

T h e F u l f i l m e n t

At the end of Chapter 4, I mentioned that I seemed to be on the ladder for promotion. This brings me to an episode which will make sour reading, just as it makes sour writing. The first intimations of a successful career in SIS coincided with an opening in a specific direction which I could not possibly ignore.

Long before the end of the war with Germany, senior officers in SIS began to turn their thoughts towards the next enemy. Between the wars, the greater part of the service's resources had been devoted to the penetration of the Soviet Union and to the defence of Britain against what was known generically as "Bolshevism," i.e., the Soviet Government and the world-wide Communist movement. When the defeat of the Axis was in sight, SIS thinking reverted to its old and congenial channels; and a modest start was made by setting up a small section, known as Section IX, to study past records of Soviet and Communist

activity. An officer named Currie, approaching the retiring age, was imported from MI5 to get the section going. He was hampered by deafness and by ignorance of SIS procedure; and the exceptional secrecy imposed on him hampered him in getting access to the papers relevant to his work. It was understood, however, that his appointment was a stop-gap one, and that, as soon as the reduction of work against Germany allowed, he would be replaced by a regular SIS officer.

For the next few weeks, virtually all my discussions with my Soviet contact concerned the future of Section IX. I wrote several memoranda on the subject, which we analysed in exhaustive detail. The situation, as I explained it then, held out two possible solutions: on retirement. Currie could be replaced by another officer, or his section could be merged with Section V. Cowgill had no doubt that the second solution would be adopted. He would talk airily of the days when we got rid of old Currie and really got down to the Communist job. I had little doubt that, in the ordinary course of events, he would be proved right. After the defeat of the Axis, there would be an economy drive, and SIS strength would be scaled down drastically. It seemed most unlikely that there would be room for two counter-espionage sections, one dealing with the vastly important Soviet problem, the other with more or less negligible odds and ends, neo-Fascism and all that. There would be pressure towards combining the sections, in which case Cowgill's seniority in the service would make him the obvious choice as head of the combined section.

My Soviet contact asked me if I would be offered a senior position in the section. I thought I probably would. But could I be certain? he persisted. To that question, I could not possibly give him a categorical affirmative. The corridors of Broadway were full of forecasts of post-war reorganisation, more or less drastic, and it was impossible to know what peacetime staffing arrangements might be introduced. I might well be sent abroad to get field experience. We talked around the subject for several meetings before he posed what was to be a fateful question: what would happen if I was offered the post instead of Cowgill? I answered that it would mean a significant promotion and improve my chances of determining the course of events, including my own postings. He seemed satisfied, and said that he hoped to have definite instructions for me by the time of our next meeting.

He had. Headquarters had informed him that I must do everything, but *everything*, to ensure that I became head of Section IX, whether or not it merged with Section V. They fully realised this meant that Cowgill must go. I made an attempt to demur, pointing out that my access to many obscure places in the service had been gained through my refusal to engage in office intrigue. But the argument failed to convince. The importance of the post was well worth a temporary loss of reputation. Besides, my friend pointed out, quite rightly, that within a few months Cowgill, and the manner of his going? would be forgotten. There was truth in this but I faced it with qualms. I liked and respected Cowgill, and had much to thank him for. But he was a prickly obstacle in the course

laid down for me, so he had to go. I could not deny that just as he would have no serious challenger in the Section IX race if he stayed, I would have no serious challenger if he left.

Although my reluctance to engage in office intrigue had not been considered a decisive factor by my Soviet friends, headquarters had not simply brushed the point aside. I was enjoined to conduct my campaign against Cowgill with the greatest care. Although most of the detail was necessarily left to my own judgment and initiative, the following guidelines were laid down. I should take no overt measures to achieve my goal because, if things went wrong subsequently, I must be able to show that the position had been thrust on me. Every move in the campaign had to come, wherever possible, from someone else. In other words, I must find allies to fight my cause, and the best place to look for them was clearly in the ranks of Cowgill's enemies. As I have suggested already, these were not few, and the passage of time had done nothing to soften their acrimony. I felt that my hope was far from forlorn, especially as Cowgill was a proud man who flew high. If he fell at all, I reflected, he would fall with a bump.

My first choice was Colonel Vivian, enfeebled as he was. His title was Deputy Chief of the Secret Service; he was Cowgill's direct superior in the service; he was responsible, in name, for all the counter-espionage activity of SIS. I have shown how Cowgill, contemptuous of his weakness, had brushed him aside, preferring to deal directly with the Chief. The slight rankled deeply with Vivian. On past occasions, he had

wept on my shoulder on account of his lost influence embarrassing me deeply. But now I welcomed these sentimental little scenes, and it was not long before Vivian was asking me, quite improperly, "what to do about Cowgill." Clearly, I could not match his impropriety by telling him in so many words. But I was able to divert his complaints to other quarters near the seat of power. It was useless to suggest that he have a showdown with the Chief. He was almost as afraid of the Chief as he was of Cowgill. But there were others who had the Chief's ear, or to whom the Chief had to listen.

The most likely of these was Christopher Arnold-Forster. When I first joined SIS, he had been in the Naval Section, processing naval intelligence for the Admiralty. The Chief had then installed him in an office across the corridor from his own, with the title Principal Staff Officer. He may have regretted the appointment subsequently, but in fact it was one of the best he ever made. Arnold-Forster had a clear brain and an unusual capacity to see order in bureaucratic chaos, together with an admirable style, both on paper and in committee. He was also one of the bravest men I ever met. Much of his working day he gasped with agony at his desk behind a row of bottles containing strange stomach powders. I felt that if his mind could be engaged on our problem, he would soon grasp the impossibility of a situation in which the head of the SIS counter-espionage section was permanently at loggerheads with MI5. It might be tolerated in the short run, under the stress of war, when resources were stretched to breaking. But to prolong it indefi-

nitely in peacetime was a different matter. If Arnold-Forster got the point, I had little doubt that he would press it.

How to put it over? The best course was for Arnold-Forster to hear an authoritative MI5 view on Cowgill. So, with whom? I rejected Dick White, on the grounds that he was too much inclined to be all things to all men. He might easily have pulled his punches. Guy Liddell would be a far better bet. He was Whites superior; he had been with MI5 so long that it almost seemed that he *was* MI5; he was always a plain speaker, and could be a relentless one. Accordingly, when Vivian next raised the subject, I reiterated that I had nothing to suggest, but thought that he would be well advised to consult Arnold-Forster. Perhaps it would help if a meeting could be arranged between Arnold-Forster and Guy Liddell? Vivian digested the idea slowly, but with dawning appreciation. Then with immense resolution he said: "You know, Kim, I'll do just that!"

How the meeting was arranged I do not know. Vivian's club was the East India and Sports, but they can hardly have lunched there. Its wartime curry and potatoes would have killed Arnold-Forster. But when I next saw Vivian, things seemed to be going well. He gave me a sly, winning smile. "I think," he said, "it was a real eye-opener for Chris!" More significant still was a telephoned invitation from Arnold-Forster to drop in and see him "next time I was free." He was too correct to raise what Wodehouse would call the "*res*" But we had a long discussion about SIS in general and its future, what scope there was for improvement

and what modifications were necessary to meet the new conditions imposed by the coming peace. He was obviously appraising me, and I tried to be as sensible and straightforward as possible. Cowgill's name was not mentioned.

The next step was to canvass the Foreign Office, with which we had often had dealings, notably in connection with the diplomatic protests to Franco and Salazar against German intelligence activity in the Iberian peninsula. A system was introduced in wartime whereby the Foreign Office seconded one of their officials for work in Broadway, in order, so to speak, to cross-fertilise the two services, to improve understanding of each others aims and procedures. The first member of the Foreign Office to be so seconded was Patrick Reilly, and he was still at his post in Broadway at the time of which I write. I had dealt with him frequently in connection with German intrigue in neutral countries, and had no reason to believe that he thought ill of me. But I knew of no differences between him and Cowgill severe enough to justify me in counting Reilly among my allies. But my lucky star was shining bright. Cowgill, who sometimes seemed bent on self-destruction, chose this critical moment to try to propel the Chief into a wholly unnecessary row with Edgar Hoover. Such a row would clearly have affected Anglo-American relations in general. Reilly, therefore, entered the picture, and with sharp reservations about Cowgill's political good sense.

The first I heard of this new development was a tremulous summons from Vivian. He showed me a

two-page letter which Cowgill had drafted for the Chiefs signature. I cannot remember what the precise issue was. The memory was doubtless driven from my mind by the intemperance of Cowgill's language. The draft was a tirade against Hoover's regular practice of sacrificing intelligence needs for political advantage in Washington. Of course, there was much truth in what Cowgill said. But such things cannot be put on paper, not anyway in correspondence between the head of one service and another. At the bottom of the draft was a succinct minute from Reilly: "I submit that V's draft is wholly unsuitable and, if sent, would make CSS look ridiculous." Reilly had asked Vivian to re-write the letter, and Vivian in turn now wanted me to put up what I suppose must be called a draft-draft. I scribbled about half a page, making the very minor point at issue in courteous terms, and we took it along to Reilly together. He passed it, without alteration, to the Chiefs secretaries, and I left them. Vivian told me next day that he had had "a *very* interesting talk with Patrick."

The scene was set. Vivian, now firmly propped, was out for Cowgill's blood. Arnold-Forster had been impressed by MI5's hostility to Cowgill, and had made sure that the Chief did not underrate it. MI5 itself was solid. Apart from Dick White, who was still personally affable, the rest of the personnel of MI5 knew Cowgill only as an antagonist in inter-office strife. Even White described him, kindly, as "an awkward bugger." There were also clouds lowering for Cowgill on the Bletchley horizon. He had always thought that officials of the Government Code & Cypher School

were ready to dispute his control of German wireless-intelligence traffic. Shortly after our return to London from St. Albans, he had clashed with two senior GC&CS officers, Jones and Hastings. On a deeply embarrassing occasion, flanked by his sub-section heads, he was badly worsted, not to say mauled, by Jones. Both took uncompromising and opposite stands. But Jones knew his brief backwards, Cowgill did not. I do not suggest that GC&CS took an active part in the drive to oust Cowgill. They were too remote. But through the operation of the old-boy network, the Chief knew well that the cryptographers would take a philosophical attitude towards Cowgill's departure.

The ordeal virtually ended one day when Vivian summoned me, and asked me to read a minute he had written to the Chief. It was of inordinate length and laced with quotations from Hamlet. It traced the sorry story of Cowgill's quarrels, and argued that a radical change must be made before the transition to peacetime conditions. My name was put forward as a successor to Currie. Cowgill's candidature for the appointment was specifically excluded. My own suitability for the post was explained in flattering detail. Strangely enough, the recital of my virtues omitted my most serious qualification for the job—the fact that I knew something about communism.

For me, that was the end of the struggle. Vivian would not have dared to put such a far-reaching proposal to the Chief without Arnold-Forster's blessing; and Arnold-Forster would not have given it if he had not first prepared the ground for a favourable reception. The fact that the minute was typed and ready

to go told me that the Chief was prepared to risk a major show-down with Cowgill, even to the point of accepting his resignation. I had little doubt that the next few days would bring a summons from the Chief. But I had one last move to make, if the summons came. I spent some time thinking exactly how I should make it.

My problem was that a career in clandestine service is unpredictable, if not downright hazardous. It is always possible that something will go wrong. Minor mishaps I could probably take in my stride. But if disaster struck, I did not want to be dependent solely on the loyalty of my colleagues in SIS. The particular danger facing secret servants is the charge of insecurity, or of related offences, which are the province of MI5. In case anything should happen to me in my new job, it would be well, I reflected, if MI5 could be officially embroiled in my appointment. What I wanted was a statement from MI5, on paper, to the effect that they approved my appointment. Yet I could scarcely say all that to the Chief in so many words. In short, I was in search of a formula. After anxious reflection, I thought that I had better call to my aid the Chief's obsessive delight in inter-departmental manoeuvre.

The summons came. It was by no means the first time that I had visited the *arcana*. But on this occasion, Miss Pettigrew and Miss Jones, the Chief's secretaries, seemed especially affable as I waited in their room for the green light to go on. The green light flashed, and I went in. For the first time, the Chief addressed me as "Kins." so I knew that no last-

minute hitch had occurred. He showed me Vivian's minute, and out of politeness I pretended to read it. He told me that he had decided to act on Vivian's proposal and offer me the immediate succession to Currie. Had I anything to say? I had. Using the sort of I-hope-I-am-not-speaking-out-of-turn-Sir approach, I said that the appointment had been offered to me presumably because of the well-known incompatibility between Cowgill and his opposite numbers in MI5. I hoped that I would be able to avoid such quarrels in future. But who could make predictions? I would be much happier in the job if I knew for certain that MI5, the people with whom I would be dealing daily, had no objection to my appointment. It would make me just that much more confident. Besides, MI5 approval, officially given, would effectively protect the service against future criticism from that quarter.

Before I had finished my brief exposition, the Chief had got the point, with evident appreciation. He was extraordinarily quick to spot cover in the bureaucratic jungle. His critics used to say that only his grasp of tactics ensured his survival in the much-coveted control of secret funds. Before long, he was throwing my own arguments back at me with force and conviction. He dismissed me with great warmth, saying that he would write Sir David Petrie (then head of MI5) without delay. I left him in the hope that he would claim, and perhaps more than half believe, that the whole credit for the idea was his own. In due course, Petrie returned a very friendly reply. The Chief was delighted with it. So was I.

In launching this intrigue I hoped that Cowgill

would end by getting himself out. He did. As soon as my appointment became known, he demanded an interview with the Chief. I know nothing of the details of the meeting, but I never saw Cowgill again. He had submitted his resignation once too often. It was a pointless and fatal mistake. Within little more than a year, Sections V and IX were united, under my direction. There was no Cowgill to dispute my path. If he had contented himself with a short period of eclipse, he would certainly have found another rewarding job in the service. But he had become used to riding high. As I hope I have shown, he was proud and impulsive, a man too big for his talents.

Within a few dtys, I was taking over from Currie, rather impatiently, I am afraid. I suggested to the Chief that, to regularise the position of the new Section IX, I should draft myself a charter for his signature. I cannot remember its exact wording. But it gave me responsibility, under the Chief, for the collection and interpretation of information concerning Soviet and Communist espionage and subversion in all parts of the world outside British territory. It also enjoined me to maintain the closest liaison for the reciprocal exchange of intelligence on these subjects with MI5. The Chief added a final clause. I was on no account to have any dealings with any of the United States services. The war was not yet over, and the Soviet Union was our ally. There was no question of risking a leakage. The leakage which the Chief had in mind was a leakage from the United States services to the Russians. It was a piquant situation.