so casually wandered silence was golden, and even when one was safely through a job one did not talk about it—much!