

patriotic enthusiasts who bound themselves to take action against the hated German in every way—to expose and intern the enemy in our midst, to free the country from the baneful German influence which has spread into every sphere of our national life, to purchase no goods of German origin, to ban the German language, and to discover the existence of the pro-German sentiment, German intrigue, and the expenditure of German gold—"palm-oil" one distinguished writer has called it—in official and Parliamentary circles.

The programme was, to say the least, a wide and laudable one, and afforded ample scope to the thousands of members who had enrolled themselves.

In Lady Betty's drawing-room that afternoon the committee of the movement had assembled, eager to meet Mr. Lewin Rodwell, who had shown such patriotism that even Cabinet Ministers had publicly bestowed great praise upon his ceaseless and self-denying efforts.

There were present, first of all, the usual set of society women of uncertain age, dressed in the latest French models, which gave them an air of youth, yet, at the same time, accentuated their angularity and unnatural freshness; two or three elderly men, led there against their will by their strong-minded spouses, a pretty girl or two from nowhere, and one or two male enthusiasts, including two good-looking and merry-going peers who were loud in their condemnation of the whole Government—from the Prime Minister downwards.

Among those to whom the great and much-advertised Lewin Rodwell was introduced was a rather thick-set, dark-haired, clean-shaven, middle-aged man named Charles Trustram, a

thoroughly John Bull type of Englishman, who occupied a highly responsible position in the Transport department of the Admiralty.

The two men shook hands warmly, whereupon Trustram expressed his great pleasure at meeting a man so famous as Lewin Rodwell.

"I came here this afternoon, Mr. Rodwell, on purpose to meet you," he assured him. "Lady Kenworthy told me you were coming, and I know the committee of the Anti-Teuton Alliance, of which I'm a member, are most eager to enlist your influence."

"I'll be most delighted," declared Rodwell, in his charmingly affable manner. "I think the movement is a really excellent one. Without a doubt the question has become very serious indeed. There are Germans and German influence in our midst in quarters quite unexpected and undiscovered—high official quarters, too. Can we, therefore, be surprised if things don't always go as they should?"

"EXACTLY," said the Admiralty official, as they both took seats together on a couch against the wall. "There's no doubt that the Germans, as part of their marvellous preparedness, made an audacious attempt to weave a network of vile treachery in our Government Departments and, above all, in the War Office and Admiralty. As an official I can tell you, in strictest confidence, of course, that I have, several times of late, had my suspicions seriously aroused. Information leaks out. How—nobody—not even our Intelligence Department itself can discover."

"My dear sir," exclaimed Rodwell, confidentially, "is it really to be wondered at when men of German birth and German descent are employed in

nearly all the various departments in Whitehall? After all, are we not to-day fighting for our country's life and freedom? Certainly those who come after us would never forgive us—you and I—those who, if born into a Germanized world and held under the iron yoke of barbaric 'Kultur,' looked back to our conduct of the war that sealed their fate and found that, besides supplying the enemy with war material—cotton and the like—we actually harboured Germans in our camp and gave them knowledge, power and position vital to the enemy's success. And I assert to-day, Mr. Trustram, that we treat Germany as the 'most-favoured nation,' even though the flower of our land are being sacrificed by thousands and thousands upon the fields of Flanders. Yes, it is an outrageous scandal—a disgrace to our nation. As I said in a speech at Liverpool last week, we are daily being misled, misguided, and lured to our destruction. And for that reason," the great man added—"for that reason I'm only too ready and anxious to help the Anti-Teuton Alliance in their splendid crusade against this canker-worm in England's heart."

LADY BETTY, seated quite near, talking to a dowager-duchess, overheard him. He had purposely spoken loudly and emphatically with that object.

"Good! Mr. Rodwell," her ladyship cried. "Excellent! I am so delighted that you thoroughly approve of our efforts. We are trying to do our share, in this terrible crisis. You are such a busy man that I almost feared to ask you to help us."

"I am never too busy, Lady Kenworthy, to help in such a good cause as this," he assured her, in that suave manner of his which stood him in such good stead at times. "True, I am rather a busy man, as everyone has to be in these days. We, in the city, have to bear our share in finance, for we know that one day—sooner or later—the Government will require a big loan to carry on the war. And when they do, we hope to be as ready to meet it as the industrial population of the country will no doubt be. Still, to us it means much thought. We have no time nowadays for any idle week-ends, or golf by the sea."

At mention of golf Lady Betty smiled. She knew well that it was the great man's habit to play golf at Sunningdale or Walton Heath with various important personages.

The conversation regarding the aims and aspirations of the Anti-Teuton Alliance grew general, and everyone was much gratified to hear Mr. Lewin Rodwell's reiterated approval of it, especially the half-dozen ascetic, hard-faced women who made "movements" the chief objects of their lives.

Lewin Rodwell smiled inwardly at them all, sipped the cup of China tea offered him by a slim, dark-haired, loosely-clad girl who secretly regarded him as a hero, and then talked loudly, airing his opinion of "what the Government really ought to do." To him, the huge farce was amusing. Lady Betty was, of course, "a good sort," but he knew quite well that her association with the Anti-Teuton movement was merely for the sake of advertisement and notoriety—in order to go one better than the Countess of Chesterbridge, who had, for years, been her rival on the face of the social barometer—which, after all, was the personal columns of the daily newspapers.

After an hour, when most of the guests had left, Rodwell rose at last and said to Trustram, with whom he had had a long and very intimate chat:

"I really do wish you'd run in and see me, Mr. Trustram. I'd be so awfully delighted. I'm sure we can do something together in order to expose this terrible scandal. Will you?"

"Most certainly. I'll be most pleased."

"Good. Can't you dine with me—say on Tuesday?"

His newly-found friend reflected a moment, and then replied in the affirmative.

"Excellent. Tuesday at eight—eh? You know my address."

"Yes—in Bruton Street."

"Right—that's an appointment," Rodwell exclaimed cheerily; and then, after bending low over Lady Betty's thin white hand, he left.

CHAPTER II.

The Suspicions of Elise.

AT nine o'clock that same evening, in a well-furnished drawing-room half-way up Fitzjohn's Avenue, in Hampstead, a pretty, blue-eyed, fair-haired girl of twenty-one sat at the piano alone, playing a gay French chanson, to pass away the time.

Dressed in a dainty little dinner-gown of carnation pink, and wearing in her well-dressed hair a touch of velvet to match, she presented a pretty picture beneath the shaded electric-light which fell over the instrument set in a corner.

Her mother, Mrs. Shearman, a charming, grey-haired lady, had just gone out, while her father, Daniel Shearman, a rich tool-manufacturer, whose works were outside Birmingham, was away at the factory, as was his habit three days each week.

Elise Shearman was just a typical athletic English girl. In her early youth her parents were "making their way in the world," but at fourteen she had been sent abroad to school, first to Lausanne, and afterwards to Dresden, where she had studied music, as so many English girls have done.

On her return to Hampstead, whither her father had removed from the grime and toil of work-a-day Birmingham, she found her home very dull. Because the Shearmans were manufacturers, the snobbishness of Hampstead, with its "first Thursdays," would have nothing to do with them; though, if the truth were told, Dan Shearman could have bought up most of his neighbours in Fitzjohn's Avenue, and was a sterling good Englishman into the bargain—which could not be said of some of those slippery, smooth-tongued city adventurers who resided behind the iron railings of that select thoroughfare.

Running her slim white hands over the keys, she began the gay refrain of one of the chansonettes which she had learned in Paris—one of the gay songs of the boulevards, which was, perhaps, not very apropos for young ladies, but which she often sang because of its gay, blithe air—Belloche's "L'Eventail Parisien."

In her sweet, musical treble she sang gaily—

Des qu'arrivent les grand's chaleurs,
A la terrass' des brasseries
Les éventails de tout's couleurs
Viennent bercer nos reveries.
Car, pour allecher le client,
Le camelot toujours cocasse
En s'éventant d'un air bonasse
Envo' ce petit boniment:

And then, with a swing and go, she sang the chorus—

Ca va, ca vient,
Ca donn' de l'air, ca fait du bien,
C'est vraiment magnifique,
Quel instrument magique!
Ca va, ca vient,

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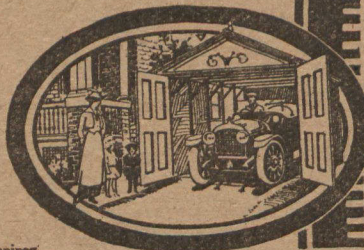
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