

The LOST NAVAL PAPERS

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A STORY AND A VISIT.

AT the beginning of the month of September, 1916, there appeared in The Cornhill Magazine a story entitled "The Lost Naval Papers." I had told this story at second-hand, for the incidents had not occurred within my personal experience. One of the principals—to whom I had allotted the temporary name of Richard Cary—was an intimate friend, but I had never met the Scotland Yard officer whom I called William Dawson, and was not at all anxious to make his official acquaintance. To me he then seemed an inhuman, icy-blooded "sleuth," a being of great national importance, but repulsive and dangerous as an associate. Yet by a turn of Fortune's wheel I came not only to know William Dawson, but to work with him, and almost to like him. His penetrative efficiency compelled one's admiration, and his unconcealed vanity showed that he did not stand wholly outside the human family. Yet I never felt safe with Dawson. In his presence, and when I knew that somewhere round the corner he was carrying on his mysterious investigations, I was perpetually apprehensive of his hand upon my shoulder and his bracelets upon my wrists. I was unconscious of crime, but the Defence of the Realm Regulations—which are to Dawson a new fount of wisdom and power—create so many fresh offences every week that it is difficult for the most timidly loyal of citizens to keep his innocence up to date. I have doubtless trespassed many times, for I have Dawson's assurance that my present freedom is due solely to his reprehensible softness towards me. Whenever I have showed independence of spirit—of which, God knows, I have little in these days—Dawson would pull out his terrible red volumes of ever-expanding Regulations and make notes of my committed crimes. The Act itself could be printed on a sheet of notepaper, but it has given birth to a whole library of Regulations. Thus he bent me to his will as he had my poor friend Richard Cary.

The mills of Scotland Yard grind slowly, yet they grind exceeding small. There is nothing showy about them. They work by system, not by inspiration. Though Dawson was not specially intelligent—in some respects almost stupid—he was dreadfully, terrifyingly efficient, because he was part of the slowly grinding Scotland Yard machine.

As this book properly begins with my published story of "The Lost Naval Papers," I will reprint it here exactly as it was written for the readers of The Cornhill Magazine in September, 1916.

I. Baiting the Trap.

THIS story—which contains a moral for those fearful folk who exalt everything German—was told to me by Richard Cary, the accomplished naval correspondent of a big paper in the North of England. I have known him and his enthusiasm for the White Ensign for twenty years. He springs from an old naval stock, the Carys of North Devon, and has devoted his life to the study of the Sea Service. He had for so long been accustomed to move freely among shipyards and navy men, and was trusted so completely, that the veil of secrecy which dropped in August, 1914, between the Fleets and the world scarcely existed for him. Everything which he desired to know for the better understanding of the real work of the Navy came to him officially or unofficially. When, therefore, he states that the Naval Notes with which this story deals would have been of incalculable value to the enemy, I accept his word

By special arrangement with the publishers—Thos. Allen. without hesitation. I have myself seen some of them, and they made me tremble—for Cary's neck. "No," said he, "I have told you the yarn just as it happened; write it yourself. I am a dull dog, quite efficient at handling hard facts and making scientific deductions from them, but with no eye for the picturesque details. I give it to you." He rose to go—Cary had been lunching with me—but paused for an instant upon my front doorstep. "If you insist upon it," added he, smiling, "I don't mind sharing in the plunder."

It was in the latter part of May, 1916. Cary was hard at work one morning in his rooms in the North City where he had established his headquarters. His study table was littered with papers—notes, diagrams, and newspaper cuttings—and he was laboriously reducing the apparent chaos into an orderly

INTRODUCING DAWSON

—who is liable to turn up as a marine, a Jack Tar, or a naval lieutenant, whenever there's a job for the Secret Service.

"Nobody ever sees me," he says, "though I am everywhere. The first time I came to your house I wore a beard, and the second time I looked like a gas inspector."

This bull-headed sleuth thumps the table to a High Admiral and like as not comes to grips with his quarry in the dark. The Lost Naval Papers is a thrilling sidelight on Dawson and the drama of the sea.

IN THREE INSTALMENTS

series of chapters upon the Navy's Work which he proposed to publish after the war was over. It was not designed to be an exciting book—Cary has no dramatic instinct—but it would be full of fine sound stuff, close accurate detail, and clear analysis. Day by day for more than twenty months he had been collecting details of every phase of the Navy's operations, here a little and there a little. He had recently returned from a confidential tour of the shipyards and naval bases, and had exercised his trained eye upon checking and amplifying what he had previously learned. While his recollection of this tour was fresh he was actively writing up his Notes and revising the rough early draft of his book. More than once it had occurred to him that his accumulations of Notes were dangerous explosives to store in a private house. They were becoming so full and so accurate that the enemy would have paid any sum or have committed any crime to secure possession of them. Cary is not nervous or imaginative—have I not said that he springs from a naval stock?—but even he now and then felt anxious. He would, I believe, have slept peacefully though knowing that a delicately primed bomb lay beneath his bed, for personal risks troubled him little, but the thought that hurt to his country might come from his well-meant labors sometimes rapped against his nerves. A few days before his patriotic conscience had been stabbed by no less a personage than Admiral Jellicoe.

who, speaking to a group of naval students which included Cary, had said: "We have concealed nothing from you, for we trust absolutely to your discretion. Remember what you have seen, but do not make any notes." Yet here at this moment was Cary disregarding the orders of a Commander-in-Chief whom he worshipped. He tried to square his conscience by reflecting that no more than three people knew of the existence of his Notes or of the book which he was writing from them, and that each one of those three was as trustworthy as himself. So he went on collating, comparing, writing, and the heap upon his table grew bigger under his hands.

The clock had just struck twelve upon that morning when a servant entered and said, "A gentleman to see you, sir, upon important business. His name is Mr. Dawson."

Cary jumped up and went to his dining-room, where the visitor was waiting. The name had meant nothing to him, but the instant his eyes fell upon Mr. Dawson he remembered that he was the chief Scotland Yard officer who had come north to teach the local police how to keep track of the German agents who infested the shipbuilding centres. Cary had met Dawson more than once, and had assisted him with his intimate local knowledge. He greeted his visitor with smiling courtesy, but Dawson did not smile. His first words, indeed, came like shots from an automatic pistol.

"Mr. Cary," said he, "I want to see your Naval Notes."

Cary was staggered, for the three people whom I have mentioned did not include Mr. Dawson. "Certainly," said he, "I will show them to you if you ask officially. But how in the world did you hear anything about them?"

"I am afraid that a good many people know about them, most undesirable people too. If you will show them to me—I am asking officially—I will tell you what I know."

CARY led the way to his study. Dawson glanced round the room, at the papers heaped upon the table, at the tall windows bare of curtains—Cary, who loved light and sunshine, hated curtains—and growled. Then he locked the door, pulled down the thick blue blinds required by the East Coast lighting orders, and switched on the electric lights though it was high noon in May. "That's better," said he. "You are an absolutely trustworthy man, Mr. Cary. I know all about you. But you are damned careless. That bare window is overlooked from half a dozen flats. You might as well do your work in the street."

Dawson picked up some of the papers, and their purport was explained to him by Cary. "I don't know anything of naval details," said he, "but I don't need any evidence of the value of the stuff here. The enemy wants it, wants it badly; that is good enough for me."

"But," remonstrated Cary, "no one knows of these papers, or of the use to which I am putting them, except my son in the Navy, my wife (who has not read a line of them), and my publisher in London."

"Hum!" commented Dawson. "Then how do you account for this?"

He opened his leather despatch-case and drew forth a parcel carefully wrapped up in brown paper. Within the wrapping was a large white envelope of the linen woven paper used for registered letters, and generously sealed. To Cary's surprise, for the envelope appeared to be secure, Dawson cautiously opened it so as not to break the seal which was adhering to the flap and drew out a second smaller envelope, also sealed. This he opened in the same delicate way and took out a third; from the third he drew a fourth, and so on until eleven empty envelopes had been added to the litter piled upon Cary's table, and the twelfth, a small one, remained in Dawson's hands.

"Did you ever see anything so childish?" observed he, indicating the envelopes. "A big, registered, sealed Chinese puzzle like that is just crying out to be opened. We would have seen the inside of that