

wearing out, but doing wearily from habit the things that once it did with swagger and swank.

Clock diagnosed it with the morbid interest of a man who feels that a single false step might spring a trap to destroy him. He knew what that rabble in a dynamo would do to him once he was known to be a spy. The knowledge fascinated him. He had but one great personal desire; to escape from Germany; another desire—to be alive in Berlin when the final crash of the judgment should smite a nation of organized iniquity never equalled by Babylon.

XII.

CLOCK kept no track of time. He had been but a day at the Vaterland when he was peremptorily ordered in an official motor to the War Office, where some gloomy General pinned on him an Iron Cross. He was bowled slowly back to the hotel through a great gazing crowd, with his new-born Iron Cross lying as glum as a dead bat on his threadbare khaki. When he stepped from the motor at the hotel he bowed to the crowd who gave a sort of communal grunt instead of a cheer.

There was a skinny-faced, spectacled man on the balcony, who edited some little semi-verboten Zeitung. Clock had heard him talk mildly against the powers. Herr Pleigman burst into a rage the moment he saw Clock on the balcony wearing the Iron Cross.

"I despise you," he whispered.

"Why don't you shout it out, man? Let them all hear you."

"I represent the mind of millions," insisted Pleigman. "But they don't know it. My little paper reaches only a few thousands, and it is edited by the censor."

"What's the good of it?"

"Property—not much. Not that. No, it is the strangling of ideas."

Clock leaned over the balcony, gazing at the crowd that was once more thickening up for the evening.

"Pleigman," he said, looking up at a single-seat airship that seemed to be very close.

"How far up is that boat?"

"From here—two hundred feet only."

Pleigman asked himself why the Captain should be so interested in that particular airplane, except that, of course, the pilot was a wonderful maestro of the air.

"Do you—know him, Captain?"

"No, but I'd like to. Who?"

"Hopkirch. He is a flight commander with many decorations. He is a Bavarian, an ace of course, but not so famous in combat as in scouting, and long-flight solo work. He is said to have flown more miles and further from Berlin than any of our pilots. And he is famous like your what's his name—?"

"Bishop?" said Clock. "Go on."

"Famous as an air detective. In fact he partly belongs to the Secret Service. He can almost drive his machine into your backyard, count your chickens and get away without even touching a tree or a fence. I am told that low flying is more difficult than high."

"Seems to be his long suit," mused Clock, as he observed how the pilot nosed his plane at slow speed among the towers almost like a fish.

"Zoom!" gasped Pleigman, as the machine came so close to the balcony he could almost see the pilot's smile. "Now that was a close shave. No wonder he is feared by the enemy."

In her room opposite the elm-top screen at the end of the balcony Frau Bobel saw this peculiar antic and surmised its effect upon the Captain. She knew Commander Hopkirch and was not surprised when a few days later the assiduous Pleigman introduced him to Captain Clock. She would have given half her hope of earthly bliss to have been present at the meeting of these two adventurers:

"A miserable game this spy craft!" she protested to Hanslick.

He laughed. "Why don't you get the confidence of Hopkirch and make him spy upon Kluck?"

XIII.

FRAU BOBEL went to bed very much perturbed. She hated to be considered incapable. It was a warm night and she could not sleep. The balcony was temptingly cool. From the back of the

elm top in front of her window—she could observe the precise segment of the balcony dominated by the windows of Captain Clock.

Sure enough—it was then past three a.m. and the vast prospect below was quiet except for the hoofs of military police and casual motors—she saw the Captain pacing to and fro, leaning over the rail, muttering about the infernal heat. A ceiling of impenetrable monotonous cloud acted as a breaker against the play of the searchlights from the dromes. The Captain had a knack of listening into the sky that was quite unusual; no doubt born of his life in the foot-hills with the Rockies so near.

The searchlights blazed fantastic trails into the heavy banks of the cloud and were flung back in shuddering auroras over the city. They seemed to be the ghosts of silence. What could a human ear detect above that cloud—different from the dreamy clack of the hoofs below?

Ah! The Captain has gone in. To bed?

Frau Bobel crept out from the tree-top.

Raining? Or was it some breeze in the trees? A curious sifting, shimmering rustle that was half silence. The cloud seemed to be whispering. One sometimes looks to see where rain begins. This was even more mysterious. Thistledown in a light breeze. Something like that. Nearer—she could make out the idle flutter of things slowly whirling down into the streets. She looked up again. Snowflakes on a still day. One came eddying close to the rail. She reached out and clutched it.

Paper? A queer wispy bit of white with a bit of a wire or metal weight coiled in its head.

Eagerly she tore it open. In the rull light of her room she looked at this mystic messenger from the sultry cloud, printed in German:—

"Some night—soon—some part of Germany will be bombed by thousands of airships. This message is exclusive to Berlin, but will be repeated to other cities."

Frau Bobel's first impulse was to see somebody else



One came eddying close to the rail. She reached out and clutched it.

pick up these news bombs. She leaned over the balcony and saw some military police scampering after them, dismounting to get them—excited!

XIV.

THOUSANDS of these cloud bulletins had blown over the city. By sunrise there was a packed mass of curious people about the Unter den Linden. Berlin was as easy to summon to a crowd as Allahdom to prayer. There was wisdom or safety

in a crowd. A million people supposed that the miracle of the air-bulletins could or would be explained at the Wilhelmstrasse. The Kaiser himself might appear. By daybreak the police had gathered in thousands of the papers, but the news spread like a wind runs, and all Berlin except the cemeteries and the cradles knew now that somehow or other adventurous aircraft of the enemy had taken advantage of some accident, had evaded the searchlights and done this piece of avant-courier advertising.

Hanslick in his headquarters at the War Office, represented the nearest guess as to the cause of the "accident." Frau Bobel was there.

"I am sure I opened the first one, Major," she told him, explaining how.

"Where was the Captain then?"

She told him, without opinions.

"How could it have happened, Major?"

"No conspiracy," he blurted. "The cloud was impenetrable by the searchlights. The spy-craft flew above it. They must have steered by compass, but at the height and being above the cloud—wait a bit."

He touched a buzzer.

"Call Commander Hopkirch from Drome X."

Hopkirch was a smooth, athletic young man, who, when he came in, looked rather disdainfully at the pursy figure of the Inspector, engaged in glaring at Captain Clock.

"My theory, Hopkirch," went on Hanslick, "is that the enemy pilots being well above the cloud saw Berlin as a mass of luminosity, the vapor acting as a curtain to the light. Is that likely?"

"Quite likely, sir—oh quite."

Hanslick ogled the Captain.

"Would this—holding out a bulletin—be the work of your accomplice in the Bureau de Publicité at Paris?"

"I don't know that. Very likely, though. It's right along his line. I daresay he acted under orders."

"What do we know of the enemy's ability for carrying out this threat?" asked Hanslick of Hopkirch.

"Nothing definite, sir. But they have thousands of machines, and they are not massed. The dromes are co-extensive with the front. Their union drome is somewhere in the air. Of course, no such aggregation has yet taken place. But there have been extensive manoeuvres on a large scale, and as you know large squadrons approximating to fleet-size have engaged our own fleets in actual battle, besides the great amount of damage inflicted on our troops, our depots and other objectives not far from the lines."

"There has been so far as you could suspect, no assistance rendered the enemy pilots from within our own force?"

"I would be ready to swear—none."

"Of course not! Im—pos—sib—le! Now, Captain Kluck, you have been fairly intimate with Commander Hopkirch."

"We have discussed air-war pretty freely."

Hanslick seemed to be chewing his tongue.

"Well. All I want to impress on both of you just now is that Berlin cannot be propagandized by the enemy. This city is enemy-proof, whether from armies, guns, air-bombs or bulletins. You know that. You are partners in propaganda. What I can't understand is, that honoring you, Captain, with the Iron Cross and your accomplice in Paris with a heavy credit at the Deutsche Bank in Geneva, has not been effective in undermining the ultimate great arm of all warfare, which is propaganda. You are given the Iron Cross—that you may know how Germany feels, as a great ship senses the slightest shudder of a storm which it is to conquer, the menace of any attempt to undermine the German mentality."

"I hope I shall yet understand—Germany," said Clock.

"You're doomed if you don't. Germany understands—everybody," snarled Hanslick.

XV.

AFTER they had gone Hanslick buzzed Frau Bobel in again.

"Keep—both corners of each eye—on the mutual affairs of Commander Hopkirch and Captain Kluck. Do not fail—so! There may be something between them."