

The Annexation Society

A MYSTERY STORY

By J. S. Fletcher

Next week, a new serial story, entitled "The Annexation Society," will begin in The Canadian Courier. The writer is the well-known English novelist, Mr. J. S. Fletcher, whose stories rank with those of the authors of "Sherlock Holmes" and "Raffles." The mysterious disappearance of the Tsar's Gold Cross from the Royal apartments of one of the best known country seats in England discloses a mystery which taxes the skill of British and French experts in criminology.

The "mystery," thrilling as it is, is not all the story. The author has woven into his romance a wonderful picture of British society under modern conditions. He tells a story which appeals to the student of science and economics as well as to the seeker after diversion and entertainment.

CANADIAN COURIER

lander, and that much harm must have been done by him, if what Max had said was true; he did not doubt what Max had said, but after all there were only his statements to go upon, and much more was needed—these statements must be supported by convincing proof.

Shortly after Max had left him, the Minister, excusing his attendance at the House of Commons to his colleagues on the plea of pressing business of the most important nature, proceeded to the War Office; it was "closed" for the day, but as there were always a few officials in residence, he sent for one of them, and ordered him to fetch with all haste the chief of the Intelligence Department—a title which covers the secret service of the army—Colonel Chambers. When this officer arrived, as he did in a remarkably brief space of time, and was informed by the Minister that there was reason to suspect Captain Hollander of playing a double part, that while pretending to be a British secret agent he was in reality in the pay of Germany, he protested that he could not credit such an assertion, and declared that Hollander, who was rather a pet of his, was the most efficient and successful man in his Department.

"Hollander is in Germany at the present time," he continued, "on a special mission, and I believe he will accomplish it."

"What is this special mission?" asked the Minister.

"To discover by what means the Germans obtained possession of the drawings of the new gun," said Chambers.

"Would you be surprised to hear," asked the Minister, with the suavity of manner for which he was famous in the House, "that there is some foundation for the belief that it was this very man Hollander who obtained these drawings and handed them over to Germany?"

CHAMBERS started violently and his face went white. He looked at the Minister, who returned his gaze so steadily that the words, "Impossible, sir!" which he was about to utter, froze on his lips. Instead, he said, "Is it possible?" in tones of the deepest dismay.

"I understand," was the reply, "that it was he and nobody else who gave the drawings to the Germans."

"May I inquire how you have come to understand that, sir?" asked Chambers.

"I cannot tell you that just now, colonel. But I can tell you what I want you to do at once. I presume that you know where Hollander's rooms or apartments are in London?"

"Yes, I have the address. He also has a room here in the War Office."

"Have them searched thoroughly. As Minister for War I give you the fullest power and authority to make a thorough investigation. And I must tell you, further, that there must be no delay; you must begin your investigation immediately; get whatever assistance may be necessary; and report to me at the House, if it is still sitting, and if it is not, come to my residence—I shall not retire for the night till I have received your report. The matter is as serious as it well can be."

"You believe he is guilty, sir?" "I fear he is guilty," said the Minister.

"If he is, then all I can say is that I have been grievously mistaken in him—he must be the most consummate scoundrel!"

"He is, I fancy," returned the Minister. "Now pray proceed with the search; I am going back to the House, where I shall probably remain till a little after eleven; thereafter, you will find me at my home."

Colonel Chambers bowed himself out, and a moment later the Minister left the War Office.

The Minister was sitting on the front bench on his side of the House of Commons towards the close of its sitting that evening when Colonel Chambers' card was brought to him; he went out forthwith and met the officer, whose face, he could not help noticing, was sombre and sad; it was impossible not to leap to the conclusion that proofs had been found which

confirmed Max's statements respecting Hollander.

"Well?" asked the Minister when alone with Chambers.

"The man," said Chambers, "is the most consummate scoundrel imaginable; he is a secret agent of Germany—there is abundant evidence against him; he had hoodwinked us all along. I—I feel very strongly about it, so strongly that I must tender my resignation."

"Do nothing of the kind," said the Minister, kindly. "Let me hear what you discovered."

"I discovered several things that incriminated him, but perhaps this paper is enough." He held up a sheet of foolscap, on which was a list of names, with sums of money opposite them. "It is the pay-roll," he resumed, "of the members of the German Secret Service employed and paid by Hollander in London."

Chambers passed the document over to the Minister, who read it carefully. Among the names on it he saw that of Sylvia Chase, with fifty pounds per mensem against it; under her name was that of Bertha Schmidt, with five pounds per mensem, but as the Minister knew nothing about her, he did not give the item any attention. Still here was ample witness of Hollander's guilt, and of the truth of much that Max had told him.

"It is quite enough by itself—this paper, to condemn the man," said the Minister. "Where did you get it?"

"In his room in the War Office," said Chambers. "There is a safe in it, and I had it opened."

"I suppose he thought it a capital place for keeping such a document, for no one would ever have dreamed of looking for anything of the sort in that place," observed the Minister. "And there are other proofs?"

"Yes; but I did not bring them with me; I did not think more would be required in addition to that damning pay-roll."

"Now, colonel, I wish to say what I am going to do. In the first place, however, I desire the matter kept to ourselves," said the Minister. "Next, Hollander must be allowed to return at the time you expected; if he is recalled, he may suspect something; on his return, he must be arrested. When do you expect him?"

"Very soon—in a day or two."

"I shall see those other proofs when I come to the War Office to-morrow," said the Minister, concluding the interview. But before he went to the War Office next day he received a message by telephone at his residence from Colonel Chambers, reporting that Hollander had arrived in London by the early Continental train, and was now at the War Office under arrest, though he had not been apprized of the reason for it. What was the next step advised? What was to be done with the man? A court-martial—or was he to be given over to the civil authorities for trial?

"I shall consider the matter," said the Minister, "and let you know."

BY profession a lawyer himself, the Minister laid the subject before the great law officers of the Crown; he had decided beforehand, however, on a court martial, but he was glad to find them express a similar opinion; they took the view that the public interest demanded that Hollander's case should be kept as free from publicity as was possible—at least for a time.

Hollander, securely guarded, was conveyed by night in a motor to Aldershot, where he was told in general terms of the charge against him, and that he would be tried by court martial. He strenuously denied that he was guilty, and asked what proof there was, but was informed that it would be produced at the proper time. Still insisting that he was innocent, he requested that the court martial should be held without delay, and waived any rights he might have had by which it could have been put off for a while. He tried to think out how the truth had come to light, but in vain, yet he faced the situation with desperate courage. He even resolved on his course of action if the worst came to the worst.

The military authorities granted his request, and the court martial sat (Continued on page 21.)



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