CHAPTER III

I WAS an English business man in Russia, and while I was most interested in the political developments, and sympathized very much with the champions of political reform, I did not meddle in the politics of the country. After all, I was only a visitor, even if a permanent one. Nevertheless it was impossible to avoid being involved from time to time in some sort of political affairs. There were in Russia no politicians or liberals of the English type. A Duma had been constituted more or less on the Western model, but most of the political leaders were idealists and students of philosophy rather than practical statesmen.

One of my great business friends was a Mr. B., a wealthy Jewish merchant in St. Petersburg, with whom I stayed whenever I visited the capital. He was an elderly man, childless, and very unhappy about it. He and his brother were the last of their line and felt keenly, as all Jews do, the fact that there was no male heir to follow them. The brother had a daughter, Sonia, who was studying at the University of St. Petersburg, and who was adored by her father and her uncle. Curiously enough, although I was constantly visiting Mr. B., I had never met his niece.

We used to dine about four o'clock in the afternoon. There would be vodka in ice buckets on the table, the finest caviare, smoked sturgeon and garlic sausage, followed by a number of Russian dishes. I think his cook made the finest *Borstch* that I have

ever tasted and it was invariably accompanied by a doughnut-like meat pie.

As a rule, on my arrival at the house, my host would be standing in his study door with a broad smile of welcome on his face, rubbing his hands and saying, "Come along, come along, I have got all your favourite dishes," and in we would go, more like two old cronies than an elderly, rather fat Jewish gentleman and a very young Englishman. But one day when I arrived he met me with a white, scared face, and tears streaming down his cheeks.

"They have arrested Sonia," he said chokingly. "She is in the Schlusselburg prison."

It appeared that Sonia, while studying at the university, had joined a Social Revolutionary organization, and the usual sequence of events—expulsion from the university, police court trial and banishment to Siberia—was impending. To make it worse, although she had joined a pacific branch of the S.R. organization, she had somehow or other got mixed up more or less unknowingly with a terrorist section.

I had never before seen a man so broken with sorrow.

After weeks of trying and bribing he and his brother finally managed to get Sonia out on bail, which was fixed at £2,000. That sum gives one some idea of the graveness of the charges which were being brought by the authorities against her. The minimum punishment would be exile to Siberia for five years.

Her uncle and father did not care about the £2,000. All they wanted was to get Sonia out of the country.

I had never met Sonia, but could I in decency refuse to help a friend in such an impasse?

My business took me often from Riga to Stettin, and as a rule I tried to make the two days' journey in the same ship. I think she was the *Regina*. She belonged to a Swedish company and had a delightful captain, while I was also friendly with the officers and engineers of the ship. She was really a cargo boat, but had accommodation for four or five passengers and a tiny cabin de luxe consisting of a twin-bedded state room with an adjoining bathroom and lavatory, which I always booked.

I made up my mind to make an attempt to smuggle Sonia out on this ship.

Her passport, without which she could not officially leave Russia, had been impounded by the police. Even if she could have secured a false one (and they were quite common in those days) the risk of using it would be great, as her full description would have been circulated to all frontier posts.

It was decided that she should be motored from St. Petersburg to Riga where she would stay one night at our house. And then I was to try to smuggle her out of the country on the *Regina*.

My plans were rather simple. I had probably made seven or eight trips that year on the *Regina* and was, of course, very well known to the port authorities whose duty it was to search from top to bottom all outgoing vessels. So thoroughly was this search made that the examiners were equipped with long iron rods to poke into ventilators, lifeboats, lockers and cupboards.

The Russians are a charming people, and one of their great joys is to see people off or to go to boats and stations to meet friends. No matter how often I went abroad there would always be half a dozen

people to see me off with baskets of fruit, bunches of flowers, chocolates and all sorts of queer, kindly gifts. It was a custom to arrive at least an hour before a train or boat departed and to make a real party, and I am afraid I very often disappointed my friends because I had what they considered an unhappy habit of reaching a boat or train just a few minutes before it left. But nevertheless they always turned up and used to entertain each other pending my arrival.

When the ship was about to sail all the friends who came to take farewell of passengers were put on shore and the gangway raised before the examination of the ship began.

My plan was that Sonia should be among those who saw me off. I would then conceal her in the bathroom and somehow or other prevent the examining officials from examining the place.

When Sonia turned up she proved to be an adorable person, rather small, with jet black hair, a wonderful peach-like complexion and blue eyes. This is a combination which one meets occasionally in Russian Jewesses. She had a delightful smile, very beautiful even teeth and delicate hands. As a matter of fact I completely lost my heart to her. I think I had been afraid of meeting a stern, high-brow, somewhat vicious Jewish revolutionary.

Everything went according to plan. There were about ten people making a great noise in my cabin. Somebody had brought a case of champagne. The head steward had said with a grin that I would be charged corkage, and I gave him a bottle, telling him to drink it in his pantry and give a drink to the port officials, and to let me have my party to the very last moment.

I had asked my guests as a great favour to make a point of not waiting to see the boat out (luckily it was raining) but to leave as soon as they were ashore, and this they promised to do.

The ship's siren boomed out the warning for visitors to go on shore. The steward came along with one of the port officials to say that my guests must really leave me now, and after one last quick drink they started to file out. Sonia remained behind. I called out to the last guest that I would be up in a moment, and slipped her into the bathroom. Between the bath and the lavatory seat there was a protruding iron bulkhead, and Sonia stood flat up against the wall behind it. She had gone very pale. I gripped her hand. It was icy cold. I whispered, "Pull yourself together!" and a plucky smile came into her eyes.

I closed the state room door and went on deck feeling none too good myself, for if I were caught not even my British passport would save me from an unpleasant term of imprisonment and possibly a protracted visit to Siberia.

I waved to my departing friends who, true to their promise, were scrambling into cabs. Then I walked aft and blundered into the examining officers, shook hands with one of them whom I knew slightly and received their thanks for my charming thought in sending them the bottle of champagne.

Then I strolled towards the saloon on which my cabin opened. Through a porthole I could see the examining party approaching. I slipped into my cabin, left the door open, and passed into the bathroom.

I had left the bathroom lavatory door unlatched,

and now I arranged my clothes and sat on the lavatory seat. After what seemed an hour but was really not more than two or three minutes there came a slight tap on my cabin door, which, you will remember, I had left open, and the examining officials walked in. They gave one glance round the cabin and, as I anticipated, came over to the bathroom door and opened it. I promptly called out and slammed the door, and then as if in a hurry went to the door with my clothes still undone and stood in the opening. The officials were most apologetic, and I replied with a smile, "That is all right; I should have locked the door." Then I turned round deliberately and pulled the plug, after which, doing up my braces with some show, I walked into my cabin and offered them yet one more drink, and we opened the last bottle of champagne, tossed off a glass each, and they went out.

All danger was not yet over, as there was always a chance of another inspection at the mouth of the river at a place called Boldera. So Sonia had to stand in her little corner for another hour.

It was most important that the captain should not suspect that Sonia was a political refugee, for, however good-natured he was, it would be more than his command was worth to take such a risk. Accordingly I had made up a story beforehand to the effect that we were lovers and that she was secretly escaping from her parents to be with me.

Boldera was passed, and, as all the world loves a lover, my captain friend and the mate and the first engineer were now grinning at the two of us in a friendly way and telling us both that we were very wicked people. We had a merry dinner that night.

Sonia had never been on a ship in her life before and so was tremendously excited and interested, and the danger she had passed through seemed to have been entirely forgotten.

But I shall never forget that charming person's embarrassment when it came to turning in for the night. All her worldly knowledge, the determined young revolutionary, disappeared, and she was just a very shy, scared young girl. I sent her to bed first, and when I came into the cabin found her with the sheets drawn up right under her nose, and two rather frightened blue eyes peeping out at me. Brute that I was, I yelled with laughter. I slipped into the bathroom, changed into pyjamas, and turned into the second bed.

The crowning jest came next morning when the captain knocked at our state room and came in. He had come to inquire after our health and saw to his dismay that the two state beds were nicely separated, being screwed to the deck. He apologized to Sonia and said that for the second and last night he would instruct the ship's carpenter temporarily to screw down one of the beds next to the other. He meant it very kindly.

For years I wrote to Sonia, but since the war I have lost touch with her.

One evening a little over a year before the war, I boarded the Nord Express for Russia at the Friedrich-strasse Bahnhof in Berlin, and found that I had a travelling companion in my coupé. We bowed to each other and mentioned our names. I noticed that his was German, but his appearance suggested the Slav more than the Teuton. As a rule it is easy

to drop into conversation with strangers on trains, but this man was silent, very reserved and seemingly very nervous.

I passed along to the restaurant car for a drink and when I returned found that our bunks had been made up for the night. My companion was standing in the corridor looking more nervous than ever. Suddenly he asked me my nationality and seemed somewhat relieved when I replied that I was English. Presently the ticket inspectors came along. My companion made a tremendous effort to keep calm, but there could be no doubt that he was labouring under a great strain. At first I thought that maybe he was trying to travel without a ticket, but this was not the reason of his agitation, for he produced one which was duly clipped.

Later I noticed a man pass up and down the corridor two or three times and invariably glance into our coupé as he passed. My companion took down his bag and went to wash. The train was slowing down for a station. The man I had noticed came along the corridor again. The train stopped. He looked in and, seeing me alone, his whole manner changed. He looked up at the rack. My companion's bag had gone. He almost shouted at me, "Has the other gentleman left the train?" Before I could reply that I did not know, my questioner had darted out on the platform. Almost simultaneously my companion returned, and the train started on its way north again. After the next stop the guard and a train inspector came along and asked to see our tickets. This was quite unusual and by this time I was pretty certain that my companion was under observation.

Mine was the lower bunk. I turned out my head light and before I dropped off to sleep the upper berth light was out as well. Every time the train stopped I woke up, and each time I noticed in the looking-glass over the washstand the glow of a cigarette. I do not think my companion slept a wink that night.

About six o'clock, just before dawn, I left the coupé. A man was leaning up against the corridor at the far end of the carriage. He was obviously watching.

My companion seemed to be in better spirits by breakfast time. We chatted and I casually mentioned what had happened the previous evening. A look of fear passed swiftly across his face.

"Have you seen the man this morning?" He asked the question casually.

"No," I said; "but I have a feeling that one of us is under observation."

My companion suddenly seemed to master himself. He smiled at me. "No," he said, "I don't think that we can possibly be under observation," and lit yet another cigarette. I commenced reading a new Tauchnitz novel.

Presently he started tearing some papers in minute fragments and, opening the window, scattered them along the line. From his bag he took more papers, which I recognized as tracings of some sort, and rather regretfully these too he destroyed. He did this all without any undue hurry, and unless my suspicions had been aroused I should not have given his action a thought.

Gumbinnen was passed and in a few minutes we were due at Eydtkuhnen, the last station in Prussia and the frontier post for Wirballen in Russia.

The man who had been in the corridor since morning came up to our coupé as we pulled into the station. "The Herrshaften are wanted in the Commandant's office." Although my conscience was like driven snow I felt uncomfortable. One always does on these occasions. I at once asked why, and was told I would be informed in due course. As we got out of the carriage a detective and two railway police closed in upon us and we and our bags were marched off to the Commandant's office.

A typical Prussian bully (I believe this particular breed is now almost extinct) demanded my passport. I handed it over. "This is obviously forged," he said rudely, and I assured him it was perfectly genuine.

He said the same about my companion's German passport, who merely said that he had had it for many years.

"Possibly," replied the Prussian; "but we know it is forged."

Then he started questioning me. I had no difficulty in replying, but because of his rudeness and a sympathy I had for my companion I held my tongue as to the papers I had seen the latter destroy and throw out of the window.

"You will be searched," said the Prussian.

I protested, but without avail, and an expert at the game ran his hands over my clothes. I do not know of a more humiliating experience than being searched. You are absolutely helpless and you invariably remember the little private things you have forgotten to destroy which are sitting in your pocket-book, or tucked away in an inside pocket, and now prying eyes are running over one's innermost secrets.

I heard the warning bell sound for the departure

of the train to Russia. I said it was imperative for me to catch it. The Commandant just looked at me.

"Am I under arrest?" I demanded.

He shook his head. "Only detained for examination. We will search your bag. Hand over your keys."

So they opened up my Gladstone bag. It was a beautiful leather contraption in a canvas cover. Why Gladstone bags have gone out of use I, as a traveller, cannot imagine, for they were the handiest form of bag for carrying property, and in my opinion very much more effective than the modern suit-cases. My companion was treated in a similar way to myself, but he did not protest very much. From the questions I was asked I could see that I was suspected of being his accomplice.

The Commandant examined us for about an hour. I demanded to see the British consul and was told that the nearest one was at Danzig. We were told that we should be interrogated again in another hour's time, and meanwhile, if we desired it, at our own expense we could have some food.

For a moment my companion and I were left alone, and in Russian he thanked me for not having said anything about him to the Commandant, and added with a twinkle in his eyes, "I am glad I destroyed those papers."

Later we were led back for further examination. A detective stepped forward and examined my bag thoroughly. The contents had already been spread out on the floor, but now he ran his hand along the seams of the bag and tapped its bottom, and felt the lining. Then he made a small incision and ran a long steel-like prong between its leather sides. He did this

very skilfully and with practically no damage to the bag.

Alas, by the look on my companion's face I saw that all was up with him. As soon as the detective commenced to operate on his bag he felt papers. The bag was ripped open, literally taken to pieces and a number of documents found. My companion was formally arrested then and there on a charge of espionage and sent back to the fortress of Thorn for trial.

By this time apparently the Commandant was convinced of my innocence and within an hour he received telegrams both from Berlin and St. Petersburg proving my *bona fides*.

With many apologies I was put up as a guest of the German Government at the local hotel.

The next day I boarded the Nord Express. Before leaving I bought a copy of a Koenigsberg newspaper and found a brief note to the effect that two suspect spies had been arrested on the previous day and taken from the Nord Express.

But the paper was wrong.

Only one spy had been arrested.

CHAPTER IV

At the outbreak of war I was in Northern British Columbia, fishing on the Skeena river, some twenty miles from Prince Rupert and, like most men, I hurried to join up. Within a week I was in training at the Willows Camp, Victoria. There was a marvellous collection of men at this camp, and it was they who in less than a year made such regiments as the 16th Canadian Scottish and the 30th Battalion famous on the British fronts.

We were equipped at Esquimalt, but there was still a great shortage of uniforms. I am short and very broad, and accordingly the quartermaster gave me a uniform designed for a man about six feet in height, in which misfit, to my shame, I had to march back to the Willows Camp. As soon as parade was over I rushed off to a local tailor and had it remade. In fact most of us obtained our own uniforms—which was certainly against regulations—and spent our money on all sorts of useless equipment. In this connection I met my first wartime spy.

An American drummer, as commercial travellers are called in the United States, was peddling a new kind of canteen. He came in and out of camp frequently and somehow or other the men came to suspect him. At last the suspicion reached the ears of the camp Provost Marshal, who had the drummer watched, and it was found, sure enough, that he was a German-American working for the German

secret service organization in Seattle. But, owing to a stroke of good fortune, I had been selected to make up a draft for Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry, and was on my way to France before the fate of the American drummer was settled.

Owing to my languages, I found myself a full-blown interpreter as soon as we arrived in France. Arranging for billets, dealing with irate villagers, purchasing food from avaricious shopkeepers was not very amusing, but I was thoroughly interested in the examination of prisoners and their documents, the taking down of their statements, and from little pieces of information building up, as one does a jig-saw puzzle, a complete picture.

The Canadians were in the line during the battle of Neuve Chapelle, and it was at Laventie, near Estaires, that I saw my first spy caught red-handed during the war.

He was an ordinary French peasant, a traitor who had been bought by the enemy and was used as a post office, i.e. he was not actively employed on getting information, but received messages which he attached to carrier pigeons and dispatched across the German lines when the coast was clear.

He had been under suspicion for some days, for he was constantly being found in places where he had no business to be, but he always had some sort of an excuse ready—he was either looking for stray cattle, collecting wood, or searching for something.

The civilian population in the zone of operations caused enormous difficulties to the military authorities, but quite naturally they would not leave their farm-houses unless they were forced. It was a strange sight indeed to see a peasant stoically ploughing his

field while shells whizzed over his head and exploded around him.

We actually were billeted in the farm of this particular spy. One evening when he came back to his farm he was stopped and a pigeon was found tucked away in his coat. He was put under arrest, and, of course, knew he was doomed. The Canadians handed him over to the French authorities who I presume dealt with him in due course.

There was a terrible scene just before he was marched off. His wife and sister must have been well aware of his treachery, and their wailings continued long after the man had been taken away.

Early in April we moved up to the Ypres front and I was put entirely on Intelligence work. About the middle of the month our division took up a position round St. Julien. We were expecting some sort of an attack at any time, and it was most important for us to know whether the enemy were getting any reinforcements. As my knowledge of German was exceptional, night after night I slipped out between the lines to listen to the German troops in their trenches. One could tell by the accent whether the soldiers were Bavarians or Saxons, and if we knew that a section of line was held by Bavarians, and suddenly either the Bavarians disappeared and were replaced by Saxons, or Bavarians and Saxons were there together, by putting two and two together after a certain time one could reasonably infer whether reinforcements had arrived and whether the German line on this section was being strengthened for the purposes of attack.

It was a nerve-racking business, wandering through No Man's Land, and horrible, because for

months there had been intermittent fighting all round the sodden, reeking, clay fields over which I crawled. One night as I crept through the pitch dark my right hand touched something, and, with a sickening squish, sank through. It was the body of a poor fellow who had been lying there for weeks.

On another night, when I was close to the German trenches, I was challenged and the challenge was followed by a hand grenade. The result was a shattered knee-cap. But my luck was in and I was found by one of our own patrols and hauled back to our lines. When I came to I was lying on a stretcher, and as I looked down towards my feet a sudden horror seized me. When I had crawled out into No Man's Land I had been wearing a Gordon tartan kilt, for by now I was attached to the Canadian Scottish Brigade. But flung across me hanging over the stretcher was a kilt of the Seaforth tartan. Of course the kilts had been mixed up at one of the advance dressing-stations, but the fact that I was wearing the wrong tartan worried my semi-delirious brain far more than my wound.

A few weeks later I received my commission and after a pleasant convalescence was assigned a post on the Intelligence Staff at the War Office. Then, as I got stronger and was able to walk about again, I was sent to the East coast on counter-espionage work. During this time nothing very sensational occurred in connection with my work, but I was learning the ropes and the experience gained during those six or seven weeks made me thoroughly conversant with the work of counter-espionage service.

A telegram summoned me back to the War Office, where I was ordered to report at a certain room.

"Mr. Hill," said a civilian, who had the bushiest eyebrows of any man I had ever met, "do you speak Russian?"

"Yes, sir," I said, and a warm glow crept up my spine. I was very anxious to go to Russia, and to my mind the question could only mean that I was to be ordered to that front.

But the authorities had other ideas, for Dr. Ross,[1] who was the civilian gentleman, said: "Then you will please learn Bulgarian in a month," and my hopes fell to the ground.

For the next four weeks I was working hard at the War Office with a Bulgarian teacher, and at the same time went through a special course in Intelligence work. It was a most thorough course. Experts from Scotland Yard lectured me on shadowing and recognizing the signs of being shadowed. I was taught the methods of using invisible inks. I learned a system of codes and was primed with all the dodges which are useful to spies.

It happened at that time that a British spy had escaped from the German occupied parts of Belgium. For days before his escape he had lain in a loft watching German reinforcements entraining at a certain junction. Hour after hour he wrote in invisible ink on grease-proof paper the number of wagons, and the type of troops entrained, and counted the guns which were loaded. And at last when he had all the information he wanted, he wrapped his grease-proof paper round some particularly fat ham sandwiches, which he put into the saddle-bag of his push-bike, and pedalled off for the Dutch frontier.

[1] Now Sir Edward Denison Ross, Director of the School of Oriental Studies.

At the frontier a long queue of people was waiting to have documents examined, and he whiled away the time by munching his sandwiches as he slowly moved up to the control post. When he reached the examining officials he politely wrapped up those sandwiches which he had not had time to consume and quite openly put them into his saddle-bag. The officer examined his papers, found them in order, looked through his saddle-bag to see that he was not carrying any correspondence, and passed him through into Holland. Within thirty-six hours he was in London, and we were developing the writing on the grease-proof paper.

How I admired that agent and his pluck! I am glad to say he came through the war quite safely, and only a few weeks ago I met him at the Conservative Club.

At the end of a month my Bulgarian was almost word perfect, and I made preparations for Salonica. We had recently stopped a neutral vessel carrying Bulgarians from the United States, and we had reason to suppose that one of them was engaged on a mission of some importance. The Bulgarians were at Alexandra Palace, which had been converted into a civilian internment camp.

It was decided that I should spend a day and a night at the Palace as a prisoner of war, and accordingly (dressed in mufti, and with a second-hand bag which I bought in the Charing Cross Road, and some odds and ends such as a third-class passenger might possess) I set off for the Alexandra Palace in a motor-car, escorted by two military policemen who thought I was a genuine Bulgarian.

The prisoners at the Alexandra Palace were a

mixed lot—Germans, Austrians, Bulgars and Turks—but in a way they were well off, as many of them had either friends or wives and relations, who, owing to their British status, were not under arrest, and were able to visit them.

I found my little party of newly-taken Bulgarian prisoners and told them that I had met with a similar misfortune on my way to Copenhagen. My story was that I was a Bulgarian born in America, and that I had decided to go back to do my duty in Bulgaria. It was the man in whom I was particularly interested who gave me hints as to the examination to which I would be subjected, and what I should and should not say and do. He had been through the experience a few days before.

At the end of thirty-six hours I had his story. He had been going to set up a new espionage bureau in Scandinavia which was intended to be a clearing-house for the information collected by his organization in America about the purchasing of munitions and armaments by the Allies. At the end of that period I was marched off for interrogation, and of course, never went back to the Alexandra Palace. Within a few hours I was on my way to the Near East.

CHAPTER V

From the harbour Salonica looked like a dream city. It is situated on rising ground, and in those days, before the fire, its buildings were of every shape and colour, and minarets stood out on the horizon like sugar towers on a wedding-cake.

The blue waters of the Ægean seemed to throw a peculiar light over the city, and one was ever conscious of the white top of Mount Olympus emerging from the clouds and keeping watch on the Thessalonica of old.

In fact, from the side of a ship the whole scene strongly resembled the first act of a West End musical comedy, with a Gordon Harker setting.

Ashore, that impression became almost a reality. First one noted the uniforms of the British, French, Italian, Serbian, Russian and Greek officers and men, all—with the exception of the British—wearing their decorations. Mixed in with this throng who had occupied Salonica were Greek *Evzons* in their white, baggy breeches, fantastic red leather slippers and gorgeous blue jackets. Armed Albanians and Montenegrins gave a special colour to the crowds in the streets with clothes which were a mixture of wonderful reds and yellows. Add to all this the peasants in their native costumes, the shepherds in their sheepskin coats and fur caps, which they wore no matter how hot the weather, and you begin to

have some idea of the appearance of any Salonica square at the time of my arrival there.

Half the population of the city were Jews—the Sephardi Jews who had fled from Spain and Portugal in the fifteenth century to escape the persecution of Ferdinand and Isabella. By their clothes they might have stepped out of that bygone century, and the women were particularly beautifully dressed.

The rest of the population was made up of Greeks, Turks, Serbs, Albanians and Bulgars, and when found in any quantity they were truly an unwise and ungodly rabble.

Many of them had undertaken missions on behalf of the enemy and a number of them fell into the hands of the military police and were brought to trial and eventually hanged. These trials were conducted with the utmost fairness, which the Levantine population never really appreciated nor understood, accustomed as they were to more rough-and-ready methods.

Flokas Café, the White Tower, and the Odéon were the main rendezvous of the Allied officers, and in consequence the happy hunting ground of every class and kind of male and female spy.

Within a few days I was only too happy to escape from the town and to find myself posted to the XIIth Corps, whose headquarters were situated a few miles away from the town, on the Lembet Road.

At this time Salonica was in a state of siege and a series of fortifications, most suitably known as the "bird cage," had been constructed from the Gulf of Thinos to the mouth of the Vardar.

I was busy collecting every kind of information I could get from beyond the enemy's lines, and

training agents who would make suitable spies. It was not easy work. As often as not the best potential spies were totally illiterate and it was necessary to teach them even how they were to assimilate and remember the information which they gathered.

Some of them took to this work like ducks to water, and on returning from a visit to the Bulgarian lines they would recite without a stop for over an hour all that they had seen.

Information would be given in some such form as this: "At such and such a village the 22nd Regiment is stationed, and they say that there is very little food to be had in the district and in consequence there is a certain amount of dissatisfaction. There is also a great deal of sickness, and a new hospital has been set up outside the village.

"Two kilometres down the road the bridge over the XYZ river is being strengthened so that it will bear the weight of heavy guns. Eight kilometres from here a new flying-ground is being made. It is most curious, but over the houses they have spread nets and sprinkled leaves."

From such a report, if it were confirmed from other sources, it would be deduced that at this particular village more troops had been concentrated than could possibly be supplied with food from local sources, that it was likely that the enemy intended to use this as a centre, that it was their intention to bring down heavy guns, that the Intelligence Corps of the enemy were anxious that our aeroplanes should not spot the new aerodrome they were preparing.

Occasionally I managed to get literate agents. These, of course, were more useful because they

could get their information back to me very much more quickly.

An illiterate agent had to go into the enemy's country and come back again, but the educated man would slip through the lines with four or six carrier pigeons, write down all the information he collected, slip it into the little metal tube attached to the pigeon's leg, and within a matter of hours the pigeon would alight at the headquarter's loft and be pounced upon by the pigeon-keeper, its message extracted and sent to me. The pigeon would be given a good feed and rest and a few days later be sent out with another agent.

But it was not only natives on whom we relied for espionage. There were quite a number of army officers who were brilliant at this form of work.

One of them was Captain J., a most brilliant creature who revelled in every form of disguise, and who would put his heart and soul into whatever character he assumed. We all knew that he excelled at this form of work, but he took great care that none of us ever saw him in character.

He would disappear for days and then come back with the most accurate information, but as no one ever saw him go or return, some of us would chaff him by saying that we had discovered he never went himself, but employed his own agents to do this work while he stayed with some fair charmer in Salonica.

After one of these periodic raggings he said: "I bet the mess that I can pass by you between a given time at a certain spot and not one of you will recognize me." The bet was immediately taken, the loser to stand a first-class dinner with champagne

and cigars at the White Tower. Captain J. undertook to pass a certain spot on the Seres Road between eight and nine on a given evening just before sundown.

On the evening that Captain J. was to pass, half a dozen of us took up our position on the Seres Road, which was the main road leading out to the British section of the front. Along it passed army lorries, Red Cross vans, troops on the march, mule trains, dispatch riders on motor-cycles, and staff cars. Sandwiched in between this military traffic was the movement of the civil population. For the most part the Macedonian peasantry walked from place to place, but occasionally one would find a hefty, prosperous peasant riding a mule while his wife walked on foot just behind him, in her left hand carrying heavy packages and in her right a stick with which she would belabour the mule which her lord and master bestrode. And then donkey caravans passed by, belonging to the more prosperous Macedonian merchants or shopkeepers. Tiny, mangy donkeys with great oil-jars slung on each side of their flanks carrying sunflower or olive oil, or with a carpet saddle stuffed each side with vegetables. Some would carry petrol tins hermetically sealed, and others petrol tins full of water with their tops already ripped off.

We scrutinized everybody who passed, looking for Captain J. Once or twice we suspected some foreign officer and even a Greek gendarme, but in each case we were wrong.

Presently another of these caravans came down the road. The owners of these donkeys were known for their cruelty, and as this particular caravan drew

alongside of us we saw the owner urging the poor little beasts along by means of a longish board tipped with a rusty nail. The flanks of two of the donkeys were running with blood. As he passed us the driver gave one of the animals a vicious prod, and one of us indignantly snatched his implement from his hand and gave him a particularly hard kick on the seat of his trousers.

Presently the sun set and we were all quite sure that for some reason or other Captain J. had failed to come down the road, and that we would enjoy a very good dinner at his expense.

Late in the evening J. came in, to be greeted with much joy and the news that he owed us a dinner. He assured us that we were wrong and that he had passed us. We called on him to prove it.

"I can prove it all right," he told us, "for I can hardly sit down owing to that kick you gave me as I prodded Neddy when passing you." Captain J. was the driver of that donkey caravan.

Unfortunately he lost his life a year later in going up on one of his usual trips during a heavy Bulgarian bombardment, when he was trying to penetrate the lines.

CHAPTER VI

From January to March, 1916, there was practically no fighting on the Salonica front. The Allied troops were preparing to move out in front of the "bird cage," and to occupy the Struma valley, which at that time was being patrolled by the South Midland Mounted Brigade, who formed our advance guard.

Under King Constantine, the Greeks were still maintaining a benevolent neutrality. The Struma valley was nominally Greek territory, and throughout this region five Greek divisions were distributed with the purely theoretical purpose of guarding the Greek-Bulgarian frontier. A quite Gilbertian situation.

Nominally attached to the mounted brigade, but otherwise quite independent, Lieutenant L. and myself roamed over the Struma valley on our own account. We each had a groom and a batman, and one pack mule which carried our fodder, supplies, and kit. We never slept two nights in the same camp and were always on the move, always watching the Greeks and the local villagers, and keeping ourselves informed as to what was happening just over the frontier in Bulgaria.

The season of wild flowers, almond and fruit-blossom which in March and April made this valley a setting for a midsummer night's dream, passed away beneath the scorching rays of a sub-tropical sun by the middle of May. It became more and more

difficult to do our usual patrols, and we began sending messages back to headquarters every third day in place of every day as before.

On May 23 the Commander of the 10th Greek Army, General Biras, intended to hold manœuvres at Seres, and he kindly invited Lieutenant L. and myself to attend.

I obtained permission from headquarters, my chief remarking that, as he presumed we would meet Turkish, Bulgarian and German officers as guests of the Greek Army Commander at these manœuvres, he wanted us to behave ourselves with the utmost correctness, and suggested that if it were possible we should attend the manœuvres unarmed, with the exception of swords. On May 22 we left Orljack for Seres in the cool of the evening, a distance of about twenty kilometres, and passed over the Struma River by Kopriva bridge.

About three o'clock in the morning we made camp some four kilometres from Seres and took a few hours' sleep, after which our chargers were groomed, our head-ropes blancoed, and our equipment specially polished. We decided to leave in camp our batmen, and handed over to them our rifles, revolvers and ammunition, and with field-glasses slung across our shoulders, and no war-like equipment but the swords attached to our saddles, we rode off into Seres.

Seres is an Oriental village with large tobacco warehouses, being one of the centres in which Turkish tobacco is grown and cultivated. The village was the scene of a battle between the Serbs and Bulgarians in 1913 and part of it was still in ruins.

We rode up to headquarters, where a Greek

orderly officer was appointed to be our host during the period of the manœuvres. We lunched with the Commander-in-Chief and his staff, who were very pleasant to us during the meal. I do not suppose that he knew that I had been personally keeping his *dossier* for the last three or four months, and through various sources knew a good deal about his correspondence and private opinions. He explained with many apologies that he would be unable to entertain us at dinner that evening, and we were invited to dine with the chief of the Artillery staff.

My delight was great when I found that the wife of this officer was a Russian lady who had lived in St. Petersburg and had met her husband while he was on a visit to Russia. This gave me a highly appreciated ally in the camp, and while the lady never betrayed a single thing in connection with her husband's work or the army, it was quite simple for me, in the course of conversation, to draw my own conclusions as to what was happening.

At five o'clock the following morning the manœuvres started. Sure enough, round the Commander-in-Chief of the 10th Greek Army there were ranged two German officers, four or five Bulgarians, and two Turkish officers with their respective orderlies, and to my great joy I noted that every one of them was armed to the teeth. However, I said nothing at the time. We rode up to the General and saluted him, and then saluted the foreign officers present, who most punctiliously returned our salute.

The manœuvres were rather a simple affair, and were a blind for the events which were happening behind the scenes. There was an inspection of infantry, cavalry and artillery which ended up in a

march past, and then a midday meal was arranged some miles from Seres under trees.

I took this opportunity of approaching the senior aide-de-camp with a very polite but very firm protest against the breach of etiquette of which the other neutral officers were guilty, in bearing arms. The aide, very embarrassed, promised that he would mention the fact to the General.

The following morning there was to be a special review of the artillery, and when we reached the rendezvous I was delighted to see that none of the foreign officers was carrying arms. But if looks could have killed I should have been a dead man from the stares I got from the two German officers.

The manœuvres were due to finish that evening, and never once did we speak to our enemies, nor did our enemies speak to us. I must add that the Greek staff was very tactful, at every meal placing a couple of Greek officers between the officers of the hostile armies.

That evening, after the manœuvres had ended and we had taken our leave of the Greek C.-in-C., I went to pay my respects to my hostess of the previous evening, the Russian lady. I found her in tears and very agitated. Her husband had just been ordered to Demihissar, a town at the foot of the Rupel Pass, and the key to the Struma plain. Her husband was anti-German. He knew that orders had been issued from Athens that the Bulgarians were to be allowed to come through the pass to invade Greek territory. This act meant that Greece would, in any case, be involved sooner or later, whether she came in on the side of the Central Powers or on the side of the Allies.

I comforted the poor lady as best I could and

then hurried off to find Lieutenant L., and without any delay we made for our camp outside Seres.

We sent one of our batmen back at once with coded messages to Orljack, where our yeomanry outpost had charge of the telegraph line to headquarters. And then, after a very short rest, we started out in the direction of the Rupel Pass. Ahead of us were trekking two Greek mountain battery brigades whom we had been watching that morning. At any moment their guns might be turned against us on the Struma.

About one o'clock in the morning we halted for sleep. All of us were pretty well exhausted, and I set the alarm in my wrist-watch for 3 o'clock and slept with my head upon it.

Just after dawn we made a small camp-fire and cooked a billy-can of tea, which was very welcome with the addition of a tot of rum. Then we proceeded in the direction of Demihissar. Our progress was naturally slow, as we had to go through the process of "drawing" every village that we came to. This manœuvre consists in trotting up to the village at a good pace, then suddenly halting one's horse, turning round and galloping off in the direction from which one has just come. If there are hostile forces in the village or an ambush has been prepared, it is ten to one that fire will be opened at once.

About six o'clock we knew that we were not on a wild-goose chase and that the Greeks were letting the Bulgar-German army through the Rupel Pass, for we met the first refugees from the surrounding villages fleeing before the invading army.

Refugees in time of war seem to behave in the same way the world over. They load themselves up

with the most useless things and hang on to these burdens at the risk of their lives. I remember an old man pushing a heavy wheelbarrow into which he had put an ordinary deal kitchen table. He was doing this under a scorching sun along a very rough unmetalled country track. By his side walked a young woman with a baby in a shawl slung on her back. In her right hand she carried two live chickens by their feet with their heads down, and in her left she held a small tin plate with two eggs and an apple upon it.

Why the wheelbarrow and the table—what were they hoping to do with them, and the pathetic tin plate with its two eggs and one apple?

This was but one of a hundred pictures. Heavy objects seemed to have a particular fascination for the refugees.

For the most part these people passed us without any sign of recognition and it seemed to be a matter of complete indifference to them as to what army we belonged to. I cross-examined a number of them to try and get information, but they had not much to tell. When the Bulgarians invaded the Struma valley in 1913 there had been great excesses. The villagers had not forgotten and were flying before the new invasion.

As the day wore on it got hotter and hotter. A Varda wind was blowing, and a Varda wind means hot, dry air that has caught up every particle of loose dust and sand, which penetrates through one's clothes into one's skin. And every kind of beetle, bug, mosquito, and sand-fly pestered both horse and rider alike. This, I think, was our greatest torture.

Finally we came in sight of Demihissar. About

a kilometre from the town I met the first Greek soldier we had seen that day. He happened to be a man who had lived in Chicago and spoke English fluently. From him I learnt that Demihissar was still in the hands of the Greeks, but that an advance guard of Bulgarians had been allowed to come through the pass into Greek territory, and had occupied the villages to the west of the pass in order to form a flanking party for the main body of the invading army which was coming through that evening.

From a map it will be seen that the Rupel Pass is the only gap along the Bela Shitza range of mountains, and that without what seemed treachery on the part of the Greeks, the German-Bulgarian army could not possibly have got into the Struma valley.

Beyond Demihissar we could see Fort Rupel, the key position to the pass, but the Greek flag was no longer flying there.

After a short rest and a consultation, Lieutenant L. and myself decided that we would push on into Demihissar with one man, so we left our two orderlies with messages and instructions to proceed back to Orljack unless we returned by sundown.

We were taking no risks and rode into the town with our revolvers actually drawn. A Greek sentry stopped us and said that we could not go into the town. We demanded to see the Commandant and after some delay were allowed to proceed to his office.

He was extremely rude, and said that he expected the town to be occupied by the Bulgarian army at any moment, and that unless we got out immediately he would make it his business to arrest us and hand us over to the Germans.

I asked him with a smile about Greek neutrality,

and he replied that that was a thing of the past and he thanked God that Greece had gone into the war on the winning side, and that we English would find ourselves very shortly driven back to our ships, which would be undoubtedly sunk in the Gulf of Salonica by the German submarines waiting there specially for our coming.

Altogether a charming person to meet at the end of a tiring ride.

We picked up our two orderlies and decided that we would make for a ridge in the mountain wall which runs out to the east of Demihissar whence we could get a commanding view of the pass and the Struma valley.

As soon as we reached this ridge and managed to find a bit of shade for ourselves and our horses we had the first meal of the day, and then Lieutenant L. and I took it in turns to watch the pass while the other slept.

CHAPTER VII

About six o'clock Lieutenant L. awakened me with the news that he had observed a large body of troops marching through the pass.

We trained our glasses on the road and made out that they were Greek troops retiring from the Rupel forts. They marched by Demihissar and camped in a valley below the ridge we occupied.

They were shortly followed by three or four battalions of Bulgarian troops and a regiment of cavalry, and then the road was occupied by cars and dispatch riders, which we rightly took to be the headquarters of an army arriving. Through our glasses we saw the cars pull up outside Demihissar and the Greek staff come forward to welcome the invaders. A battalion of Bulgarian troops took over Demihissar and set out pickets around the town.

We knew that we were running a very grave risk of being cut off from our line of communication, and that if we were not very careful we should certainly be taken prisoners. However, the information which we were getting was of such importance that we felt ourselves justified in staying as long as we could.

The Bulgarian army filed through the Rupel Pass rather like a great snake. Battalion after battalion followed each other, deploying left and right as they reached the valley and spreading out along the banks

of the Struma. Bivouac fires were built, and we saw the marvellous sight of an army in the field, very, very different from seeing one entrenched.

Meantime there was a stir among the Greek troops. Some sort of parade was evidently being organized. One battalion seemed to refuse to parade and the officers of other battalions went over to it. Then there seemed to be a conference of officers. Finally the reluctant battalion apparently agreed to parade, and within a few minutes a Greek general was addressing the assembled troops.

All this was rather like watching a silent film. We could see beautifully through our glasses, but imagination had to suggest to us the way in which the drama was unfolding.

As soon as the Greek general had finished his address and the troops returned to their bivouacs, I left Lieutenant L. to watch the pass and slipped away to find out what the trouble had been.

The first group of soldiers I met were gathering scrub for firewood, and seemed quite friendly, but I could not make myself understood, until one of them—when I had produced a little money—promised to fetch someone who could speak English. Presently he came back with a man who had lived in Canada, where he had been in one of the construction gangs which ran the final railway line of the Grand Trunk's trans-continental line into Prince Rupert, B.C.

This made a link between us, and I quickly learned the situation from him. It appeared that a good part of the Greek army, although anti-Ally, very much resented the fact that the Bulgarians should be allowed to come into the Struma valley, and were horrified that the Greek command had evacuated

the Rupel forts to them. Some of them felt so strongly on the subject that they wanted to fight the Bulgarians then and there and drive them out and across the frontier while yet there was time. The general who had addressed the troops had explained that they were acting on orders from Athens, and that the Greek army would withdraw to Seres. But there was a great deal of dissatisfaction in the Greek camp.

I told my Greek informant that I was going back to Salonica, this being in the direction exactly opposite to that in which our camp lay. Night was now rapidly approaching, and giving the Greek a fifty drachma note I slipped off in the direction which I had indicated. As soon as I was sure that I was not being followed I made a detour and returned to Lieutenant L.

From our ridge we had a marvellous view of the Bulgarian army and of the Greek detachment, for now the positions were picked out by thousands of little camp-fires which gave a most picturesque effect to the scene.

I told Lieutenant L. of the feeling which existed in the Greek camp, and we wondered whether we might turn it to some good account.

We remembered the action of Stalky in Kipling's "Stalky and Co." when he was besieged in a fort on the North-West frontier between the Malots and Khye Kheen tribes, and played the one side against the other. We felt there was a great similarity in our own position.

Our plan was to creep out on to the Greek flank which was nearest to the Bulgarian troops, and under cover of darkness to open rapid fire on the Greek

camp in the pious hope that the Greeks, justifiably angered by what they would take to be Bulgarian treachery, would attack the Bulgarian camp and start a nice little row between the two parties.

But while the plan was feasible enough, we did not know whether such tactics would be justified, for perhaps this penetration of the Bulgarians into the Struma valley was all part of a plan of the Allies who were working out their own tactics. We also knew that it was important for us to get back as soon as possible with our information. So, after a very long discussion, we decided that we had no business to attempt to stage our plot.

We had unfortunately been guilty of one great oversight. We had seen the Bulgarian cavalry come through the Rupel Pass, but we had not noted where they had bivouacked, and it suddenly struck us that they would probably have put out a protective screen, and that there was every chance of our running slap into a Bulgarian patrol. That made us decide not to return by the route we had come, for obviously if the Bulgarian and German cavalry were out along the road to Seres they would be keeping watch on the Kopriva Bridge. We therefore decided to pass the Greek camp, follow the line of the Struma River, ford it as soon as possible, strike out towards Poroi and recross the river in order to get back to Orljack.

At that time we were still using the Austrian staff map of the Struma valley which, though the best available, was very far from accurate, some villages being as much as five or six miles out.

By six o'clock we had cleared the Bulgarian flank, but all danger of running into hostile cavalry was not over and we still had to take the precaution of

drawing every village as we had done on the previous day.

About midday we entered a village which we subsequently discovered to be pro-Bulgar. We had as usual drawn it and no one had fired at us, and so we felt fairly safe in approaching it. We bought some eggs and bread, and went on our way. On the outskirts of the village we met some angry villagers who hurled stones at us and somebody fired a couple of shots.

As we were not there for guerrilla warfare, and did not know what forces were against us, we galloped off. Unfortunately one of the stones flung hit me on the head and knocked off my slouch hat, and I could not risk stopping to pick it up. The stone had drawn blood and made me feel very sick, and as the day wore on the burning rays of the sun penetrated the handkerchief I had tied round my head and made me feel very ill. Lieutenant L. and two of the men had been suffering with an attack of dysentery before we had even left Seres. I was developing in addition to my other aches and pains an attack of malaria.

The horses were absolutely dead beat, and by the evening my mare developed colic.

The next five hours' ride was a complete nightmare, and at the end of this day I nearly committed murder.

The sun had already set when we got to the village of Cavdalar. We had not the least chance of getting back to Orljack that night unless we could find a guide, for we had found the Austrian staff map totally unreliable for the part of the country we were crossing.

I staggered into the village inn, a dark little mud hut with a couple of tables and a small bar lit by a smoky kerosene lamp. There were half a dozen louts in the bar, and the air was heavy with the sour odour characteristic of unwashed peasantry. I made myself understood, and said that I wanted a guide to take us to Orljack. One of the number, a particularly sneaking-looking Greek, said that he would act as a guide providing I stood his friends, who were *comitadjes*, a drink all round. The *comitadjes* are brigand peasants who roam all through Macedonia and have the unpleasant habit of shooting first and asking questions afterwards.

I was weak enough to stand a round of drinks.

My Greek guide asked for another round, and I suppose it was because I was so tired that I complied with his request, and then he demanded yet another round, which I bought.

"Come on, now we go," I said. He leered at me and then spat contemptuously on the floor and intimated that he would be damned if he was going to guide any Englishman to Orljack.

I completely lost my temper. I drew my revolver and rammed it into the middle of his back and then kicked him with all my might towards the door and continued to kick him down the path.

It was a crazy thing to do, for ordinarily I could have expected half a dozen bullets in my back from the *comitadjes*.

But I just did not care, and can never understand how it was that in my fury I did not actually kill that Greek. I can only account for it by the fact that I was getting a savage satisfaction by brutally kicking him.

Lieutenant L. said he had never seen anything quite so unpleasant and yet so funny as my anger.

I made the Greek walk by my stirrup and kept the barrel of my revolver scratching the back of his neck for the first hour.

Then Lieutenant L. took charge of the guide, and about midnight we slipped into Orljack and started passing our dispatches down to the signal section for telegraphing to headquarters.

When the last word was written we just pitched forward and slept until late next morning.