

The Passing of a Throne

A Powerful, Personal Narrative Concerning the Unparalleled Drama of the War

CHAPTER XLVIII.—(Continued.)

By FRED M. WHITE

"STOP!" he said. "Put up your hands everyone of you. The first man who moves pays the penalty."

There was no help for it, there was nothing for it but to obey. Bewildered and dismayed by this unexpected attack under the roof of a man whom they had regarded as their friend, they took it as docilely as if they had been so many children caught in some act of mischief. In a few minutes they had been thoroughly searched and stripped of their weapons. Before the next batch had arrived they were safe in the turret-room, powerless for future mischief.

They came one after the other, each of them straight into the trap, so that not a shot was fired; there was not even the semblance of a struggle. Hallett stood there with a grim smile of satisfaction on his face until the fifth batch of spies arrived from the so-called hospital ship, and then his eyes gleamed with satisfaction as they fell on a tall man with an upturned moustache.

"At last!" Hallett cried. It's a good many years since we last met, Mr. Charles Steinburg, but I always told you that I should have you in the end. I might have known that this little business was your planning. I hope you are proud of it; I hope you are proud when you think of your English birth."

The man thus addressed merely shrugged his shoulders and said nothing. The others looked at him interested and fascinated by the sight of the most infamous international spy the world had ever seen. But even that desperate character knew when he was beaten and submitted to be searched without a word of protest.

It was all over now, the spies had been rounded up, there had not been a single hitch in the whole programme. Hallett smiled as he took out his cigarette case and passed it round.

"We can go back to the castle now," he said. "These people are all safe and I know that my man will make an efficient warder."

"Hold on a minute," Inchcliffe said. "We haven't finished my experiment yet. Hallett, would you mind running upstairs and giving the signal. You know what it is."

Ten minutes later and the successful raiders were walking along the cliffs in the direction of the castle. They were happy enough in the knowledge of the good work done, all except Inchcliffe, who appeared to be anxious about something. Then a sudden cry broke from his lips and he pointed out to sea.

Five or six great blinding flashes lifted themselves from the face of the waters and as many stunning explosions followed.

"Got the lot!" Inchcliffe cried. "Four smacks and the hospital ship. Been a great night, hasn't it?"

CHAPTER XLIX.—WHAT OF THE HARVEST?

THERE was no popular excitement and no jubilation over the destruction of the so-called hospital ship and the fishing smacks in the North Sea. One or two local correspondents picked up a few crumbs of information, which duly found their way into the hands of the news-agencies, but all this was looked upon as so much gossip, and in a day or two was forgotten. Nor were the spies as yet brought before any tribunal. The haul made by Hallett and those under him was too far reaching and important to be made public as yet. But a day or two later a very great personage turned up unexpectedly and asked to see Inchcliffe at once.

He went into his own vast drawing-room in his own majestic home, a great man in his way and looked up to by his own people, feeling very much like a small boy unexpectedly summoned into the presence of a dreaded headmaster.

"I am greatly honoured, my lord,"

he stammered. "I am sorry to bring you so far out of your way, and I would have come to you immediately if you had sent for me."

The great man disguised a smile.

"I am not coming out of my way at all," he said. "I should have come up here in any case. I have had a long report from Mr. Hallett, which has interested me greatly."

"I hope it pleased your lordship." Inchcliffe murmured.

The great man relaxed visibly.

"It pleased me very much indeed," he said. "Now look here, Inchcliffe, I want you to forget for a moment who I am, or rather what I am, and only remember me as your father's dearest and most intimate friend. When the war broke out I sent for you and you did not come. I had a special mission for you, and I don't mind telling you I was annoyed, very much annoyed indeed."

"BUT, my lord," Inchcliffe protested, "I never got your message. I was off on my honeymoon—"

"Oh, yes, yes," the big man said testily, "I know that now. I refused to see you, in which I was wrong. Hallett tells me that you knew nothing of the war till you got to Southampton. Since then, however, . . . Of course I can't make it public yet, but your splendid services are now known in the proper quarters, and I have come down here to put a really big thing into your hands. The way you tackled those smacks and that bogus hospital ship would have been a credit to any officer of the British Navy. In short I am proud of you, my boy, and anything you like to ask for you can have."

The great man shook hands heartily with Inchcliffe, and departed as abruptly as he had come. It was later in the same day that Inchcliffe sought Vera out and gave her a couple of newspapers. They were brown and wrinkled, and evidently had been in the water for some little time. Vera could see at a glance that they were German newspapers, in fact very recent copies of the "Berliner Zeitung."

"Where did you get these from?" Vera asked.

"They were found just now on a body which was washed up this morning, evidently a victim of the explosion," Inchcliffe explained. "Between ourselves I am anxious to get that body buried, because it is all that remains of a famous German who shall be nameless. I can make much out of the German myself, but it looks to me as if great happenings are taking place in Berlin, and one or two names are mentioned which will be familiar to you."

It seemed to Vera, when she came to read those newspapers in the quietness of her bedroom, that she was dreaming. It seemed almost impossible to believe that those amazing headlines could have come from the office of so Pan-German an organ as the "Berliner Zeitung." Had the editor suddenly gone mad, she wondered. Or had he suddenly become converted to the side of the Democratic Federation? For the sheet that she held in her hand was frankly and openly revolutionary. It was no longer the slave of the German War Office, no longer a mere servile rag humbly printing the mandate of the tyrants, but a fearless self-respecting journal, speaking its mind on the subject of the day, and appealing to the German people. Some of the headlines stretched all across the paper thus:—

BERLIN FREE.
THE VOICE OF THE PEOPLE
PROCLAIMED AT LAST.
REPUBLIC OR MONARCHY?

"There are no soldiers in Berlin!"

"For the first time in its history Berlin is a free city. For the first time since the foundation of the German Empire it is permitted to the humblest

of us to speak his mind freely without fear or the knowledge of punishment to follow. Berlin is awake.

"For years we have slumbered, for years we have deluded ourselves that we are the freest and most enlightened race on the face of the earth. That has been our nightmare. Under the spell of that hideous nightmare we have allowed the chains to be bound about us and our limbs fettered by the Prussian tyrant. And not only were we physically in chains, but we were bound spiritually as well. We have been traitors to ourselves, but not such accursed traitors as those whose duty was to lead us along in the paths of Christianity and progress. There has been no soul in Germany for years, it was stifled long ago. For nearly half a century we have been drunk with conquest, and our spiritual physicians have drenched us with poppies when they should have purged us with herbs. And why? Because they have been bought body and soul by Prussian gold. They preferred the purple and fine linen and the stalled ox to the dinner of herbs.

"Now, where has all this brought us to? Are we marching victoriously towards Paris and London and Petrograd, with the foe at our knee begging for mercy? Oh, no. We have lost over a million precious lives, there is not a house in Germany where eyes are dry, we are penned in like starving rats in a cage. And we are on the verge of starvation, too. The immense volume of trade which we have steadily built up in the last forty years has gone. We are at our last gasp, and still those bloody Prussian tyrants take the best that is left of us like so many human fagots and pile them on the funeral pyre, which is supposed to light the dark way to London.

IT was only a few days ago that we began to see the light, began to know how we were being deceived and how we were likely to lose the last handful of our manhood if the tyrant of Potsdam had his way.

"It was only a few days ago that we like another Rip van Winkle, awoke from her drugged sleep to the realisation of things as they are. We knew nothing, in lieu of the bread we needed we were fed day by day with stories of victories that were no more than defeats in disguise. We knew nothing of the slaughter that was going on. Then suddenly out of the skies there dropped the Manifesto of the Social Brotherhood. It burst like a bomb-shell over Berlin. And it bore the stamp of truth upon it, so that every man could read it for himself. The effect was instantaneous, the social revolution coursed in the veins of Berlin, as if she had been one human body and one only. One moment and we were a military nation filled with pride and ambition, the next we were the heart of the German Republic only asking for the peace and goodwill of our neighbours.

"It was in vain that the police interfered, in vain the troops lined the streets and drenched them with blood. With that we cemented the foundations of the new Republic.

"And the Government saw the red light. There was no more violence after the first day or two. Bethmann-Hollweg saw to that. And for once in his life the king of Prussia listened to reason. We call him the king of Prussia, because he is Emperor of Germany no longer. Our leaders forced him to meet them, they forced him to promise that he would bring this mad conflict to an end.

"That was the promise he made, but what of the fulfilment? The weary conflict is still going on, though every man in Berlin is now solid for the Republic. We have here three hundred thousand resolute citizens ready to shed the last drop of their blood for their deluded country. Our manifestos are prepared for delivery to every capital in Europe, but there are powerful reasons why the movement fails.

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