THE BATTLE OF LONDON

By

Hugh Addison

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WHAT THIS STORY IS ABOUT

A story that is a precept and a warning, showing how, if the danger of a Bolshevik revolution arrives, it can be met and conquered chiefly by the efforts of the citizens themselves.

Against a background of tremendous political events, runs a thrilling story of personal adventure, describing the Liberty League's efforts to save a London racked and tortured by the impact of the Red Terror.

The story cuts down to the heart of the subject, and nothing is spared.

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BY
HUGH ADDISON

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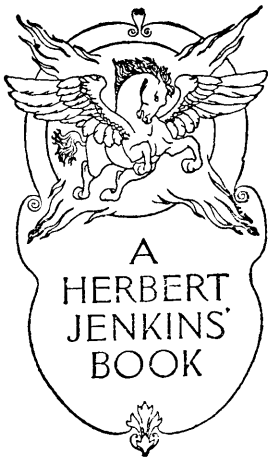

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AUTHOR'S NOTE

IT is perhaps advisable that the reader should know that this book was written, exactly as now published, in the summer of 1920. The idea of the Liberty League, therefore, which figures largely in the following pages, owes nothing to the Fascist movement in Italy which has since come so much into prominence. The manuscript was lost for two years, in circumstances which need not be detailed here, and only now appears in book form.

At the time this book was written the author had not long returned from places in Russia and the Near East, where Bolshevism was either rampant or brewing. There was at that time a good deal more going on under the surface in England than the average citizen was aware of. The word "revolution" had not then crept into the leading articles of the newspapers. Our politicians, with few exceptions, refused to mention the subject—pretended indeed that it did not exist. But some time later, during the great coal strike of 1921, on what is known as "Black Friday," the Government was at last forced to take action against the growing danger, and announced the formation of a National Defence Force—the first and only occasion on which the revolutionary elements of Britain were shown that physical force would be met by physical force.

The Battle of London was written with the frank intention of shocking what the friends of Red Russia call the *bourgeoisie* into a realisation of the only means of meeting revolution if and when it should arise. It is to be hoped, and is indeed most likely, that a Liberty League, or something like it, will never be called upon to save England as the Fascists saved Italy. But nobody can say to-day that all danger is absolutely over, so that a consideration of how to meet it is not merely academic. Should the catastrophe of a Labour Government ever arrive—and futile dissensions between the main body of the middle classes may some day bring it about—we know in advance what is the minimum of tyranny the milder Labour Leaders would inflict on us, and may be certain that the wilder spirits would soon be clamouring for more. Fortunately we now have the example of the Fascists—and the Liberty League—to show us what to do in a real crisis.

The Battle of London also deals with the question of aerial invasion—a subject which has since come very much to the fore—and gives some idea of what a modern air raid on London would be like.

Finally, in view of the possible criticism that "these things don't happen in London," one may point out as a detail that the incident of the Bolshevik raid described in Chapter VI was, some twelve months or more after this was written, almost exactly paralleled three times over one afternoon at houses or flats all within less than a mile of the scene of the raid which figures in the book. The Sinn Fein murderer of the Shepherd's Bush householder who on that day was shot through the stomach in his own entrance hall was never brought to justice.

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THE BATTLE OF LONDON

CHAPTER I

WAITING FOR LES ASSASSINS

IT was the editor's room of the *Morning Echo*, a pleasant room giving a view, over the tops of trees, of the Thames Embankment, a little distance away. There was nothing about it to show that it was part of a great newspaper office. Melrose, the editor, was a small man with thin, almost ascetic features, whose apparent fragility belied his real energy and vigour. He had pronounced artistic tendencies, which were reflected in the few choice pictures on the walls, by the Oriental rugs scattered on the floor, and the occasional small pieces of statuary which decorated the room. He believed that good work could be done amid the most luxurious surroundings. He hated untidiness, and no newspapers ever littered his floor. There were many rooms in the *Echo* building where untidiness was worshipped as the visible sign of energy and efficiency. But Melrose cherished no such illusions. Not a scrap of paper was out of place on his large, handsome desk, and many a visitor to his room went away with quite a false impression of the amount of work done by the chief man of the *Echo*.

Melrose was leaning forward on his desk, listening

to what was being said by the other occupant of the room, a younger man with strong, clean-shaven features, whose age might have been anything between thirty and forty. He was speaking with great intensity as he paced nervously up and down the room, and the free and unrestrained way in which he delivered himself showed that there was an entire absence of formality between him and his chief.

"This is the moment—I'm convinced of it," the younger man was saying. "It will come any time within the next few days—perhaps sooner. All this palavering with the Government is so much eye-wash. Every member of the Cabinet knows that in his bones, but they have to go on with it. The Labour crowd has manœuvred them into a corner. If they make the slightest show of strength at this late hour, then the Bolshies will cry out that the Government has shown no disposition to settle affairs peaceably, and they'll start in on the war with all the moral advantage of pretending that the Government has precipitated matters—even though they know nobody would believe them. . . . But that doesn't matter. The Reds are now merely looking for the incident which will give them the excuse to cross the bridge from this mock conference business over to open revolution. By Heaven, it makes one sick to think that all this talking down at Downing Street is mere make-believe, and that both sides know it. . . . There's only one thing the Government could do to give itself a chance now—just one thing."

"What's that, Hunter?"

"To call in a couple of dozen policemen and have

the whole crowd of them thrown bodily out into Downing Street—just that and nothing more."

Melrose laughed.

"I don't think that would advance matters much."

"But I mean it," went on Hunter vehemently. "I'm not saying it in joke. If this harassed, dispirited, unhappy country of ours could only hear this very afternoon that the Cabinet had been manly enough and human enough to kick our leading Bolshevists out into Downing Street, and send them on their way with a few healthy swear words describing them for the loathsome creatures they are, there'd be such a wave of relief that something plain and vigorous had been done at last—something that everybody could understand—that I really believe it might save the situation. The country only needs somebody in authority to show a spark of courage and energy, and it would follow the lead with a rush. It's absolutely aching to be guided and stimulated—to hear just one word that sounds something like a trumpet call. . . ."

"Ah!" exclaimed Melrose eloquently.

"Oh, of course I know nothing so excellent will happen. Up to the very last moment the Cabinet will go on talking with these ruffians as though they are decent people, knowing well that every single one of them harbours intentions for which he ought to be shot at sight—and then will come the breakdown of all the parleying. The dear delegates will immediately reveal themselves for the human wolves they are, and the Cabinet will have shaken hands with filth for nothing. . . . Oh, it makes me sick. If ever a whiff of grapeshot were needed, it's in

Downing Street this afternoon. But the country can do nothing. It's got to sit and wait, like a fascinated rabbit, until *messieurs les assassins* decide to commence."

Melrose smiled at the apt application of the quotation. He drummed his long thin fingers on the desk.

"What's to stop them beginning right away?"

"Nothing—nothing whatever. They'll just suit their own convenience. They'll probably suddenly shift their ground, demand something utterly absurd and fantastic, and make it impossible even for this Government to agree. Then they'll break off negotiations, and the fun will begin. I'm sure they mean to do it at once—they won't let this conference end with any kind of so-called settlement. The League's the deciding factor. They haven't much fear of it at present, but they think it will grow, and they don't intend to give it time. . . . By the way, I had a few more threatening letters this morning. Listen to this one."

Hunter searched in his pocket and brought out an ill-scrawled letter.

"Written by the usual foreign mongrel," he went on. "Read it yourself."

Melrose took the letter.

"You and your Liberty League will soon be ware all the English *bourgeois* will be—in Hell," he read. "Wen the fight comes you will be won of the first put agenst a wall. Long ago in Russia we lerned what to do with swines like you. Your turn is coming next. Hourra for the Red Army."

"The usual sort of thing," commented Melrose.

"That makes over five hundred, all more or less

on the same lines," laughed Hunter. "There's very little variety about them."

"All the same, when the trouble does begin you'll have to keep a careful look-out."

"Well, I expect I shall be here most of the time, and we shall all sink or swim together. . . . But it's impossible to foresee how things will turn—and anyhow, it's no good worrying about our individual selves when the whole country is in an uproar. I expect that in a very short time from now we shall get very much accustomed to the idea of people being shot down in the streets. . . . And now I'm off down to Whitehall. I want to have a talk with Sir Charles Randall as soon as I can. I've got a feeling that things may begin to happen at any moment now. It's in the air."

"Yes, judging by all these reports of activity at the various Red headquarters, I should say there's no doubt about it," replied Melrose. "Let me know immediately if Randall says anything particularly interesting. I shall be here all day."

"Right. I'll come back at once with any news I've got," said Hunter, as he went out of the room.

CHAPTER II

THE GATHERING STORM

DURING the preceding few months the events which had led up to the tremendous crisis with which England was now faced had marched with astonishing swiftness.

The general apathy and listlessness shown towards the gradual breakdown of the powers of government, which had been so marked a feature in England during the years following on the Armistice, had gradually given place to a fatalism which was as foreign to the temperament of Old England as the pernicious doctrines which, incarnated in the persons of swarthy, wild-eyed emissaries from every country of Eastern and Central Europe, had streamed through its ports like so much evil merchandise.

The people, oppressed by taxation and looking in vain for wise guidance from a strong Government, now waited with folded arms for the crash to come. Here and there were a few who still strove to rouse the country and inspire it to grapple with the danger that threatened, before it was too late. But the disruptive social and industrial movements which had marked the years immediately following the war, had only increased in intensity. Labour, growing more cynical with every demand it made, passed from one easy triumph to another. Strike succeeded strike with such monotonous regularity that they

had ceased to excite interest, or even concern. Largely because of this endless chain of strikes, the promised "boom" of trade and prosperity had died an early death, and given place to widespread unemployment. From having more work than they wanted, the workers soon found themselves without half enough. And the extremists who, by their ceaseless agitations and incitements to disaffection, had so largely brought this state of affairs about, exploited the new situation with their customary lack of scruple, and invited the workers to contemplate the unhappy pass to which the "capitalist classes" had brought them.

The word "revolution" had ceased to inspire either dread or indignation. It was old-fashioned, *vieux jeu*. The only real interest shown was in what degree of intensity and horror the Terror would manifest itself when it inevitably came.

Even in the fatal year the Government might have saved everything had it made one virile effort to stay the rot and sound a call to the best that was in the nation. But the Government was as tired as the people it was supposed to lead. The old game of refusing to face facts, of talking of the horror that had come out of Russia as though it were some gentle, friendly beast, only waiting to be soothed by kind words, had continued to the end. The England of that day had found no St. George to grapple with its dragon.

The crisis, as far as England was concerned, had been largely precipitated by the collapse of all European authority in the Near and Middle East. The British Empire, after its great victories in the war, found itself with widespread new responsibilities on its

hands which it no longer had the power to uphold. It had no soldiers left to withstand the impact of simultaneous risings all over Asia. Bolshevism had swept down through Armenia and Persia. Constantinople was in the hands of an unholy combination of Russian *commissars* and Young Turks. Egypt, too, had been abandoned to the same forces, the Suez Canal was blocked and the whole of the Indian Frontier was ablaze. India we still held, but with the greatest difficulty, and in face of organised and constantly increasing insurrection all over the country. The world-wide forces which had for so long been bent on the complete destruction of the British Empire seemed at last to be on the verge of complete triumph. The same supineness which had allowed Ireland to drift away through anarchy to a tragi-comedy of independence, had brought England and the Empire face to face with ultimate disaster.

On the Continent, Germany alone had been able to preserve her frontiers, and some semblance of order within them. Her astute handling of the situation during the protracted negotiations with the Allies over the clauses of the Peace Treaty had served her well. By carefully refraining from keeping a single one of her promises, she found herself left with all the essentials of a powerful army, so that, as the Allies grew weaker both in military power and in the pressing of their claims, she grew stronger, and at last was able to defy them openly. Her military forces were quite powerful enough to keep her inviolate from Russia—a fact which she relied upon far more than any arguments she had with that country. Germany was a striking example of the

fact that organised chicane and evil may save a country where unorganised honesty and virtue may lose it.

At the right moment Belgium and Holland had been swallowed up in a few days by Germany. She had simply rolled a hundred or so of her new fast tanks over the frontiers, and within three days the coast from Ostend to Rotterdam was hers. There could be no question of opposition, weakened as both countries were by a communist movement which had already made them more than half Bolshevik.

The whole of Eastern and Central Europe was a welter of anarchy and terrorism, in which frontiers had disappeared and races had been dissolved as in a boiling cauldron. In France a Communist Government sat at Paris, and held most of the large towns, although there was still fierce opposition to the new *régime* in many of the country districts, the main rallying-point of the old *régime* being Brittany, with Rennes as the seat of the Republican Government.

Such was the general situation in Europe on that fateful June day. In London the people were oppressed by a weight of impending disaster. It was as though a thunderstorm, long threatening, were about to burst. The general feeling was that anything would be better than this long, enervating suspense. . . . The clouds were hanging low and heavy. Let them break. Better the deluge than this stifling atmosphere of menace and inaction.

CHAPTER III

BREAKDOWN

EVERYTHING depended on the result of the meeting between the Cabinet and the twelve Communists who still, by a deliberate irony, called themselves members of the Labour Party. Their number included two Russian Jewish *commissars* from Moscow and Petrograd—special emissaries of that cruel despotism which for years past had been trying to accomplish the downfall of England. They were supposed to represent the strong foreign element, chiefly Russian and German, but containing contingents from every country in Europe, which by a hundred devious means had been introduced into the country with the deliberate object of poisoning the minds of the native workers. And these individuals, who deserved nothing better than the short shrift of lynch law, were now closeted with the British Cabinet. To such a pass had the gradual accretion of power in the hands of the extremists reduced the Government of the country.

For six weeks past there had been an almost complete stoppage of industry. Beginning with a strike, over some trumped-up grievance, of the miners and the whole of the transport services, the movement had inevitably spread until practically every industry was affected. The Government, guided by long practice, had tackled the situation brought about

by the strike with considerable energy. The country was being supplied with the necessities of life by means of the well-organised service of motor-transport which had already served in previous strikes, and a very restricted service of trains was being run by the Army. For passenger work every available aeroplane had been pressed into service, and the thousands of motor chars-à-bancs which now existed were used for transporting people on business from town to town—a revival, on a far greater scale, of the conditions of the old stage-coach days. In London itself a skeleton service of Underground trains and buses was running, driven by soldiers and volunteers. But as few people as possible were coming up to business—for the great majority there was no business to do—and the streets were singularly quiet and lifeless.

The scenes in Whitehall while the fateful conference was proceeding in Downing Street were in many ways reminiscent of those wonderful, hectic hours of 1914, just prior to Britain's declaration of war on Germany. But among the thousands gathered there, slowly drifting up and down the pavements and standing grouped round the Cenotaph that commemorated Britain's million dead, there was none of that exalted, almost holy, emotion which so gripped the people who waited on the eve of the Great War for the word to be given that Britain had cast down the gauntlet before the savage power at Berlin. Depression, lassitude, even despair—these were the emotions that held the multitude.

Wearily the morning dragged on. At half-past twelve there was some excitement as the Labour

delegates went away in motor-cars from Downing Street—a rather tame excitement, centred chiefly on the two swarthy envoys from Russia. The members of the Cabinet did not appear, and it was understood that they were all lunching at No. 10.

The crowds drifted away, to reassemble in greater numbers during the afternoon, when the conference continued.

At four-thirty it broke up. There was real excitement shown this time. The rumour went quickly round that the delegation, abandoning all camouflage about wages and hours of labour, had bluntly demanded that the mines, the railways and the transport organisation generally, including the huge motor service now controlled by the Government, should be handed over to them to be run exclusively for the benefit of the workers. It was a very thinly disguised demand for instant Soviet rule over the vital industries of the country.

And the Government, girding up its loins at last, had bluntly refused the Communist demands. There was no compromise. And this time the faces of the Communist delegation as they came out were worth studying.

They were talking rapidly among themselves as they came slowly down the short flight of steps from No. 10, and the two men from Russia were gesticulating wildly. One or two looked angry; others were smiling—a self-satisfied, lazy sort of smile, which had no kind humour in it and promised no good to anybody.

With practically only one exception, none of these men had been known to the public twelve months

before. The exception was the Rt. Hon. J. A. Locock, M.P., who, throughout the years following the Armistice, had posed as a moderate man, always on the side of compromise and "straightforward constitutional methods." Honours and a comfortable position in life had come to him as a result of his work with the Labour Party. For years the country had accepted it as a truism that whatever happened he was on the side of moderation and sanity—a brake on the wheel of revolution. "Locock's all right," was the general opinion; "he'll keep the extremists in check," and this in spite of the fact that Locock had a positive genius for running both with the hare and the hounds, and that although he often said smooth words to the Government he had never said hard ones of the hot-heads. And gradually it was realised that while most of the older and saner leaders were being eliminated from power by the frank Communists, Locock remained. He was the only member of the old authentic Labour Party in the delegation, and his companions were all young men, many of them under thirty.

As the delegates reached the street a group of newspaper reporters went up to them.

"Everything broken down—a blank refusal from the Government," said one of the Communists in reply to questions from the reporters.

"And what does that mean?" asked one of the newspaper men.

"It means war—war to the knife, and dam quick about it."

"Come, come, Harris, not so fast," Locock said soothingly, with an eye on the Press—playing his

old game of Mr. Facing-Both-Ways up to the very last.

"Ah, what does it matter?" burst out one of the Russians, with a very pronounced accent. "The time is now past for talking. We are ready. Action is wanted."

The delegates climbed into their motor-cars, turning disdainfully on the reporters who still pursued them with questions.

As they drove away through the crowds several members of the Cabinet now came down the steps from No. 10, Downing Street. One or two walked across the narrow roadway into the archway of the Foreign Office. Others walked down towards Whitehall to get into their waiting motor-cars, and here and there the crowd raised a faint cheer as they drove away. The reporters let them depart unquestioned, knowing from long experience that it was useless to ask them questions, even at such a time. They were concerned chiefly with noting the expression of gravity on their faces.

But as Sir Charles Randall, the Minister for War, was about to step into his car, Hunter, who had been standing near the polished black door of the Privy Council Office, talking to an inspector of police, hurried up to him.

"Hello, Hunter," said the War Minister, with remarkable cordiality for so great a person—one who, moreover, could have a very blunt and rasping way with him at times. "What are you doing here?"

"Just looking on. I arrived a few minutes ago. . . . Well, it looks as though it has come at last."

For a moment Sir Charles looked at him with the bland mask of the Cabinet Minister who never knows anything. Then his expression changed.

"Jump inside. We can talk for a few minutes on the way to the War Office."

"Do you see any way out?" asked Hunter, as they drove away.

"None. Look here, there's no need to say to you that this is a confidential talk. We've both been working for the same thing too long. I read your article this morning. It's the crux of the whole matter. The moment they take action we've got to hit back at once, and hit hard. The *bourgeoisie*, or whatever you like to call it, will have to be just as active in killing as the other fellows. If at the very beginning the orderly people just take it lying down . . ."

"That's what I've been hammering at. . . ."

"I know. Your description this morning of what you saw happen in Petrograd early in 1917—how officers were booted out of tramcars by workmen and hooligans, and took it tamely without ever hitting back—that's the whole point. For every act of aggression we must counter—and do it mighty hard. We shall only conquer violence by more violence. We've seen too many examples of what happens if you don't."

"If only they'd all been like you."

"Ah, that's what I ventured to say only five minutes ago. . . . Fortunately I think the Army's all right."

"If only there were a little more of it."

"Well, there's the Territorials. I think most of

them will be all right too, although I'm a trifle doubtful of one or two of the industrial districts. There's been a lot of dirty work going on. . . . The order for mobilisation goes out immediately. Not a word, although it will be common property by to-morrow morning."

"When do you think it will start?"

"When do you?"

"That's rather absurd coming from you," said Hunter with a smile. "But I should say the chances are they'll wade in this very night."

The War Minister nodded.

"It's more than likely. They want it, and if we'd given in to-day—they made it impossible, anyhow—it would have been a very short postponement. . . . Ah, if only some of my dear colleagues had decided to be strong long ago, when it would have done some good!"

"There's one question I think I am entitled to ask you, seeing the work I've done to make it," said Hunter. "What's your frank opinion of the Liberty League? Is it going to save the situation, or not?"

"I think that's just what it will do—that is if anything will. Nice thing for a War Minister to have to confess, even to such a distinguished journalist as yourself, eh? But there it is. You've had a free hand, and I haven't. And I have a bit of news which I think ought to be particularly gratifying to you. From this very hour the League will be recognised as a Government organisation. It was the first thing I put forward after the dear Bolsheviks had departed. And there was no hesitation about it, this time. The Prime Minister and all the rest were glad to jump at

it, and your name came up more than once. . . . I hope you feel it's some reward for the work you've done."

"Sir Charles, I'll be perfectly straight with you," said Hunter with a laugh. "Whether my name was or was not mentioned in a discussion of the Cabinet doesn't matter a row of pins to me, and I think you know it. But if the country can be saved from the mess it's got into—well, that's another story. And from that point of view, what you now say is great news. Even *this* Government ought to be able to do more with the League than the *Echo* could."

It was the War Minister's turn to laugh.

"A hit, Hunter, a palpable hit, but a well-deserved one. If I'd had my way the Government would have taken over the League long ago. They were afraid of the howl the Reds would have sent up, that's all. Still, since you handed me the details of the organisation a good deal has been done.

"What the situation amounts to at the present moment is this," he went on. "There are the Reds, well armed, well organised and, as we know, bent on doing the greatest amount of damage in the shortest possible time. There are the sane and moderate people who are in and behind the League. And there's the great mass of ordinary people who can't think and don't know where they are. . . ."

"The poor devils have never been told."

"True. Well, the advantage in a situation like this lies obviously with the party bent on attack. We daren't begin. The Communists will start the trouble, we know that. The point is so to galvanise the League that it will strike back hard from the word go, and not wait for developments."

"I think you will find the League will do that all right, if it is given half a chance. But I'm afraid our side is not so well armed as it might be—in the Provinces, at any rate."

"Things are probably better than you think, in that respect. The Government has done *some* sensible things. It has hung on to very large quantities of arms—rifles *and* machine-guns. These are already well distributed over the country, and a word—which I am going to give in a few minutes—will scatter them still farther, into the right hands. In London the distribution of arms will be complete within an hour or so from now—the Leaguers will only have to go to their various headquarters to get them. And every Special Constable already knows where he will find his weapon. I think that with the Navy and the Army, the Air Force, the League, the Police and a few other little things . . . But look here, I must be going. Get in touch with me any time you want to. I shall always be glad to see you if there's half a chance. Where shall you be to-night?"

"At the office. We expect trouble of our own, you know, and we've made our own special arrangements to meet it."

"Right. If I want to know anything urgently about the League I shall know where to find you."

The car had been drawn up before the main door of the War Office as they talked. Sir Charles got down hurriedly, and with a cordial handshake was gone.

Hunter stepped into his own car, which had followed him on, and drove immediately back to the *Echo* office.

CHAPTER IV

THE LIBERTY LEAGUE

DURING the long and uninspiring chapter of the Government's dealings with the ever-encroaching demands of Communism the *Echo* had consistently demanded that a stand should be made somewhere. It had pointed out ceaselessly that the process of making concessions at the pistol's point could have only one result, and that it would be better to face at once the worst the revolutionary forces could do.

Growing increasingly bolder with every success, the Communists had at last taken the decisive step of forming Red Guard Associations. The movement ought to have been quelled at once by the utmost display of authority and force of which the Government was capable. But the moment—as usual—passed, and the next step was that all over the country the Reds had begun openly to drill with arms in their hands. It was very much a parallel, on a much larger scale, of conditions a few years previously in Ireland.

And while most of the country looked on and hoped that things could not really be what they seemed, the *Echo* had come out with the simple demand that if the Reds were organising to attack the rest of society, it was about time the rest of society organised itself in defence against the Reds. "If there is

to be fighting and killing," the *Echo* said bluntly, " do not let it all be on one side. We do not seek it, but if it must come, let us be prepared to take our share in it."

Amid the prevailing murk and indecision the *Echo* boldly announced that it proposed to form a Liberty League, asking all those people to join it who were now prepared to fight for their liberties at home as they had earlier fought for them overseas. It asked all ex-officers and ex-soldiers who were willing to resist the aggression of the Communists to send in their names, with particulars of what they could do best in case things should come to the worst.

At first the Government had deprecated this move, showing more energy in discouraging a defence of liberty than in resisting an attack on it. But indifferent either to the discouragement of the Government or the threats of the Reds, the *Echo* went on its way, and the names poured in. The *Echo* went into the scheme very thoroughly. Officers and men who had been expert in bombing, with machine-guns, or in any other department of specialised warfare, were all entered on separate lists. The aviators of the war were registered almost to a man. The movement spread. There was a register composed of thousands of owners of motor-cars. Women volunteered their services for nursing, for V.A.D. work—in fact, for most of the activities on which they had been engaged during the Great War.

Within three months the League was regarded by hundreds of thousands of people throughout the country as their chief hope in the case of an outbreak of Terrorism. It was the one movement which

promised to distinguish this revolution from all other revolutions elsewhere. In England a large section of the middle classes were prepared to try and save themselves, and not simply allow themselves to be overwhelmed by a wave of savagery. This counter-movement positively infuriated the Communists. It was possible to imagine their saying, with Buffon: "Cet animal est très méchant. Quand on l'attaque il se defend."

Hunter had taken the leading part in the *Echo* campaign. During the first period of the war he had been a resident correspondent of the *Echo* in Russia, and had been a witness of all the events that had led up to the horrors of the Bolshevik era. In the latter period of the war he had been engaged on Intelligence work for the Army, chiefly in the Near East, and following on the Armistice he had spent a year or more in Constantinople engaged in sifting out the many strange and dangerous characters who came drifting down with the constant stream of refugees from Odessa, Sebastopol and elsewhere. There was little he did not know about the ramifications of Bolshevism.

Day after day he had hammered away in the *Echo* at the point which he felt was the most important of all: that any sudden attack by the Communists on the lives and liberties of the people generally must be met by immediate and even more vigorous retaliation on the part of the middle classes. It was merely a case of kill or be killed. During the past few months there had been plenty of tragic examples in Europe to point the moral of his articles.

And only that morning he had described in the *Echo* certain scenes he had witnessed in Russia early

in 1917, during the period when the Kerensky revolution against Tsarism was swiftly merging into the savagery of Bolshevism: how he had seen officers dragged or kicked out of tramcars by workmen, from a merely savage desire to show their new authority over the *bourgeoisie* and aristocrats; how the officers had in almost every case taken the assaults and insults "lying down"; how at that period there were in Moscow alone 30,000 officers who might have saved the situation had they worked together. But there had been no organisation or resistance; only a supine, fatalistic acceptance of the brutalities of the new power, which grew and waxed stronger on the cowardly acceptance with which it was met.

"Had each man so attacked hit back, there would have been no Terror in Russia," wrote Hunter. "Many might have been killed in resisting, but at least they would have died honourably. But in nearly every case the men who so abased themselves to the first gusts of the gathering storm saved their lives for the moment, only to suffer every humiliation and misery as a prelude to an infinitely worse fate. Torture, the filthy prison cell, starvation and execution were the price they had to pay for their supineness in the first moments of the crisis, when all might have been saved. Had there been a few willing to sacrifice themselves at the beginning, all that was good in Russia would not have disappeared in the wave of barbarism that followed. And the men who went down without striking a blow for themselves sacrificed not only their own honour and lives, but the honour and lives of their women and children —the honour and life of Russia itself."

Hunter was a marked man in more ways than one. He was the real inspiration of the Liberty League, and the many thousands of letters he had received were eloquent of the enthusiastic following he had throughout the country. But amid the flood of congratulation and encouragement there were often letters of quite another kind—both signed and anonymous—from followers of the Communist Party. He had no illusions as to what would be his fate were he to fall into their hands when "The Day" came.

Within a few minutes after leaving Sir Charles Randall at the steps of the War Office, Hunter was deep in conversation again with Melrose.

"I suppose we may take it," Melrose was saying, "that we shall be one of the first places to be attacked. It would be a great send-off for them if they could begin by sending us sky-high. I suppose the Iron Division will turn up pretty rapidly when things begin. I've relied absolutely on you for that, you know."

"You can be quite easy about it," said Hunter. "Within two hours we could have the whole fifteen hundred of them here—every man pledged to keep the flag of the *Echo* flying, whatever happens. Complete with machine-guns, rations, and all the rest of it. I was with Colonel Bateman and Major Shotley only yesterday. A telephone call to either of them would start the machine going. They would tell their officers, and each officer would warn his N.C.O.'s, and the N.C.O.'s would gather up the men. With the motor transport available we reckon that the whole crowd could be down here well within two hours, and they would begin arriving long before that. We've only got to give the word."

They went on discussing the situation as it affected them. For months past the *Echo* had been perfecting its plans. It feared more—and had more to fear—than any of its contemporaries, and had simply worked on the common-sense basis that chaos and anarchy might come to London as it had done to so many other European capitals.

In case of a breakdown of electric current, due to the destruction or capture of the electric-power stations, it had installed its own electric plant. In every way it had envisaged the problem of "coming out," no matter how bad conditions might become. An *Echo* of one sheet, or half a sheet, was better than none at all. And the picked body of men, humorously christened by Hunter the "Iron Division," had been organised entirely to the end of keeping the premises of the *Echo* intact. Both Melrose and Hunter were fired by the idea that the *Echo* might make all the difference between victory and otherwise in the great clash of forces now imminent.

And, perhaps most important of all, the *Echo* had been instrumental in making important developments in wireless telephony. It had bought up several vital inventions which up to now it had applied only to its own purposes, preparatory to making them available to the world in general. Most of the main difficulties had been overcome, and it was now possible for the bearer of a portable instrument to speak to the *Echo* office from any part of the country, and, what was just as important, it was possible for the *Echo* to "ring up" the bearer of any one of these instruments.

Its correspondents all over the British Isles and on

the Continent were all equipped with wireless telephones, and could thus obtain instantaneous communication with the head office. But the problem of confining a message entirely to the recipient for which it was intended, as in the case of the ordinary telephone, had not yet been entirely overcome. Leakage of news or other communications was therefore still a pronounced drawback, and to lessen this as much as possible, until the problem should be finally solved, the *Echo* had invented a sort of reporter's language of its own, by which towns were represented by numbers and an ordinary news message could be easily "camouflaged." For important private messages a few people in the office possessed a secret code, by which confidential messages could be sent in security.

The problem of distribution during revolution or civil war had also been thought out, and arrangements had been made whereby the paper would be scattered far and wide over the country by aeroplanes. It meant "free distribution," but that was infinitely better than none at all.

As the two men sat talking, pink slips of paper were brought in from time to time, which Melrose glanced at and pushed over to Hunter. They were short messages by wireless telephone sent by their correspondents from all parts of the country, and written down in the wireless room at the top of the building. They were mostly from the big industrial centres, and were all on the same lines—that great tension existed, and that the general feeling everywhere was that the storm was about to burst. At Sheffield, Newcastle, Glasgow and elsewhere there had been parades of armed Red Guards through the

streets and demonstrations in favour of the Revolution.

"*Hello*, here's something that sounds like the real thing at last," said Melrose, after glancing through a slip handed to him. "Listen to this. It's from Leighton Buzzard, of all places."

He read out:

"Detachment of armed local Reds about fifty strong this afternoon made sudden raid on railway works where some hundred and fifty men gone back quietly to work. Reds with levelled rifles ordered every man leave the works immediately, and most of the men prepared to obey the order. But one man, believed to be fitter named Symons, shouted, 'To Hell with the Reds, lads. We've stood this long enough.' Details at present scanty, but apparently fight broke out at once, the workmen using spanners, iron nuts and bolts and anything that came handy. One workman also had shotgun. Heavy casualties on both sides. Believed between thirty and forty workmen killed and wounded, but Reds lost over half their number killed. Appears they did not expect any kind of resistance, and were largely taken by surprise. Those of them who were not killed or badly injured bolted, most of them leaving rifles behind. Ambulances, nurses and doctors now at work. Victorious workmen just walked through town cheering and waving captured rifles amid great demonstration from townspeople. Feared there will be more and graver trouble to-night, and already talk that Liberty Leaguers being mobilised."

The two men looked at each other as Melrose's voice ceased.

"By Jove!" exclaimed Hunter. "That man Symons is one after our own heart, eh? He's lighted a candle that won't easily be put out."

"You're right. This news will put more heart into London than anything that has happened for a long time," returned Melrose. "Leighton Buzzard leads the way. I suppose Colgate is running it for all it's worth in the *Evening*." He picked up an office telephone, pressed a button, exchanged a few words with someone over the wire, and turned again to Hunter.

"It will be on the streets in ten minutes. And if there's any guts left in the people—well, by Heaven, this ought to stir them up. What's true of Leighton Buzzard is true of nearly every other place. There are plenty of workmen who will fight if they only get half a chance."

"I think they'll have that all right," said Hunter. "Hello, what's this?" The messenger boy had entered with even more hurry than usual, carrying another pink slip. Melrose took it.

"Code," he said, and reaching down took a little book out of a drawer of his desk.

For a few minutes he bent to his desk, consulting the book and writing. Then after a little while:

"It's from Langton, at the House. He says: 'Understand Government expecting big outbreak London to-night. All possible dispositions being taken cope with it. Guards already warned.' . . . So there you are," finished Melrose, looking up.

"Well, that's that," commented Hunter. "And there's nearly eighty thousand Reds in London. We're going to see something at last. . . . Well,

I'd better see about getting the Iron Division along at once."

"Yes, that's *quite* enough news to act upon."

"It won't take me long. That done, I shall run down to my flat. I think I'd better send the wife down into the country right away. I know an excellent place she can stop, near to the youngsters' school, and she ought to be all right down there. I can send her off in my two-seater. It will leave me more free to be busy here if I get her safely out of the way. I'll be with you again within two hours at the most."

"All right," said Melrose. "But make it as soon as you can, although I don't suppose there'll be anything to worry about for an hour or two. We've got men all over London, and we shall know all about it the instant anything breaks out. I've got a lot of things to do too."

And Hunter went out to see about his Iron Division, thinking to himself as he did so how amazingly calm and matter-of-fact they both were about it. . . . But why not? They had neither of them any reason to be surprised. This was what they had been expecting, and preparing for, during months past. The Communists had long been proclaiming it from the housetops. If anybody in London or England was surprised, he had only his own stupidity to blame for it.

CHAPTER V

THE STORM BREAKS

THERE was little or nothing to show Hunter as he drove through the town that there was anything unusual impending—nothing whatever to suggest that in a few hours London was to be the battleground of terrible civil war. The almost-deserted aspect of the streets had now become a commonplace.

Here and there he saw knots of people reading the *Evening Echo*, with its report of the affair at Leighton Buzzard. It seemed to be causing some excitement, and at the Piccadilly Tube station there was a considerable crowd round the newspaper sellers. But London was too vast for the news to have caused any sudden change in its aspect. With nearly all the theatres closed there were few people coming into the centre, and the few people who had come up to business had already departed to the suburbs by such means of transport as were available. Since the great strike had descended on the country with all its crushing and devitalising effect, most of the big stores closed down at midday, there being so few shoppers that there was little or nothing for their thousands of employées to do.

Hunter lived at a flat just behind Olympia, a little way off the Hammersmith Road. For some time past he and his wife had been there alone, largely as

a result of the domestic servant crisis. Both their boys were away at school, and the only other inhabitant of the flat, if she could be called one, was the "charlady" who came every morning.

Hunter had already told his driver that he would require him to go down into the country immediately. Arrived at the entrance to the mansions where he lived, Hunter sent him away to make his own preparations, telling him to be back in an hour's time.

Hunter mounted the stairs to the top flat where he lived. He did not expect his wife to be home for a little while, and going to his study, busied himself for a time in arranging some important private papers. This done, he unlocked a drawer and taking out a big ·45 automatic pistol, took it to pieces and saw that it was in good working order.

While engaged on this he heard the click of his wife's key in the front door. He whistled a cheery note as she came into the hall, and she walked at once down the passage to the study.

There was no suggestion that Violet Hunter was the mother of two sturdy boys as she entered the room, her face alight with amusement and interest.

"Hullo, dear. I didn't expect to find you here. . . . I say, we had such a jolly afternoon down at Chelsea. There's nothing like a studio for fun, after all. Everybody played or sang or did something. . . . I say, what are you doing with that?" She broke off suddenly as her eyes fell on the big pistol.

"Nothing—just seeing that it's in good health. Go on with the yarn."

"But I say, Bryan, is there any news? What's

the matter? I can see something's happened. You can't deceive me."

He spoke in a careless manner.

"Well, *chérie*, I think that what we have so often talked about is to happen at last."

"You do! When?"

"Quite possibly to-night."

Her eyes widened a little. But she showed no other sign of emotion. They had lived too long with the idea.

He told her of all that had happened during the day.

"Well, I suppose it had to come," she said, a little breathlessly. "It's better than going on like this, waiting and dreading."

But when he told her of his idea that she should go at once down into the country she cried out against it.

"Why should I go away, Bryan? London will be full of wives. Why should *I* run away?"

"Well, you see, little one, I shall have my hands pretty full. I expect both to live and work at the office—if the Reds let us do either. And though we have done our best to look into the future, it's quite impossible to foresee how things will turn. I may be beleaguered at the office, or I may be here, there and everywhere. One can't tell. I thought it best that you should be somewhere down near the children. You see there's one thing about me which doesn't apply to everybody. I'm a marked man—there's no doubt about that. It doesn't worry me over-much, but it might be better for me to be on my own."

They remained for some moments looking at each other.

"It's difficult, dearest," she said at last. "You feel you'd rather I went. I would rather stay. . . . Oh no, I don't feel that I can go. What should I be thinking down in the country alone, with you in the middle of it all up here? And I couldn't do any good to the boys. Surely nothing will happen to the schools—they would never dare to touch those! And there are seven million people in London. Surely there is safety in numbers! If you have to stay in the office I shall be all right here. We can talk on the telephone: I can get Agnes to stay with me, or I could go down to Chelsea with her. Perhaps that would be better."

"You know the fact is, Violet," Hunter burst out, "that even *we* can't realise it all. You saw something of what happened in Russia before I sent you home, and God knows, I've studied the subject. And yet here we are in this quiet London flat, with the pictures on the wall just as usual, and everything just the same, and we simply can't realise that before midnight London, and all England for the matter of that, may be a hell."

"I know, I know," murmured Violet. "Yes, it is difficult to realise. This afternoon everybody was talking of where to go for a holiday."

"Anyhow, my dear, we've got to take a decision. I must start back to the office in an hour's time. If you don't start for the country to-night, what do you propose to do? You certainly can't stay here alone. For one thing, my address is quite well known. It certainly wouldn't be safe to leave you here."

"Then it's Chelsea, Bryan. Agnes is on the telephone too. We shall be in touch."

"That is if any telephones, except our own kind, are working. . . . All right, my love, that's settled. I shall feel fairly easy knowing you are there. Chelsea ought to be something of a backwater in all this. I'll make a few preparations while you are getting ready something cold to eat. Then you can 'phone Agnes that you are coming, and I'll take you over in the car, and that's that. Come on. Action is better than words any day."

And feigning a cheerfulness he did not feel, he took her in his arms and kissed her, and went off whistling to his dressing-room to put some things in a suit-case.

A little later Violet announced that the meal was ready. It was very simple—some cold meat and salad, some cheese, a tiny pat of butter and bread. The time was not one for display or luxury—the food supplies of London, indeed, had been cut down as low as during the most rigorous period of the war. But there was a bottle of St. Julien on the table, once a modest enough beverage, but now a drink for princes. Hunter had bought a small stock from a local wine merchant just before the previous Budget, and so saved a trifle of six shillings a bottle. The Chancellor of the Exchequer, having no new worlds to conquer, had simply gone on doing his best, or worst, with what were available to him.

"Ha ha, the good red wine," said Hunter, almost gaily, as they sat down.

"I thought as it is probably our last meal in the flat for some time . . . There are only six bottles left."

"Quite right, sweetheart. There's a good deal in the 'eat, drink and be merry' principle. We don't know what the morrow holds for us."

They talked mostly of every-day topics during the meal—the children, the household and other things. The evening was fine and beautiful, and a warm breeze was playing gently through the open windows of the dining-room. Hardly a sound of the outside world could be heard. London had never seemed more peaceful.

Hunter raised his glass as they were finishing.

"Well, here's good luck to us all, darling, and confusion to our enemies. I think we shall win all right." He bent over and kissed her. "And now we must really get busy. I expect the car will be here any minute."

He had hardly spoken when from somewhere outside came a sudden, unmistakable sound which made them stare at each other, transfixed and open-eyed.

It was the sound of rapid firing some distance away.

"God! Already!" exclaimed Hunter. "I wonder where it is. Sounds as though it is Hammersmith way."

He looked at his watch.

"Seven forty-five—just as a matter of history."

Again came the sound of rifle shots, faint but unmistakable. The summer breeze that came through the windows also brought with it the sound of shouting far off.

Hunter stepped through a French window that opened out on to a stone balcony. There were more shots and shouting, and they could hear much more distinctly now.

"It's certainly somewhere down Hammersmith way, Violet."

She gripped his arm, and they stood there, waiting.

There came a further burst of rifle shots, nearer this time. The fusillade swelled louder, came nearer still. The shooting must now be in the Hammersmith Road, close by, though hidden from them. Along the street that led out of the main road they now caught glimpses of people fleeing, uttering hysterical little cries, and with white, terror-stricken faces. There were a man and a woman together, then a well-dressed old gentleman, hurrying along with infirm steps, his head constantly turning backwards—then a woman with two young children, both of whom were crying as she hurried them away.

"There it is all over again," cried Hunter, white-faced himself, stretching his arm out towards the fugitives. "Terror and death and misery. . . . Oh, those bloody-minded swine!"

From the road close by there now came a confused uproar of shooting and shouting and cries of terror. There was a loud crash, followed by a sound of tearing wood and the tinkling of falling glass. It suggested that a motor-car had run into something at high speed. . . . At the windows round about Hunter noticed other white, anxious faces.

"Come in and I'll shut the windows," he said. "I must ring up Melrose and find out if possible what's happening everywhere."

He used the ordinary telephone, partly to see if it was still working, and got on to Melrose after some little delay, during which the sounds of uproar outside still continued. He told him hurriedly what was happening, as far as he knew it, and asked for any further news.

"It's apparently broken out simultaneously, both at your end and this. It looks as though the Reds are converging on Central London from all directions. There's fighting going on now down near Shoreditch—message came in a few moments ago. There's apparently a big body of Reds coming down from the East End, and your crowd is working up from the Fulham and Shepherd's Bush region. Guards and Police are all out, and Territorials and Leaguers are coming into it too. As far as I can make out the Government is trying to throw a cordon round Central London, but of course it's all very vague and confused for the moment."

"And the Iron Division?"

"Began to arrive half an hour ago—as many as ten in a car, and they're coming along fast now. They're as keen as mustard, and are busy throwing up barricades. Both Bateman and Shotley are on the spot. . . . What about you?"

"I'm waiting for my car. It ought to be here any minute now. The moment it turns up I'll come along. I may have to go a long way round, but I'll get through somehow. The trouble is that this sudden outbreak may stop my driver getting here. If so, I'll go and spy out the land and see how things are before starting. But this has come as a bit of a surprise. I'd have given it an hour or two yet. Hope it hasn't caught the Government napping too much."

"It'll be all they can do to save the situation. But, considering everything, I'm feeling fairly easy in my mind. I think anybody who tries to rush this place will have a pretty bad time."

Hunter was beginning to feel anxious as to what

he should do with Violet, but he said nothing of this to Melrose.

Leaving the telephone, he went out on to the balcony again, hoping against hope to see his car waiting at the entrance. But there was no sign of it, and he decided that it was useless relying on it any longer. There was still the sound of firing, but it was now distant again, and came from the opposite direction to that of the original outbreak. The fight had evidently progressed up the main road towards London.

Hunter lit his pipe and began to think things out. Cut off from his car, he was in something of a quandary. He might start off at once for Chelsea, leaving Violet there, and then make his way from there to the office, trusting to luck to get through. But first of all, he had better take a look round outside to get an idea what things were like in the immediate neighbourhood.

He discussed this with Violet, who agreed, suggesting however that he should not go farther than the main road.

"I'll be back in five minutes," he said, giving her hand a squeeze. "Then if things look all right we'll start off at . . . "

A ring at the front-door bell stopped him. It was followed by a thunderous knocking—an echoing rat-tat-tat such as no visitor of theirs had ever given before.

They seemed to stop breathing as they looked at each other. There came another thunderous knocking. It was ominous and terrifying.

The sight of his wife's face caused Hunter to pull himself together at once.

"Wait a minute," he almost whispered. "I'll peep first."

Softly he opened the dining-room door, which gave a view of the entrance. Through the bevelled glass of the outer door he could see the distorted outline of the figures of three men, standing on the staircase-landing outside.

As he looked one of them applied his foot to the door, kicking it violently.

"Come on, open the damned door," he roared, "or we'll break it down."

Hunter went up to his wife and took her in his arms. She was trembling violently.

"Be calm, sweetheart," he whispered urgently, holding her tightly. "I'm not really surprised at this. But I've thought it all out. I know exactly what to do. I'm going down into the study. I want you to open the door and show them down there. Can you do it?"

She nodded, trying to fight down her terror.

"Good. Don't be alarmed. They won't touch you. They only want to have a palaver with me. Show them right down to the study."

He hurried down the passage to his room, slipped the big automatic into his pocket, and sat down at his desk.

He heard the door open, and a rough voice ask if he were in. He heard Violet's reply, in strangled, unnatural tones, and then the heavy tramp of men coming down the long passage.

CHAPTER VI

AN EXECUTION AT HOME

IN those few seconds, as the visitors walked noisily down to his room, Hunter seemed to see the familiar objects that surrounded him with a new and strange interest—his book-shelves, the prints and water-colours on the walls, an absurd caricature of himself done by an artist friend. . . . Even with the noise of their approach it all seemed difficult to believe, with these familiar objects round him . . . sitting in his comfortable study chair.

The door, which was ajar, was flung wide open, and his musings were cut short. The three men were in the room.

They were led by a tall, big man, with a bony nose and a drooping ginger moustache. He might have been any kind of labourer or navvy dressed in his best clothes, but his face proclaimed him a bold, adventurous fellow. Behind him came a nondescript individual with a shifty eye who might have been a cab-tout or anything else of dubious character, and he ostentatiously carried an automatic pistol in his hand which was the twin of the one in Hunter's pocket. The third was of a type with which Hunter had been familiar in Russia, particularly during the Revolution: sallow, undersized, with lank hair and beady eyes—the true type of revolutionary fanatic, who seems to make up in savagery what he lacks in physique. All

three wore their hats, and each one had a red brassard round his arm with a big white C on it.

The big man got to business immediately.

"Your name's Hunter," he said abruptly and roughly. "We're sent to take you away with us."

"Who sent you?" asked Hunter, rising.

"What the hell's that got to do with you? All you've got to do is to do what you're told."

"Must I come at once? Can't you give me a little time to get a few things ready?" Hunter was temporising. He was wondering how he could get over the difficulty of the naked automatic in the hand of the second man.

"You don't need to make any preparations, my lad," replied the big man, with a laugh. "You'd only be wasting your time."

"Yes, but one minute." As Hunter spoke he saw Violet appear in the doorway from the passage, and advance a little way into the room, her eyes large and luminous in her white face. "Why do you come after me like this? I'm not the kind of man you want. I work for my living as hard as ever you did. You want the politicians and the capitalists, not . . ."

"*Yew*, blarst yer, are just the chap we *do* want." The big fellow thrust his chin forward, and spoke in tones of indescribable venom, his dark eyes glittering. "If it weren't that other people wanted the pleasure of your company, I'd do yew in now, myself. Yew've given us more trouble than anybody else, with yer leagues and articles. We've 'ad yew dotted for a long time parst. There's three or four parties of us out after you, but we've 'ad the luck. And now yewer squealing; don't want to face the music, eh? Yew'll

soon 'ear it. Yew'll realise what yer up against when yew see the number of stiff 'uns lying about ahtside. An' that's only a little mild beginning."

Even in his desperate situation Hunter could find the mind to wonder at the amazing ferocity of the man. He was a blood-thirsty pirate, born out of his century, but suddenly, by a stroke of evil fortune, come into his own, and obviously revelling in it.

"At least you will let me speak alone with my wife before I go." Hunter indicated, with outstretched hand, Violet standing behind them.

"Not likely. You're coming with us now, and you don't leave us until you do."

Hunter felt trapped, and desperate. It would have been better to let them break the door down, and to have blazed away at them there. But behind his half-apologetic manner his mind was widely and ruthlessly alert, and he was watching for the slightest opportunity of turning the tables. They were obviously expecting no kind of resistance from him, and that was all to his advantage.

Up to now the big man had done all the talking, the other two merely following his words. But at Hunter's reference to Violet the Jew from Russia turned round and regarded her. He turned back to Hunter with a malicious grin.

"Say, she is nice, your wife," he said, his accent showing that—as in the case of many of the Russian agents with the English Communists—he had lived in America. "I've taken quite a fancy to your fair English women. We shall know how to look after her all right when you're gone. . . . What say?" He addressed his last words to the man with the pistol.

"You're right," said that individual. "I reckon that's one of the perquisites on this job."

Hunter's eyes blazed, but he made no movement.

"In Russia we got wise long ago how to treat the little ladies of the *bourgeoisie,*" the Jew went on. "I wasn't a *commissar* for three years for nothing. . . . Just see here."

In a flash he had thrown one arm round Violet's waist and another round her neck, and had kissed her roughly on the mouth. Hunter saw the horror and repulsion painted on her face as she tried to lift her chin up and away from the brute. Then she stepped back, and like a flash gave him a resounding smack on the face that echoed through the room.

In the tragic moments that followed, Hunter was keenly conscious of the glad emotion that his wife's spirited action had kindled within him.

The Jew stepped back with a snarl, his back to Hunter, and his hand went to his pocket. The man with the pistol had turned to look, and the attention of the big fellow was also momentarily distracted. For just that moment the attention of all three was concentrated on Violet. It was Hunter's first chance, and he took it.

Whipping his pistol out, he placed it against the chest of the big man, and fired. As the leader of the three fell backwards, with a shout of surprise and dismay that followed immediately on the thunderous report of the pistol, the man with the automatic in his hand wheeled swiftly round, but Hunter had shot him twice through the body before he could think or even point his weapon. Hunter could not shoot the man from Russia, for fear of hitting Violet, but leapt

bodily at him, tripped over the legs of the second man, gripped the Jew by the collar as he pitched forward, and fell crashing to the floor with him.

Hunter's pistol flew out of his hand as he fell. But like lightning he had a hand round the man's throat, twisted himself over, and knelt on him. The Jew struggled to get at his own pistol, which he had not yet taken out of his pocket, but Hunter dealt him a savage blow between the eyes with his clenched fist, and heard with joy his head go thump on the floor. Still bearing on his adversary with all his weight, he relieved the man of his pistol, ran his hands over his pockets to see that there were no other weapons concealed on him, and stood up.

It had all happened in two or three seconds.

Violet was leaning against the wall, one hand thrust out before her, as if warding something off, her eyes staring fixedly at the scene before her.

Hunter put his arm round her, turning her away from the sight, drew her to him, and felt the quivering of her body as she lay inert against him. But he kept a watchful eye on the three men on the floor.

The big man had fallen backwards into an armchair, and lay half in, half out of it, in a curiously ungainly attitude. The second was crumpled up on the carpet, where he had fallen. Both were lying quite still. There was no doubt of their fate.

The Jew stirred, sat up, and looked about him.

"Get over there and put up your hands," said Hunter harshly, motioning with his head to the other side of the room, and covering the man with his own pistol. They were the first words that had been spoken since the fight began.

There came a fluttering sigh from Violet.

"How are you feeling, little one?" he said tenderly. "Come, brace up. We're all right. You saved the situation by smacking that brute in the face. It gave me my chance. It was splendid."

"I'm all right," she murmured. "I shall be all right in a moment."

He kept his pistol pointed at the survivor, who stood with his hands drooping over his head with an expression on his dark face that suggested a scared wolf. But Hunter was taking no chances with him.

In a few moments Violet raised her head and looked round.

"Don't worry about me. I'm all right now. It's absurd of me to behave like this at such a time." She was making a brave attempt to pretend that a pistol battle in her flat was the sort of thing any woman ought to be prepared for. "Oh!" She gave a nervous little jump as she saw the survivor. "There's one of them left, then."

"Yes—at present."

"What are you going to do with him?" she whispered.

"Are you quite sure you're all right?"

"Yes, but . . ."

"Then go and get together whatever things you want. Close all the doors and be as busy and quick as you can."

"But are you going to . . . wouldn't it be murder?" she murmured with a shudder.

"No, dear, I'm not going to murder him. I'm going to execute him, which is quite a different thing.

I'm judge and jury too, here, and a good judge too. Now hurry away, sweet. I want to have a talk to this man."

He pushed her gently away from him, still keeping his eye on the man from Russia.

"Oh, Bryan, must you?"

"It's his life or ours," he said harshly. "We didn't ask them to come here. What have I been preaching all these months? And what do you think they intended to do with me?"

"Oh, I know. But wouldn't it be possible somehow . . ."

"Be quiet, Violet," he almost shouted. "I'll tell you something. You know that little Captain Yourousoff we liked so much in Petrograd. You've often wondered how he died." He was glaring steadfastly at the man with his hands up as he spoke.

"I've never told you before. He died at the hands of Chinese torturers—slant-eyed human devils—employed and set on by men like this. I know the details of what happened to him, but I'll leave them to your imagination. . . . Now go, dear, and do as I tell you."

The door closed behind him, and Violet was gone. He felt much easier for it.

"Say, you aren't going to shoot a feller in cold blood?" said the man, speaking for the first time. His small, dark eyes were glittering with fear in his white face.

"My blood's not cold. It's been boiling for a long time—for years past, since people like you first got to work. What's your name?"

"Kautsky. I'm a pretty big man with the Russian

crowd. Say, it would pay you better to be sensible and let me go."

"Why?"

"Well, anybody who had a friend like me would be darned lucky. I could perhaps save you."

"From what?"

"Well, the crowd's got a particular down on you. They want you at any cost. If I spoke up for you it might make all the difference. Your face is known, and everybody's got orders to look out for you. You're one of the first on the list, and London won't hold you. You come along with me now, and I'll do my best for you. I will, sure."

"Thanks." The man's sing-song American accent irritated Hunter. It was so obviously out of place, grafted on to this ferrety-eyed individual, and he was so obviously proud of it.

"What's the situation outside?" Hunter went on.

"It's all right. When we came in here they were scrapping up in Kensington High Street. We'll have all London to-night. There's only the Guards to worry about. We know quite well what your Government figures on doing. They're going to put a ring round Whitehall—all the Government offices, including the Parliament and Buckingham Palace. No doubt they'll hold out for a little while, but we'll have 'em all right. There's been more going on in the Army and Navy than the Government's wise to. The Royal Family left for the Channel Islands yesterday, in great secrecy, didn't it? Oh, we knew all right, all right. But we can wait."

"And what about troops from Aldershot?"

"Well, they won't be able to come up by rail—that's certain. We saw to that a few hours ago. It was easy to blow up a bit of track and the bridges. And don't forget that this is going on all over the country. Say, I don't think your League will be able to save the situation. Bright idea, but the people are tired. It's our turn."

"Is all your crowd as confident as you seem to be?"

"They are. What's to stop us? Everybody's doing it. . . . But look here, what about this proposition of mine? My arms are getting tired. Are you coming along?"

"With you, you rat?" Hunter flared up again. "Do you think I'd make any arrangement with scum like you, even if I thought your word was worth anything? I'm going to send you to hell along with those misguided fools on the floor who've been debauched by silly clap-trap from men like you. But England's not Russia, my friend, and you're going to find it out now. . . . Are you ready? Do you want to say a prayer to the devils you worship?"

"Say, but look here, you can't do it. You can't shoot a feller like . . ." His voice rose almost to a scream.

The pistol cracked and the man pitched forward on to his face.

Hunter gave one look at the three bodies lying on the carpet of his study and went out, closing the door behind him.

CHAPTER VII

ANOTHER VISITOR

HE found Violet in her bedroom, a half-packed suit-case lying on the bed.

"I heard it," she said, as he came in.

"Well?"

"I suppose it had to be."

"There was no way out of it. I should have been the greatest of fools and cowards if I had trusted that little wretch in any way. Try and imagine that this is not London, but Moscow or Buda Pesth, or Naples, or some other place where hell has been let loose. Try and forget that we are within one minute of the Hammersmith Road. Then you'll get the thing in focus."

She sat on the bed staring at him, but said nothing.

"Frankly, Violet, the only thing that worries me about those three is how to get rid of the bodies. If it were dark I'd try and get them down in the service lift. . . . It's funny, isn't it, to think of what's happened here within the last minutes or so. And yet, somehow, it hardly seems surprising to me. I have a curious, vague sort of feeling that all this has happened before. Comes of thinking of the subject generally so much, I suppose. . . . But I probably shouldn't be alive now but for that timely intervention of yours. Thank God you smacked that brute."

He stroked her face gently, realising something of the state her nerves must be in.

"Anyhow, it's given us a breathing space," he went on. "I wonder if by any happy chance the car has arrived. . . . No such luck, I'm afraid, but . . ."

He went to the balcony again. A car was waiting at the entrance, but the first glance showed him that it was not his own. The driver of it was wearing a flat-topped red cap, rather like the cap of a British military policeman. But Hunter knew at once that it stood for something quite different.

Here was something he had overlooked. It had not occurred to him that the three emissaries had come in state. This was distinctly serious.

"Perhaps he'll get tired of waiting and go away soon," said Violet, when he had told her.

"I doubt it. They're probably all burning with zeal and discipline—for the time being. No, what is more likely is that he will come up and look for them. If he does—I shall know what to do with him. . . . By Jove, that gives me an idea, Violet!" he finished up grimly.

"What, Bryan?"

"They've stopped my car from coming. Why shouldn't I take theirs? As soon as it becomes a little dusk we'll go quietly down, and I'll make that chap drive us wherever we want to go. If it's out of the question to get to the office, we'll drive out into the country. He'll probably know something about the situation. . . . Anyhow, we've got to get away from this place as soon as we can. It wouldn't be safe to hang on here for the night."

"But would he do what you told him?"

"I think he might—with a pistol quietly held against his ribs all the time. I'll put on the cap and jacket of that big fellow in the study and wear his arm band. . . . If necessary, I can pretend you are my prisoner. It's risky, but it's better than stopping here, or wandering about the streets on foot. Will you do it?"

"If you think it's best, Bryan, of course I will."

"Good. And while we're waiting I'll have another word with Melrose."

Hunter had a wireless telephone in his flat, but it was fitted up in his study. Before going into that chamber of death to talk he decided to try the ordinary telephone in the hall. Somewhat to his surprise the girl at the exchange answered, and in another moment he was talking to Melrose.

"You're lucky to be able to get through in this way," said his editor. "Half the telephone exchanges are off already. What's the matter with your wireless?"

"Nothing—I'll tell you in a moment. What's the situation now?"

"There's been a big scrap up near the Mansion House—a big body of Reds and a few troops and Leaguers to oppose them. The Reds are marching on to the centre from every direction—and practically nothing to oppose them. The Government's concentrating all it can at Westminster. There's been some sniping round the office here, and our chaps will be busy soon, I think. But it's still too mixed for words. I'm wondering whether you'll be able to get here now. What's happened to you?"

Hunter explained as briefly as possible.

Melrose whistled with surprise.

"Good God! They weren't long in getting after you. But you seem to have put your principles into practice all right. Your study must look pretty."

Hunter went on to tell him about the chauffeur, and his hopes of turning that difficulty to his own advantage.

"It's a nasty situation. I know you'll do all you can with it—you'll get out of it if anybody can. I should be very worried about you—only the fact is, there are sounds outside which suggest we shall soon be in the thick of it here. Hello, here's Colonel Bateman just come into the room." There was a pause for a few moments, during which Melrose was apparently talking with the commander of the "Iron Division."

Then Melrose's voice again:

"He says . . ."

The voice was suddenly cut off, and though Hunter busied himself with the telephone for a minute or more, he could obtain no further communication.

"That's that," he said to himself, dropping the receiver. He suddenly felt lonely. The *Echo* was apparently about to be attacked. He felt very much cut off from anything—very much alone. The tense excitement and the boiling anger which had made his shooting of the three ruffians seem an almost normal thing was beginning to pass away, and he felt very apprehensive about the immediate future. It was not amusing to think that he might any time within the next hour or so be caught and shot like a dog. But his chief thoughts were of Violet and what might happen to her.

Something had to be done. He decided to go out

and do a little scouting. Violet begged him to take no risks, when he told her.

"Dearest, I shan't be away more than a few minutes, and I promise you I won't take the slightest risk. I want to get an idea of what the main road is like. I can get out by the back entrance, and if there are any Reds at all in the street outside I shan't even go into it. I can't stand the risk of being held up and questioned. But I must have a look round and see how things are outside."

Hunter felt that he must do something—it was impossible to remain inactive. He put on an old tweed jacket and a cap, and slipped his field-glasses into his pocket. Arrived on the ground floor, he turned sharp right, away from where the chauffeur was waiting in the street outside the lawn, and by following a narrow passage that ran round the block of flats he was able to come out on to the street at a point some sixty yards or more away from the man, and hidden from him by the curve of the buildings.

The street was quiet—not a soul was in it near him, with the exception of the chauffeur. But through his glasses he saw that at the end of the street, on the main road, there was some sort of barricade, manned by a dozen or more of Red "soldiers," all carrying rifles with bayonets fixed. Hunter guessed at once that this was probably part of a hastily executed Red plan to control all motor traffic in and out of London, the Hammersmith Road being one of the main arteries. . . . It would be difficult to get past such an obstacle, no matter how hard and courageously he might try to bluff. Whether on foot or in a car it would be an enterprise too full of risk.

But in the other direction the street was clear. He walked down it, keeping his eyes well ahead. There was no sign of Red soldiers, either here or on the various cross streets. There were two courses open to him. Either he could venture out with Violet on foot, taking their chance of avoiding contact with any Reds, or he could seize the car, as he had at first decided, and start off in the direction that was open to him. In most ways the second choice appealed most to him. But it was open to grave risks. He would have to take the car almost from under the noses of the Reds at the barricade. And if the chauffeur refused to be terrorised, which was just possible, the plan might break down at the very beginning, with consequences that would be disastrous.

He walked back, turning the two ideas over in his mind, feeling very undecided—asking himself if he were losing his nerve a little. It was a rare thing for him not to be able to make up his mind on a problem.

Walking back, he looked up at the towering, curved glass roof of Olympia, surmounted at its nearer end by an octagonal glass observatory or lantern. He knew it well because some months before the *Echo* had used this high observatory as a place from which to conduct some important experiments with the wireless telephone. The wireless aerial was still up there, fixed to the lopsided lightning conductor which rose up above the lantern. The experiments had been conducted both by night and day, and for this reason Hunter had been provided with a key to open the street door leading into the back premises of Olympia, from where it was possible to mount up to the roof. He remembered now that he still had this key in his flat. . . . For a

moment his thoughts took another turn, and then he came back to the choice that lay before him. Which was it to be ?

He found Violet looking very pale, and obviously very "jumpy." Even the short time she had spent alone in the flat—so suddenly transferred from a pleasant abode to a place of dread and tragedy—had badly affected her nerves. Hunter feigned an air of cheerfulness before her, and laid stress on the fact that one way of escape was wide open to them.

"It won't be long now," he said. "As soon as it's a little dusk we'll get away." . . . But he was still undecided as to whether it would be on foot or otherwise.

He went again to the balcony. The chauffeur now seemed to be getting impatient. He was walking up and down on the pavement and occasionally glancing up at the flats, as if wondering what was keeping the three who had gone in there. . . . It suddenly occurred to Hunter that if the man grew suspicious and called on the soldiers at the barricade to come and make a search, the situation would be infinitely more dangerous than before.

That settled it. Stealing the motor-car was out of the question. They would set out immediately. They had friends in Holland Park, not more than a quarter of an hour's walk away, and could probably safely make their way there through the side streets. That was a point which, curiously, had not occurred to him before.

But at that moment four Red soldiers, all with bayonets fixed to their rifles, came lurching along the street from the direction from which Hunter had just

returned. They had all obviously been drinking, and were in various stages of intoxication. Arrived opposite the motor-car they stopped, and apparently demanded to be taken away in it. The driver waved them away and pointed to the entrance door of the mansions—his whole demeanour was that of a man who did not want to be bothered by fools who had nothing better to do than to get drunk. But one of the more drunken of the four seized the driver by the collar—half familiarly, half angrily—and seemed to order him to set the car in motion.

The driver, showing himself to be a man of spirit, sent his tormentor flying with a violent push. His victory was a very brief one. The soldier, who had fallen back against the railings, recovered himself, picked up his fallen rifle and fired from the hip. The driver, shot through the body, fell back against the car.

There came shouts from the barricade, and a crackle of rifle shots. One of the four fell and rolled in the gutter. The other three bolted at full speed in the direction from which they had come.

There was the sound of running feet, and in a moment half a dozen Reds from the barricade arrived on the spot. They did not attempt to pursue the fugitives further, but examined the bodies and apparently discussed the reason for the car being there, looking round them at the surrounding windows as they did so. The incident ended, for the time being, in the Reds withdrawing again to the barricade, with the exception of one who was left on guard over the car.

The incident cheered Hunter up considerably. It was pleasant to see the Reds killing each other, and

moreover, it made the danger of remaining in the flat less urgent.

He now began to collect such things as he intended to take away with him. Among them were his own pistol and his wireless telephone. For both these it was necessary to go again into the study. But it had already occurred to him to search the dead men for any interesting papers they might have on them. A visit there was necessary in any case.

He opened the door of the study and went in. Already the presence of death had brought a subtle change into the room. Hunter shivered slightly as he went in. He picked up his own pistol and laid hands on all the cartridges he could, then disconnected his telephone and put it into its leather case.

Then he turned to the bodies. It was an unpleasant job, but it had to be done. There were very few papers in the pockets of the big man, and none at all on the one he had mentally dubbed the cab-tout. These were not the brains but the tools of the organisation. But Kautsky's inner pockets were stuffed with papers, and there was also a pocket book with a fat wad of notes in it. He stuffed everything into his pockets, for examination later, and closed the door gladly on the scene.

He found Violet now waiting with hat and coat on, her small dressing-case ready packed.

"Suppose we make a cup of tea, sweetheart?" he said gaily. "It's the thing you always turn to in an emergency, eh?" He pinched her cheek gently, trying to pretend that the world was more or less normal. "In ten minutes it will be getting dusk, and then we'll be off. . . . Come on. Let's go into the kitchen together."

He lit his pipe while she busied herself making the tea, and talked cheerily of the people they were going to visit. As it happened, they were people Violet was not over-fond of. Jack Leverton was an old crony of Hunter's, and the two men got on excellently together. But the two women, by one of those mysterious and slight antipathies which are so common in feminine relationships, had never really "hit it," and Violet had always regarded the other as being a little superior in her manner without any particular justification for it.

"Do you think they'll be particularly pleased to see us?" she said, in a tone which made Hunter suddenly burst into laughter.

"You goose," he cried. "You speak as though we're about to pay an afternoon call and are a little doubtful about our reception. . . . My dear, we're refugees—hunted people seeking asylum. I don't think we shall be received coldly, and even if we were, it wouldn't matter. They're the nearest people to hand, and that's all that matters. . . . Oh, you women! You *would* think about these things while there's a revolution on."

Violet laughed too, and was all the better for her husband's banter.

They began to drink their tea where they were, and the very chink of the crockery sounded cheerful. . . . And then, with a shock of fear that made them both jump in their seats, there came a ring at the front door, followed by the heavy bang of the knocker.

"My God!" exclaimed Hunter, in spite of himself, and put his cup down with a crash.

"Oh, Bryan!" whispered Violet, and sank back in her chair.

He stood up and took her in his arms.

"My poor kiddie," he whispered tenderly. Then urgently: "Listen to me. We won't open the door to them. If they force their way in, then we'll fight, both of us. You understand. There's no hope of mercy in these people. Better to die fighting, isn't it, than any other way."

"Yes, yes, my dearest. Oh, yes. I won't fail." She spoke as bravely as she could.

The ring was repeated, long and insistent, followed by the echoing knock, that seemed to shake Hunter's soul.

"I'll go and peep again. Wait here."

He crept silently along the passage, peeped round the corner, and in the now failing light saw to his surprise that only one man stood outside the door. Who could it be? . . . In any case, one man could be dealt with.

With his heart pumping hard he crept silently over the carpeted hall, up to the door itself, to make sure that there was really only one man, and that others were not waiting behind on the descent of the stairs. Then he flung the door open, thrust his pistol forward into the dusk of the stairway, and in a harsh, grating voice, that did not sound in the least like his own, he rasped out:

"Hands up!"

"Sure!" came a voice he seemed to know, and a pair of arms flew up. "But, gee, this is a damned nice way to greet an old friend."

Hunter stared, hardly believing his eyes and ears.

"My God, Billy Derryman. . . . By God, I nearly shot you. Come in, Billy, come in. . . . Oh, half a minute, old man, half a minute. I can't shake." And Hunter leaned against the wall, hardly knowing whether to laugh or cry.

CHAPTER VIII

HUNTER CHANGES QUARTERS

BILLY DERRYMAN was an old acquaintance of Hunter's. They had first met in Russia, and later out in the Near East, during the concluding period of the war. Derryman was a travelling cinematographer, with *carte blanche* for the whole of the world, as far as war or disaster affected it, and Hunter, in his capacity of an Intelligence officer, had been able to help him on more than one occasion.

He had been strongly attracted to this quaintly spoken, extraordinary American, who would do the maddest possible things—without in the least realising they were mad—providing " there was a picture in it." But it was his gift of forcible and picturesque expression that largely attracted Hunter, and he had often in later years thought of their breezy talks together.

Derryman was a man with an Idea. He divided the world into two groups—Anglo-Saxons and Dagoes. For him the only peoples who mattered at all were those who belonged to what he called " the Breakfast-Eating Union " (in other words, the British and the Americans), and all others were quite outside the pale. It never occurred to him that his arbitrary division of the world's population might be a little unfair to some of its peoples. He simply had " no use " for the nations who did not eat breakfast, whatever other qualities

they might have to make up for it, and was never tired of saying so in picturesque and often unpolite language.

And here he was, sprung out of the tragic dusk of London in revolution—which was just like him—as calm and unperturbed as ever. With his cameras he had been for years moving through a distracted, terror-ridden world; always recording, recording, seeing tragedy and desolation only as his lenses saw them—objectively, dispassionately, something to be filmed or snapped and sent with all possible despatch to New York. And his cameras seemed to be a powerful talisman for him, which protected him and kept him from all harm. With these in his possession it never occurred to him that he could run any personal danger. Why should he? All these things were obviously happening so that the camera might record them. It was then absurd and illogical that anything should happen to the camera—and he felt that he was as much a part of the camera as the calm, unwinking eye that peeped out of it.

"... All the way down from Piccadilly I've walked," he was saying, after greeting Violet and settling down to talk, "toting my old box of tricks along with me. ... I left it down on the ground floor. I wasn't going to carry it all the way up here. And say, why haven't you an elevator in a dandy apartment like this?" He looked round. "You sure ought to have an elevator, Mrs. Hunter. ... You know what I mean—lift, you call it."

Violet laughed. She was smoking a cigarette. So much had the sudden irruption of Billy Derryman done for her. It seemed impossible for anything to go wrong with him about.

"And isn't this little old London of yours feeling bad," he went on. "Up near the Park there, not long ago, a feller with a red cap and a rifle wanted to shoot me. I was so surprised that I began talking to him in Russian or Bulgarian, or something. I thought I must be in uncivilised parts. And then I said, 'Hell, can't you tell an American camera-man when you see one!' That seemed to fix him. Do you know what he said? 'Right. You send them pictures as soon as you can to America and show 'em that the Old Country knows how to get a move on.' He didn't seem half proud of the show they're putting up. And I reckon, in a way, he's right. They haven't been practising any economy in their shooting. There's people lying about all over the streets, ambulances dashing up and down, Red Guards shooting up at the windows. . . . Say, it's the real thing all right.

"At that wide place—what do you call it?—Hyde Park Corner, I got into as hot a little scrap as ever I've seen. There were soldiers lying down behind the railings where your King's palace is and Red Guards over on the other side. They were firing all they knew how . . . machine-guns too. As far as I could figure it out the Reds had just appeared suddenly from nowhere. But it's like that all over the place—you don't know which side's coming from where. I walked down in this direction and it looked as though I was getting clear of all the trouble. Getting tired too. Not a taxi to be had. And then some distance up the road here a lot of civilian fellers, led by some husky guys in old officers' tunics, burst out of a side street, and they were at it again."

"And who won in that fight, Billy?" asked Hunter,

dancing with excitement. "Those civilian fellows, as you call them, belong to what we call the Liberty League—*my* League, Billy old man."

"Who won! I think it would have old Solomon beat to try and figure out who deserved the bouquet for that little stunt. Say, it was just a dog fight. They'd apparently butted into each other by accident, and they might have been niggers full of rum the way they were killing each other. The Reds weren't having it all their own way, not by a . . ."

"Thank God for that! We'll win, we'll win."

"I tell you, I never beat it out of anything so quick since I asked that old Turk on the Bosphorus to let me film his harem. . . . Do you remember? Gee, wasn't he wild!

"Well, having left that little dust-up behind I saw Olympia on the skyline. I remembered you once telling me you lived near it, found the address in my little old book—and *me voilà*."

It had been impossible to stop him talking up to now, and in the glad shock of finding who it was at the door, Hunter had been only too glad to let him rattle on.

"But say, why were you looking like that when I paid you a call?" he began again. "You were looking all skeered to death. Has all this business given you the jumps or . . ."

"Listen, Billy, let me talk a bit. I want to get something into your head quick. We've been having a pretty lively time here too."

In as few words as possible Hunter told him all that had happened, what it meant, and what he now proposed to do.

"But in this dinky apartment," said Billy, looking round him. "I tell you I can't believe it. In the streets, sure. One expects that. But when you come to visit a friend, and he tells you . . ."

"Come along with me. I'll show you. And then we must be getting out quick. I don't want any more callers. The next lot won't be like you."

They walked down the passage. Hunter opened the door of the study and switched on the light.

"Hell!" was Billy's exclamation at the sight he saw. "What a picture it would make if there was only light enough! You've certainly been having your share of the fun too. . . . And in this elegant study! It beats anything I know."

He bent to examine the bodies.

"That's a big husky feller. You were fortunate to draw it on him so quick. . . . Two whites and a dago. There's a goddam feller who never ate a breakfast in his life, I'll bet." He stirred Kautsky with his foot, and looked down at him.

"Gee, doesn't he look as though he could do with a square meal?"

"He got it," said Hunter shortly. "Come on out of this. I'm getting a little tired of my chamber of horrors. Come on, Billy. We've got to be moving. You'll come along with us, I hope."

Hunter had shut the study door as he spoke, and they were standing outside it. Billy looked at him a little curiously.

"But say, Hunter, aren't you taking it all a little easily? Now that we're away from Mrs. Hunter a moment we can talk. I didn't get here without some little trouble, you know. They went over me

pretty carefully along at the barricade there. I guess my accent and my papers and my cameras and things were what helped me through. But you're different. There's a price on your head, and you daren't risk being detained and examined. I didn't go into all the details when I was talking in there, but they went over me three times before I got to this place. How do you propose to get through, with Mrs. Hunter too? I haven't seen a woman in the streets all the way down here. . . . Don't think it's quite a woman's job just now, walking through these streets of yours."

"I know that, Billy. I've no illusions on that subject. But we've got to get out of here. That barricade at the end of the street is out of the question, of course. But up this other way it seems all right, providing we get out quick. I've been waiting for the light to go, and we were just about to start off when you arrived."

"Up that way!" Billy pointed in the direction Hunter had indicated, away from the barricade. "But you can't get up there. The street's blocked up in that direction too."

"But, my dear Billy, I went down it half an hour ago, and it was absolutely clear and deserted."

"Then all I can say is, it's changed since you knew it. I told you the main road over there is piled up with scores and hundreds of automobiles that the Reds have stopped and cleared the people out of. Well, apparently the road was getting so stuffed with them that they decided to make room for more. It took me some little time to locate this place of yours. And I went down this street here, before I found

the right spot. I tell you it's blocked with automobiles from side to side, with a big Red guard on them. They were pushing them down from the main road when I came in. I expect they're doing it still. That street's full of those Red fellers. . . . And if you're going to try and push your way through 'em with a lady on your arm, well . . ."

Hunter stared, dismayed, at the news.

"But, Billy, we've *got* to get away from here. Sooner or later they'll be coming to look for those three lying inside there. If it weren't that the driver was shot too, it's ten to one they would have been here before this. And the next visitors may take the form of a squad of them, with rifles and bayonets. I couldn't hope for the same luck next time. We simply *must* clear out of this, and the sooner the better."

"I get you, Steve," said Billy. "It's as clear as mud that you *must* say good-bye to the happy little home as soon as possible. I'm with you there. But I've told you what things are like outside. Better stay on here a bit than butt right into trouble in the street. . . . You can't go that way, and you can't go that way." He pointed towards the barricade, and then away in the other direction. "But if you *must* beat it, well, can't you produce some alternative?"

"My dear Billy, that street's the only way out of here. Do you think I can stick here any longer, expecting them any moment to come tramping up the stairs. I'd rather take the chance. . . . No, by Heaven, I've got it. There *is* an alternative. It's just jumped into my mind. There's one way

of getting out of the flat and escaping the streets too. Come with me."

He hurried Billy into the kitchen, and flinging the window up, leaned out and pointed to the glass lantern perched on the roof of Olympia.

"You see that place up there? How will that do for a lodging for the night? . . . That's the place. If we can only cross the street in safety we shall be as secure up there as owls in a tree. I know how to get there. Come on, Billy. There's no time to lose. We're going to move. We shall want things for the night. Where's my old Wolseley valise?"

And Hunter dashed off to Violet, and gave her hurried instructions as to what he wanted to pack.

In a cupboard he found his Wolseley valise of active-service days, with its soft sleeping-bag still in it. They were both good at packing, and in a few minutes they were stowing away into the opened-out valise the various necessaries Hunter had indicated —some tinned provisions from the larder, bread and butter, two bottles of water, candles, two bottles of wine, a sort of improved Tommy's cooker, which they had often used on motoring trips, an electric torch and various other things.

As he dragged the valise out of the cupboard Hunter's eyes had fallen on one of his treasures. It was a miniature rifle of ·22 bore, a beautiful thing of special make, chambered to take an especially large and powerful cartridge. All his life the boy had persisted in him, and he had loved to surround himself with this sort of thing. He had used the rifle with great effect on the Danube marshes to take

sitting shots at long range at feeding wild geese. In some vague way he felt that the rifle might be useful to him, up there in his aerie. But it was more to save a thing he loved from the profane hands of any pillagers who might come to his flat that he dropped it on to the valise to pack, together with a box of the special cartridges. . . . His field-glasses he had already. . . . Shaving tackle? . . . Within five minutes of his decision he was buckling up the valise.

"I haven't quite figured out what this stunt is," said Billy, looking down at him. "Do I gather . . . ?"

"I'll explain all when we get up there, Billy. I can't do it without you, and we'll talk things over up there. . . . Look here, you'd better get a pistol of some sort. You'll find a selection in the study, and cartridges too. Come on, Billy. We've got need of you."

"Then I guess there's nothing to do but carry out orders," said Billy, and turned towards the study.

Hunter opened the front door, and listened. It was quite dark now on the staircase, no lights having been lit. The silence was uncanny. Of all the inhabitants below them there was not a sign or a sound. Some of the families, he knew, had weeks ago gone into the country. But the others—what were they doing, what were they thinking now? And all over London, in scores of thousands of other homes, there must be the same silence and oppression, and forebodings as to what the morrow would bring.

There was no sound of ascending footsteps. That

was the main thing. Violet joined him as he stood listening.

"Cheer up, sweetheart," he whispered, with his arm round her. "You'll see that Billy will bring us luck. I believe that camera of his wards off the Evil Eye."

"If ever he were lucky enough to catch a glimpse of the Evil Eye, you may be sure he would make a picture of it," she replied, with a little laugh.

"Bravo, Violet!" cried Hunter almost gaily. "That's the stuff to give 'em. . . . And now, let's get the baggage and clear out. . . . My God, I'd almost forgotten the chief thing—that key!"

He knew where to put his hand on it, and a moment later they all three went out.

"Farewell, flat," said Violet, as the door closed behind them. "I wonder when we shall see you again."

"Say, Hunter, what's that thing hanging over your shoulder?" said Billy. "Are you going in for movie work too?" He pointed to a small, square leather case, slung by a strap.

"That's my wireless 'phone," replied Hunter. "I hope you'll see me pretty busy with it later on."

They passed down the dark stairs, picked up Billy's outfit, where he had left it on the ground floor, and went out by way of the back exit that Hunter had used before.

They halted as they came to the street, to see that all was clear. To get to the door in the wall of Olympia for which Hunter had the key, they had to cross the street and walk about a hundred yards down it.

The street lamps had not been lighted, and as

they halted in the shadows of the overhanging buildings all was dark and quiet. Then they heard voices, and a moment later they made out half a dozen Reds, their rifles slung on their backs, slowly pushing a big touring car down the street. Hunter watched their slow progress until they had disappeared into the darkness.

"Now for it," he said urgently.

They crossed the street, Hunter and Violet carrying the valise, and Billy burdened with his apparatus. Hugging the wall on the farther side, they arrived in a few moments outside the door in the wall.

As he fitted the key into the lock Hunter thanked his stars for the darkness. Not more than another hundred yards down the street was the mass of automobiles which the Reds were collecting there, stretching from side to side of the street, an impassable barrier. A few of the car headlights were lit, and they could see the figures of the Reds moving about, and hear their voices. . . . Hunter breathed freely again as he shut the solid door quietly behind them.

CHAPTER IX

ON OLYMPIA

LOOKING back on their ascent of the roof of Olympia that night, Hunter always felt a sense of amazement that an adventure which was fantastic to an absurd degree should have seemed at the time a normal and commonplace way out of a difficult situation.

The plain fact was that the grisly episode in the study, and the thrills and alarms that followed it, had worked on his and Violet's nerves to an extent which Hunter did not by any means appreciate at the time. Though both had kept very much under control, their one desire was to leave the flat behind, no matter what an adventure into the unknown might bring. They could not remain there any longer, with the three dead men for company.

The last soft glow of twilight hung over the great mass of Olympia—its glass walls seeming faintly luminous—as they stood within the door. They were now free of the yard to the rear of the great building, the scene of a thousand joyous entertainments in London's varied life.

To gain the point where the arch of the glass roof sprang upwards, it was first of all necessary to pass up a ladder about forty feet high. It occurred to Hunter, as they reached the foot of it, that the climb

from where they stood to where the glass lantern sat perched on the extreme edge of the glass roof, 130 feet from the ground, was not the kind of thing that would appeal to many women. He himself had done his bit of climbing in Cumberland and elsewhere, and Billy, he knew, was capable of anything. But Violet, who was only an excellent and pretty wife, and not a cinema heroine, might not find it a pleasant experience.

First of all there was the valise to be carried up. They left it at the top of the ladder, on the ledge of masonry from where sprang the sweeping curve of the glass roof, and then did the same with Billy's various camera cases and tripod.

Violet's turn came next, and Hunter mounted step by step behind her, with a protecting hand outstretched.

They now found themselves at the foot of a sort of half-ladder, half-stairway, with a handrail, which in the form of a quarter-circle curved upwards over the roof. Hunter proposed that they should first of all go up and see Violet safe in the glass observatory, or lantern, and then return for their kit.

There was just light enough to see, but that was all. Before ascending, Hunter unfastened one of the long straps from his valise, and then went up first to show the way, with Violet behind him and Billy bringing up the rear.

The ascent of the staircase was a simple matter. At the top of it was a scramble of about three feet upwards, and then they found themselves on the flattened inverted V—zinc covered—which marked the apex of the roof.

"How do you feel up here, Violet?" Hunter asked.

"Fairly all right—but it feels high. I don't think I was made for a steeplejack."

Gradually, both helping Violet, they progressed along the apex of the great building, until they were near its western extremity. Here was the octagonal-shaped glass structure, surmounted by a peaked roof from which thrust a lightning conductor, with which Hunter was already quite familiar. When helping up there with the wireless telephone experiments he had thought of it whimsically as an ideal coign of vantage and a safe retreat in case of trouble in London—and here they were about to make use of it as a refuge in deadly earnest!

And here came the ticklish moment. The architect—who had not anticipated any such use for his rather quaint embellishment of the huge building—had thoughtlessly placed the door at the side, so that to enter it was necessary to descend the sloping roof for a little way and approach very close to the edge, which gave a sheer drop on to glass-covered outbuildings far down below. It was by no means an enterprise for Violet to undertake lightly, especially in the almost complete darkness. And yet the darkness was a help, as it veiled the possibilities of the situation.

They were all sitting down now, near the ridge of the roof, and for a moment rested to look about them. It was eerie sitting there, on the roof of London as it seemed, and Violet's hand stole into her husband's, as if she were searching for courage and comfort.

"Seems to me this roof garden of yours would be improved by a jazz band and a few fairy lights," came Billy's voice. "I've seen Madison Square Garden look brighter than this."

He struck the right note. His humorous reflection came as a welcome and human relief in the sinister quiet that enfolded them.

"You're right, Billy. And it's time we got into our desirable dwelling-place," said Hunter. "You see, just below there; that's the step leading up to the door. Your job is now to mount the step, open the door, hold out your welcoming arms, and I'll guarantee to deliver Violet safely into them."

"Sure." Billy walked carelessly down the slope to the step, opened the glass door and stood waiting. "Dinner is served, ladies and gentlemen. Now come right in."

"Now for you, Violet," said Hunter. "We'll do a bit of rope work, just to make it seem more like the real thing."

He passed the long strap from his valise round her waist, and she lowered herself gingerly down the ridge, with Hunter holding on behind. Billy reached upwards, took her arm, and passed her inside. Hunter followed, with a feeling of relief that this awkward corner was safely turned.

Crouching down, Hunter struck a match. They found themselves in a roomy octagonal chamber, about twelve feet across. The lower part of the glass sides were obscured by zinc, so that there was no danger of them or their light being seen from below, so long as they were sitting on the floor.

"And now for the furniture, Billy. We'll leave

Violet here with a cigarette, and get busy again."

It took them two journeys to bring everything up, and the valise proved to be an awkward thing to handle on the sloping ridge of the roof, but after some hard work everything was safely inside.

"And now that the Swiss Family Robinson has settled down in its new quarters, what does it do next?" Billy asked.

"It unpacks," said Hunter. He unrolled the valise, found the candles, lit one, and began to take everything out.

"Gee—provisions, wine, water, tin mugs, tin plates, bread—say, how long a lease have you got this place for? And that's a dinky little rifle. Is there shooting on your property, then? And hell—a Persian rug. A bute. Did you bring a bath by any chance?"

Hunter laughed.

"It's a Koulah prayer-rug—one I'm very fond of. I bought it at Astrakhan many years ago. It's worth a hundred pounds or so, and anyhow, I couldn't bear to leave it. We've had to leave other good ones behind, but I thought I'd bring this one. It'll do for you to lie on. . . . As to the rifle, well, I'm fond of that too. And it may come in useful."

"Anyhow, if we're going to live in a minaret, it's more or less in the picture to have a rug to sit on."

With the valise, the sleeping-bag and the small Persian carpet spread out, they were all able to sit down more or less comfortably, and keep from contact with the floor, which was distinctly dirty.

"How about a little supper?" said Violet. "Tongue,

bread, biscuits. Tin of prepared coffee here. I could soon get that hot. Or we have wine. . . . Very full menu this evening." She was recovering her spirits, once away from the flat.

"Splendid," said Hunter. "It's just like coming back home in a troop train from the wars—except there's no Italian kids shouting 'Bully beef, mister,' and there's a lady in the compartment. Suppose we say coffee?"

Billy hugged himself in an ecstasy on his prayer-rug.

"Say, it's great. Here I am with a real elegant suite at the Sa-voy. It's true things aren't at their best there just now, but all the same, the lil' old caravanserai is quite habitable. And here I am sitting in a minaret surrounded by a camp outfit that looks like a museum exhibit from the Great War. Say, Allah, it's great. . . . Yes, coffee for me too. Now you talk about it, I'm certainly hungry."

Hunter ripped open a tin of tongue, and Violet soon had the contents of the tin of prepared coffee and milk boiling on the Tommy's cooker. In the dim but pleasant light of a single candle they sat and took their supper.

"How long do you propose to live up here?" asked Billy. "How long a siege could you stand?"

"We'll see what the morning brings. And that reminds me."

Hunter took a small book from his pocket, and consulting it, began to compose a short message in code. Then taking the wireless telephone out of its leather case, he connected it up with a wire hanging down from the glass roof of their shelter, which was

in turn connected with the aerial outside. He slipped the ear-pieces over his head, and began to speak his code message into the transmitter, Billy watching him with a twinkle of amusement in his eyes.

"What's all that about?" he asked, when Hunter had finished. "Sounds about as clear to me as a clause in the League of Nations."

"Message in code to the office. What I said was: 'Three of us, self, wife, and American friend named Derryman, are in glass lantern western extremity Olympia roof. Taken refuge here for night because am expecting flat be raided again. Reply.' By now, or in a few more seconds, that will lie on the desk of my friend Melrose. When he's decoded it I hope he'll ring me up immediately. You'll hear this little instrument buzz, and I shall hear him as soon as he speaks. Judging by the last words I had with him on the 'phone, they've got their hands full round there just now. You see, Billy, there's two things the Reds are keen on, among others: one is to stop the voice of the *Echo*, and the other is to stop mine. I've become a Big Noise in this country since you saw me last."

Hunter had lit his pipe, and the other two were smoking cigarettes. They sat in silence for a few moments, comforted by the supper, waiting for a reply to Hunter's message.

There came a faint buzz from Hunter's instrument, not much louder than the drone of a bee, and at the same moment Hunter heard Melrose's voice.

"Hello, Hunter, I've got where you are. It's familiar ground, anyhow. What's made you take to it?"

"Street barricaded both ends, so that I couldn't risk trying to get out. And as the flat felt too unhealthy I thought of this place as a way out. What's the news?"

"We've been busy. We've beaten off an attack—it died down about ten minutes ago. Barricades have acted splendidly, but Bateman thinks we shall have much heavier attack soon. We've lost about ten killed, and there are nearly forty wounded. They're being well looked after. Bateman is convinced that we gave more than we got. He's sure there's a worse attack coming soon, but he seems quite confident about it."

"My God, and me stuck up here!" exclaimed Hunter. "I wish I could be with you."

"I wish you could. But it's no use your worrying too much about that. Your chief concern is to see that you're not caught and shot. Most of your work has been done already. After all, you couldn't do a great deal here to-night, except perhaps get potted at one of the barricades, and neither of us is dying to see that happen. We've got two splendid men in Bateman and Shotley, and the rest of the officers and all the men are as keen as mustard. They're all tearing mad against the Reds, now that it's broken out at last, and there'll be no giving way. Anyhow, we're only a small part of the whole. Big things are happening down at Westminster."

"What's the situation there?"

"There's a big battle broken out—message through few minutes ago from Langton. The whole region is barricaded off—Charing Cross, along to Carlton House Terrace, through the park to Hyde Park Corner,

and then back to the river—quite a big front. The Government scrambled all the troops and Leaguers and police it could into that area, and is apparently prepared to fight hard. Langton says same spirit down there—all troops apparently ramping mad against the Reds, especially the foreign element, and burning to wipe them out. . . . But the situation is horribly anxious. It's the real thing, and no mistake."

"Do you think the Government will be able to hold out?"

"God knows. One can only hope and pray. If they don't—well, Heaven and the League help us. They're the only things that will stand between us and hell in England. But it's too early yet to say anything about Westminster. The Government is heavily outnumbered, but their positions will want a lot of forcing."

"What news is there from the country?"

"Outbreaks reported from all over the place—just the barest details. But it's clear already that it's not going to be merely a St. Bartholomew's Eve for us. The League is out and busy in most places. But we shall know more where we are to-morrow. . . . And now look here, Hunter, take care of yourself. All you've got to do is to keep a whole skin and get back here as soon as you can. Ring up from time to time, and I'll let you know what's going on. . . . We're very busy. I've been cutting up bandages for the wounded."

Hunter reported to his companions all he had heard. He felt very much cut off from events, but perhaps Melrose was right. His work had been in

preparing the League, and the League was now fighting. And as to the "Iron Division," it couldn't be in better hands. . . . All the same, it was madly tantalising to be stuck up there.

"If we're quiet we may hear what's happening Westminster way." He opened the door and they all sat near it and listened.

Faintly through the air came a soft sound—"pap, pap, pap."

"Machine-guns," said Billy in a whisper. "And what's that? Something bigger. Bomb or trench mortar or something."

A faint "boom" had come to them, carried gently on the breeze. It was difficult to imagine that these soft and gentle sounds were those of fierce civil war, waged in the heart of London. Westminster was being attacked by the forces of anarchy, and these whispers that were wafted to them were the sounds of battle four miles away.

"It's terrible just to be sitting up here listening to it—to be doing nothing," said Hunter, still haunted by the idea that he was idle and "out of it" while London was fighting for its existence.

"If everybody on your side plugs as many of them goddam fellers as you've done, it'll soon be over," remarked Billy.

At that moment they heard from some little distance away the sound of a high-powered car with open exhaust. It swung into the street below them from the Hammersmith Road. They saw the glare of its headlights, and it stopped just short of the entrance to the flats. Its glare shone on the car already stationed there, showing the Red sentry still on guard and the

two dead men lying as they had fallen. Another car followed, and came to rest just behind the first.

"Those glasses, Violet, quick. And put out the candle. We'll take no chances."

"If it's a spy-glass you're talking about, what about this?" Billy bent down to one of his leather cases and took out something that looked like the half of a very big pair of binoculars. "Picked it up for a song in the bazaar at Smyrna just after the Boches had left there. Sixteen-power Zeiss. Say, son, with this at two hundred yards you can see whether a feller uses a Gillette or takes his life in his hand."

They stared down through their glasses. The lights from the second car shone full on the first one. The driver wore a red cap and next to him sat a man wearing a brassard on his arm similar to those on the three men in the study. Behind, in the rear seats, were three Red soldiers with rifles and bandoliers. All got down and were joined by half a dozen more Red soldiers from the car behind.

"Every mother's son of them is a dago," said Billy. "There isn't a single white man among them."

"They're the kind of men needed for the job," replied Hunter. "The Red Army is full of that sort of scum."

Led by the man with the brassard, they all disappeared through the gate, with a loud noise of tramping feet on the asphalt pathway.

"Well, you didn't leave home any too early," said Billy, as they watched them all disappear through the main doorway. Hunter saw them in his mind's

eye tramping noisily up the stairs, and then knocking at his own door.

A quarter of an hour passed, and there was no further sign of movement. Then one of the Reds returned to the car, carrying something over his arm.

"Some of my Persian rugs," said Hunter with a sigh. "I wonder what sort of a filthy mess they'll leave the flat in."

More time passed, and still the others did not come down.

"I guess they'll be feeling pretty wild when they see your study," said Billy. "It's a sure thing they'll go in for reprisals and things. But I tell you what. They're probably searching the other flats, just to make sure you aren't about anywhere. . . . Wasn't that a door-knocker going hard? I'll bet you they are digging the other guys out and questioning them."

Hunter thought it likely too.

More time passed, and at last two of the Reds appeared, carrying something between them, and walking very slowly.

"Your luck's in this time, Hunter. They're kindly carrying the corpses out for you. See who that is. That's the little goddam feller who never had a breakfast."

Other Reds appeared, similarly burdened.

"That's a load off your mind, dear," said Hunter, turning to Violet. "We're rid of those unwelcome guests, anyhow."

"Yes. It's something. But the poor flat. I wonder what they'll do to it. . . . Does the insurance cover Bolshevism?"

Hunter laughed in spite of himself.

The cars drove off with their grisly burdens, and the street was dark and quiet again. . . . On the breeze, the faint sounds of battle in Westminster came to them.

CHAPTER X

BILLY SOLILOQUISES

"LORD, when I look back on the last two or three years! What a time it's been!"

It was Billy who was speaking. The candle was lit again, and they were sitting smoking, Billy on the prayer-rug, Violet on the sleeping-bag, and Hunter on the valise. They could still hear the sounds of firing from Westminster, but though they had gazed in that direction through their glasses, darkened London had given them no further hint of what was going on, and Billy had begun to talk about some of his experiences following the war. He had to be either doing something or talking.

"After I left you out in the Near East," he went on, "I was chasing revolutions up and down Germany for the best part of a year. I got very tired of that; I never took to the gentle Hun, even after the Armistice. And they made a whole heap of palaver about mighty little. If one half of the Boches had wiped out the other half there would have been some sense to it. All that dope about our men not having died in vain might have come true. But they made as much song about half a hundred revolutionary casualties in Berlin as they did about half a million in the war.

"After that I lit out for Warsaw to help the Poles along a bit. I was glad when the Poles were glad,

and sorry when they were sorry, and we never knew from one day to the other which it was going to be. We went hundreds of miles into Russia, and then we went back again, like your famous Duke of York. Then we did it again, and then the Reds took up another hole in their belt, and waded in once more, and back we were again in Warsaw. Sort of see-saw business. And the same old scenes. Villages burning, rain coming down on rivers with dog-tired troops tramping over broken bridges, and everybody looking dam miserable. Gee, how tired I am of seeing refugees!

"Say, do you remember, Hunter, where we were on Armistice Day—do you remember that God-forgotten spot called Mudros, where we were waiting to go up with your Fleet to Constantinople? Gee, I should say a hermit would die of *ennui* at Mudros. And everybody was saying that the war was over, and that there wouldn't be any more fighting, and the world was going to be parcelled out and everybody made happy, with as many votes and as much candy as he wanted. My, I've seen nothing but fighting and misery ever since.

"After the Poland stunt I pushed down into the Ukraine. Same old picnic—mud and vermin. I was in the middle of it all, but I couldn't make out what was happening. It was worse down at Odessa. I got there after somebody or other had retaken it from somebody else for the seventeenth time. I was taking pictures all day long and I couldn't make out who the hell—I beg your pardon, Mrs. Hunter—but I couldn't make out who was fighting which. Each side earnestly warned me against the brutali-

ties of the other, but I couldn't figure out which was the angel child and which the bad boy of the family.

"So I gave the problem up, and decided that for the time being I was strictly nootral, especially as at one time or another both sides had proposed to shoot me. I tell you, nobody but an American could have been where I've been this last two or three years. I only had to waggle my flag at them and they came to heel at once, and explained that what they really wanted was a free cargo of assorted merchandise, and had I any influence with the President? Sure I had. The President was a cousin of mine. I went up and down Eastern Europe dropping promises for free shiploads like a theatrical advance agent distributing handbills. It was the only way to get a move on.

"There was a lot more of the same sort of stuff in Roumania and Hungary. Then in Vienna a lovely Countess, one of the highest in the land, fell in love with me. Oh, but she was a peach. I don't know whether the rations I could get had anything to do with her affection. That was a subject I didn't enquire into. Anyhow, I wouldn't have cared if she'd told me so. I tell you I shall never hear anybody speak of Vienna again without coming over all sentimental, like a dear old white-haired lady finding her first dance card. It was the one real, happy, Christian interlude in all those years. Zika was her pet name—the one I called her by. I'll show you her picture one of these days, taken just after she was presented at Court in the days when that old Emperor of theirs was sitting propped up on his throne.

"Then I was down in Serbia and the Balkans generally for a while, watching the dear old problem, which everybody said was settled, burst out again. I was soon tired of that. After Vienna I hadn't any use for places like Uskub, or even Sofia. The sight of the daughters of Bulgaria, after my Countess, made me feel sad. I thought of going east again, but decided against it, and so missed all that Bolshevik business round Constantinople. It would have been interesting to see old Johnny Turk come back again, after seeing him kicked out. But I ran plump into all the Bolshevik business in Italy. I was in Milan when the trouble broke out. I was in that big square where the marble cathedral is, and I'd got my machine stuck up in the main doorway. As nasty an afternoon as your friend Billy ever had. Three months of it in Italy. Then the same thing in Paris. Say, Hunter, I believe I must be one of those germ carriers the doctors speak about. Wherever I go it bursts out. But I was interested in Paris; I'd read about the Commune when I was a kid, and there was the same thing again, only somehow it didn't seem so romantic as it was in the book.

"Well, I got tired of starting revolutions and things in Europe, and I managed to get a boat home. And sure enough, they were having a little trouble in New York. Then our people figured out there was real trouble coming over here. I didn't want to come. I'd no particular down on old London, and I told 'em that the moment I set foot in the Strand something was bound to break out. But they pressed me, and said kind words, and wouldn't be denied. So I had seventeen days on the Atlantic on a third-

rate freighter with a crew that didn't know whether to go Red or merely get drunk, and I wasn't sorry to fetch up in the Mersey without any spare parts missing. I arrived in London yesterday. Sure enough, the revolution breaks out this afternoon. And here I am, sitting in this parrot's cage with you, and not quite sure where our next birdseed's coming from. Now, what do you think of that for a quiet life?"

"Very interesting, Billy, very. And very melancholy. The world's gone wrong, and you've seen as much of its madness as any man. . . . And you're now witnessing the culmination of it. If England doesn't win in this fight—well then, we may get ready to say good-bye to Civilisation for some time to come."

Hunter stood up as he spoke, and went to the door. He gave a startled exclamation.

"Good God, Billy, look at this!"

Away towards Westminster the sky was ablaze, and above the conflagration a huge column of sparks rose into the air. Through his glasses Hunter tried to identify the spot. The blaze flared up with a greater intensity, casting its glare far and wide. Hunter could see very distinctly the towers of the Houses of Parliament, and farther away to the left the faint outline of the dome of St. Paul's.

"It's very close to Whitehall—that's certain," he said, still gazing through his glasses.

"Try mine. You know the details of your burgh better, and perhaps you'll be able to pick the spot out."

Hunter took Billy's glass.

"By gad, it makes a wonderful difference. I thought mine were good, but this . . . Yes, it must be in Whitehall itself. I can read the time by Big Ben—five minutes to eleven. It must be very close to that. . . . It looks like the Foreign Office. . . . My God, what a fight it must be!"

"It isn't the palace of your King, by any chance?" enquired Billy, with the keenest anxiety showing in his voice.

"No, I think it's well beyond that."

"That's good. Because, if that were part of the programme, I should hate to miss it. Mine's a democratic country all right, but a real, four-flush, royal and imperial palace in flames would make some hit on the movies on Broadway."

The booming sound which they heard occasionally at first now came much more frequently, and the fainter sound of rifle and machine-gun fire was continuous.

"Oh, those brutes, those brutes," murmured Hunter. "And to think that all this need never have happened if only England had been given a lead. . . . My God, I feel worried, Billy. If that *is* the Foreign Office, then things must be looking pretty bad in Whitehall."

He reached for the telephone to ring up Melrose.

CHAPTER XI

WESTMINSTER DIGS ITSELF IN

ONCE it had been forced to realise that it was face to face with revolution on a large scale —that, in short, its own power and authority were to be attacked by the formidable armed forces which had been allowed to grow up within the State in order to bring that State toppling in ruins—the Government acted with quickness and decision.

And once this point had been reached, things which had been regarded as but shadows became real and tangible. In Government circles the idea of a concentrated Red attack on Westminster—a blow aimed at the immediate crushing of all constitutional authority—had often enough been discussed. But the idea had been treated as a phantom—an ugly idea which would never materialise. Now, once the impossible conference had broken down, the mists were dissipated, and in a flash the Government saw the phantom as a brutal reality.

The Government now realised that the Reds aimed at nothing else than a grand attack on the whole of the Government district of Whitehall and the capture of the Lords and Commons *en bloc*. It was an audacious idea, which, should it succeed, would mean the immediate collapse of all government as England had known it for centuries past—and no

doubt, incidentally, the biggest massacre of politicians in all history.

At six o'clock, following the breakdown of the conference with the Communists, an order for immediate general mobilisation had been issued. All Territorials were warned to assemble at their respective drill halls in full marching order, and from then onwards the Authorities had begun to collect them in motor lorries and bring them towards the centre, the bulk of them being hidden away for the time being in the various Government buildings. The police forces were organised in the same way, the Authorities wisely deciding to have as large a force as could be collected at the vital point. Any Bolshevist success there would have immediate disastrous consequences, and the rest of London, for the meantime, was left more or less to take care of itself.

The Guards were soon in readiness for battle, and such bodies of Leaguers as could be collected and armed in time were all poured into Westminster. From seven o'clock onwards the whole region was an armed citadel.

By this time every approach to the Government area was in process of being blocked by sandbags and barbed-wire "knife-rests." At the Trafalgar Square end of Whitehall, for instance, a strong sandbag redoubt with machine-guns commanded the square and down Northumberland Avenue, to the river, where a similar redoubt guarded the Embankment. This system was repeated at such points as Carlton House Steps, St. James's Street near the Palace, Hyde Park Corner and elsewhere. The grounds of Buckingham Palace made an awkward

salient in this scheme of defence, and outside this, again, was the great Government milk and food depot in Hyde Park, which had been organised as a distributing centre to cope with the situation brought about by the great strike when it was first declared, six weeks before.

Special attention was given in this hastily organised scheme of defence to the underground railways running into Westminster. These also were strongly barricaded off, and portable searchlights, of the kind used on aerodromes during the war, flooded the tunnels with light, so that there could be no possibility of a surprise attack in this direction.

By early evening at least twenty-five thousand men were gathered in the central district—a mixed lot of Guards, Territorials, Leaguers, the police force and special constables. Companies of Engineers, chiefly Territorials, were busy installing portable searchlights in every possible position where they might be calculated to aid the defence in a night attack. These, for the most part, were placed on the roofs of buildings. In spite of its weakness in dealing with the revolutionary movement generally, the Government had been wise enough during the anxious weeks of the strike to make as much provision as possible for just such an attack as was now imminent. Special strong guards had also been installed at such vital points as the Bank of England and the Tower of London. From the latter place the Crown Jewels had been removed to some unknown place of security weeks before. All electrical generating stations were also strongly guarded by troops, but it was fully realised that in an upheaval on the

extensive scale now threatening, these would probably fall an easy prey to the Reds.

It was believed that in the whole of the London area the Reds disposed of some 80,000 men. These were divided into district battalions—Poplar, Limehouse, Lambeth and the rest—and had been drilling openly for months past. In many of the battalions the foreign element was as high as forty per cent. As to armament, the Reds were limited to rifles, machine-guns, and bombs. Of artillery—save a certain number of trench mortars—aeroplanes or tanks, they had none. But the conviction of the whole of the Red organisation—fostered by the teaching of the foreign element, many of whose members had taken part in various Terrorist revolutions on the Continent—was that once "The Day" came a simultaneous show of force all over the country would be sufficient to ensure that the power would pass quickly into their own hands. It had been so all over Europe, and the Red leaders, blindly refusing to see that England might, when the test came, be "different," counted on it being the same in this case. Moreover, they had been conducting a steady Communist propaganda in the Navy and Army, and the evil seed they had sown had sufficiently taken root here and there to deceive them, and give the impression that the Crown Forces were ready for revolt once they saw that the Reds were really in earnest, and had struck the first blow. . . . Again, the Reds had overlooked the possibility of the formation of such a body as the Liberty League, designed purely to counteract their own Red battalions. Even now that it was in being they had scoffed at the League

as a futile *bourgeois* invention, organised too late to save the "capitalist classes" from the fate that awaited them.

The "General" in command of the Red forces was one George Tomlin, a Labour M.P. representing a South Wales mining district of a particularly revolutionary temper. Tomlin had long been famous for his wild speeches in the House. As "General" he had been more or less humorously dubbed in the earlier stages of the Red military movement, when his fellow politicians had been too fatuous to realise that this man of violent speech, who preached revolution in the Legislature itself, really meant what he said.

One of his chief lieutenants was a Commander Longford, M.P., an incomprehensible being also notorious for his violent speeches in the House—another example of that curious political psychology which permits legislators to smile indulgently on the man who utters the most seditious doctrines in the place where they should be least tolerated.

The Reds were well organised, and had many automobiles at their disposal. And they enjoyed the great advantage that however brazenly they might show their intentions they knew that they would meet with no opposition until the very moment when they started to put into practice all that they had for so long been preaching. To such a state had weakness reduced the situation that the Government only dared do on the defensive what it should long ago have initiated.

The attack on London had begun earlier than

was anticipated. From seven o'clock and onwards the Reds had begun to march from the outlying districts on what had now become the citadel of Westminster. Their advance on the centre was organised on much the same lines as one of the great Labour demonstrations of the earlier years of the movement, but there was the vital difference this time, that every man who marched was armed, and that the evening light shone on serried rows of bayonets.

With red flags flying and drum-and-fife bands playing revolutionary marches, they converged on the centre according to a prearranged plan. They were resolute enough, and they felt that victory was certainly theirs. But there was also the conviction—and certainly the hope—that the walls of the Government Jericho would collapse at the mere sound of their drum-and-fife bands. They had every reason to anticipate weakness. Was there not the example of all Europe to inspire them, and to intimidate their opponents?

In the outlying industrial districts the march of the Reds was attended by cheering crowds, chiefly of children and youths. But as the marching battalions penetrated deeper into London proper the crowds on the pavements grew thinner and thinner, until finally the organised forces of anarchy marched through streets which were almost deserted, save for people who looked down from windows. Shop fronts were hastily shuttered as news of the approaching invasion spread. Here and there policemen stood wonderingly aside as the battalions passed, puzzled by a situation which was too much even for their varied experience. They stood for Authority

—but Authority had apparently abdicated. The marching Reds called out and chaffed them as they passed, and invited them to fall in and join the movement.

But the forces of law and order had not yet entirely abdicated, and it was the battalions from Hammersmith and Fulham which first came into contact with them. As fortune willed it, their first shots were exchanged with a body of Leaguers. These, to the number of about a hundred, reached the Hammersmith Road from their assembly place in Brook Green just at the moment the Red battalions were beginning to march out of Hammersmith Broadway on towards London. The Leaguers, seeing what they had to contend with, wisely "legged it," much to the joy and derision of the marching Reds, who sped them on their way with a few parting shots, fired as they marched, and without any orders from their officers. The Leaguers halted in their retreat, poured in a volley, partially breaking up the leading Red battalion, and went on their way again, followed now by a continuous running fire from the angry Communists.

At the point just beyond Olympia where the railway runs underneath the main road there came a nasty surprise for the marching battalions. The Leaguers had opened out on the far side of the railway, and as the leading battalion came swaggeringly along, with its ranks re-formed, its red flags flying and its band playing vigorously, they poured in a hot fire, killing a good number and throwing the battalion into confusion.

Once they had recovered from their surprise, the

Reds rushed the bridge with their blood up, and the few Leaguers who did not get away in time received short shrift. The remainder retreated up the main road, pursued hotly by the Reds, and near Kensington Town Hall came on another body of their comrades who were just assembling. There was a sudden and confused engagement here, but the Leaguers still had to fall back along the main road, fighting a plucky rearguard action all the way. But with the open space of Kensington Gardens and Hyde Park on their right, they were in danger at any moment of being cut off, and had to keep moving very quickly.

The action developed into a running fight, which left a trail of dead and wounded all along the broad, stately thoroughfare, while from the windows of the mansions that lined the road white-faced, startled people looked down on this amazing thing which, now that it had come at last, seemed to have dropped on peaceful London with all the suddenness of a thunderbolt.

The whole of Hyde Park had been closed for weeks to the public. At the moment there was only a guard of half a dozen soldiers, with a few police armed with revolvers, at each gate. These opened fire from behind the railings, but the Reds, with undeniable courage, bombed down the railings and swarmed in, meeting in the park itself a company of Guards who were coming up at the double. But the Reds were in overwhelming numbers. Their attack here came in the nature of a surprise, before Westminster was really ready to meet it. After a hot and quick engagement the Reds had secured possession of the whole of the park, but now found themselves held

up by the stronger defences at Hyde Park Corner, covering the approach to Buckingham Palace and Westminster.

There followed heavy rifle and machine-gun fire across the intervening space, and for the time being both sides rested on their positions. The Reds were in command of Hyde Park and its depot, vital to the needs of London. They had been handled from the very start in a way they had not expected, but they had opened their attack with a partial success.

It was this fighting, and the scattered outbreaks which occurred in rear of it, which Billy had encountered before he paid his surprise visit to Hunter.

CHAPTER XII

THE BATTLE OF LONDON BEGINS

THE main attack on Westminster opened shortly after nine o'clock.

General Tomlin had taken up his headquarters at the National Gallery. He wore a khaki uniform cut on the German model, and his all-red cap was adorned with a wide plain gold band. Though in his earlier days, and particularly throughout the Great War, he had always hotly declaimed against "militarism," he did not disdain its outer trappings and ceremonial when the time came for him to prove, as he was sure would be the case, that he was a born leader of men.

The Red forces, now concentrated in the centre, had deployed and formed a ring round the Government zone. This had not been accomplished without a considerable amount of elementary manœuvring, with which development General Tomlin felt well content. The Reds rested on the river near Charing Cross, and in a wide three-quarter circle, which embraced the whole of the Westminster district, touched the river again near the bottom of Chelsea Bridge Road. But some sectors of this Red containing line were comparatively weak. General Tomlin anticipated only a fairly spirited defence at the very most, and felt he could afford to concentrate just where he wished. This was the culminating moment of nearly two

years of constantly growing Red power and audacity, and though at the very last moment the Government had stiffened and was showing fight, there was no reason in his mind to think that its resistance would in any way approach the heroic. General Tomlin regarded it as a movement of despair, preparatory to inevitable capitulation.

His plan of attack was to feign a general assault all round the circle, but in reality to concentrate on a drive direct into Whitehall and Parliament Square, to where his colleagues in Parliament were sitting. It was still the heart of England, even though it had been beating but feebly for a long time past. Once there, the moral effect would be so overwhelming that all constitutional power and authority throughout England would crumble at the shock.

Whatever other preparations had been made by the Government, General Tomlin knew quite well that there were no tanks in the enemy area. Labour's insistence on the reduction of this arm of the Service —on the basis that as there was no foreign enemy to fight, tanks were not needed—had been followed by the very strictest surveillance that none were imported into London from Aldershot or elsewhere. The Cabinet had received a private "warning" from Labour at the outbreak of the strike that any such movement would be regarded as an "act of war against the workers of England," and would precipitate immediate hostilities. General Tomlin did not want to face any tanks, and he had every reason to know that the Government had not attempted to import any into its area. "Labour" had its spies in many places, and was quite sure on this point.

Shortly after nine o'clock the rattle of rifle and machine-gun fire opened all round the armed circle. The streets of the West End were now absolutely deserted, the Reds having cleared away with brutal celerity the various knots of loiterers and sightseers who had collected under the impression that the ancient right of the Londoner to look on at anything that was happening in the streets of his city was still in force.

The main attacking forces of the Reds were massed at the lower end of Charing Cross Road, behind the National Gallery—ready to advance down to Trafalgar Square and Whitehall—and in all the streets giving on to Piccadilly Circus, ready for an advance down to the Carlton House steps. It was at these two points that a break-through would give the Reds the maximum of result in the quickest time. The Reds included in their ranks a considerable proportion of men who had seen active service, although the majority of the British element were men who had remained at home during the war, and in the workshops had learned more of selfishness than sacrifice. But there was no doubt of their ardent spirit. The venom of class hatred was in their veins, and they panted for an instant and crushing victory over everything they had been taught to despise—or envy. And quite apart from the numerous foreign element they included a strong strain of sheer riff-raff who desired only to be on the side of plunder and disorder.

As the soft twilight gradually faded to dusk the leading companies of the Reds lined the stone balustrade at the top of Trafalgar Square and opened a heavy fire on the strong redoubt running from the

end of Northumberland Avenue across to the Admiralty Arch. It was one of the key positions of the Government defence, and was very strongly held. Not until the Reds had been firing for some five minutes or more did any answering shots come. Then from the Government defences a steady stream of rifle fire broke out, varied by the livelier rattle of machine-guns.

The Battle of London had begun.

Gradually the Reds increased their hold on the square, taking cover behind the fountains and the pedestals of the many statues. A number of aged members of the august club at the corner of the square, who had felt that whatever absurd foolishness was happening in London their club remained what it had always been, were unceremoniously bundled out, and from the windows of the club rifle and machine-gun fire began to spit out at the opposing redoubt. The hotels on the opposite side of the square were also occupied, and spurts of red flame shot out from every window.

At the same time the Reds, swarming in every safety down the Haymarket and along Pall Mall, occupied the two stately clubs—the Athenæum and the United Services—at the corners leading down to Carlton House steps. Here, again, their distinguished members had lingered to the last. Ancient generals who had fought in every campaign for fifty years past; reverend archdeacons and literary peers who had spent their declining years in writing letters to *The Times*—all were ordered at the bayonet's point out of their august retreats and driven out into the streets, there to suffer as best they could the taunts and laughter of the Red soldiers through whose ranks they had to

make their way. Here and there some who were unwise enough to protest were hastened on their way by blows from rifle butts.

The roofs of both buildings were occupied, and a heavy fire poured into the Government redoubt at the top of the steps.

Behind the sheltering corner of each of the clubs large bodies of Reds waited in readiness for the coming assault.

On the Embankment, at Hyde Park Corner, and at other principal points round the circle, similar scenes were being enacted. Mid-way down the slope of the Green Park a line of Government trenches had been hastily constructed in the early evening, as a first line to guard the approach to Buckingham Palace and the Mall, with its strategic arrangement of massive railings and gates, planned years before for some such unlikely possibility as this.

From the windows of the Ritz Hotel, where all the guests and staff had been incontinently thrown out, a heavy fire was opened on the near-by trenches. Half an hour after the opening of the Battle of London the Government forces were enveloped in a ring of smoke and flame, save from the river-side.

By an audacious move the Reds had now established a battery of trench mortars behind the massive square pedestal of the Nelson Column. From this excellent cover they were able to pour in a very damaging fire on the defenders of Whitehall, the projectiles exploding with terrible effect on the hard wood paving of the street. This was the Red artillery preparation before the assault.

From many points, near and far, the Government

searchlights were now glaring out, sweeping across Trafalgar Square, making it alternately a place of blinding light and darkest shadow. The Red sharpshooters attended to these, and some were put out of action, but after an interval others took their places. In the intervals of darkness the red flashes of the constant fusillade gleamed with a fiercer intensity.

The assaulting Red battalions here were waiting, well sheltered, at the bottom of the Strand and round the angle of Cockspur Street. The rattle of the machine-guns and rifles, and the crash of the trench-mortar bombs was at its height, when at ten o'clock General Tomlin gave the order for what he thought would be a decisive assault.

Nothing could have withstood that rush down the slope on to the first barricade. It was a cataract of men which, from the two sides simultaneously, rounded the protecting corner buildings, and literally fell on the defenders. The rifles and machine-guns tore gaps in the leading lines of the attackers, and hundreds of the Reds fell; but once the attack was launched, and they came pouring in from left and right, its success at this point was inevitable. The redoubt was overwhelmed by the momentum of the rush, and amid the crash of hand grenades, the flash of pistols and the savage work of the bayonet the Reds took possession of the first line of defence.

They took the Admiralty Arch in their rush, bombing their way through the heavy gates, and hundreds of them now swept along the Mall, in front of Carlton House Terrace, towards Carlton House steps. The defenders there had beaten off the first assault of the

Reds, which here was confined to a narrower space, giving a devastating field of fire for the defenders. But the Major of Grenadiers who was in command at this point soon realised that the attackers had broken through at the Arch, and that he was in immediate danger of being overwhelmed from the rear. The rush had momentarily died down on his front, and as the attack came from behind he faced his men round and led them through at the charge. A few moments later much the same thing was repeated by the defenders at the opening near St. James's Palace, a little farther along. This in turn exposed the soldiers manning the trenches across the Green Park, who had to draw back hurriedly to the defences round Buckingham Palace. The Red success in Trafalgar Square had broken in the whole of one side of the Government defence.

There followed a desperate twenty-minutes' scramble of fighting up and down the Horse Guards' Parade. Parties of soldiers falling back encountered and became mixed up with parties of Reds pressing on to drive home their success. In those first few minutes it seemed to the assaulting battalions that the whole of the Government resistance had collapsed and that they had only to drive on to complete victory. The darkness of the parade ground was lit up fitfully by the travelling beams of the searchlights and the green glare of Verey lights, and made terrible by the cries and groans of stricken men. There was fighting between small groups, and between individuals. In the general confusion, and the alternating light and darkness, the combatants of both sides did not know whether to hold their hand or to strike, until they

were within a yard of friend or adversary. In the shrubberies and on the lawns of St. James's Park there was desperate man-hunting by both sides, and men were shot or bayoneted as they stole stealthily round bushes or the trunks of trees. It was naked, primitive savagery unleashed, in which the lust for destruction for its own sake on one side was matched by the equally fierce desire to kill before being killed on the other.

But gradually the attackers became aware that their rush was being stayed. More and more Reds poured into the wide space of the parade ground and found that they were unable to advance farther. All the defenders had by now either been killed in the murderous struggle or had fought their way back. And now from the arch under the Horse Guards, from the barred grille of the little dark tunnel that runs through into Downing Street, and from many points of the projecting wing of the Foreign Office, streams of machine-gun bullets poured across the open space. The attackers held their ground, then—very much thinned out—wavered and retreated. There was no facing that withering stream of bullets across the bare, unprotected space. The Reds retreated hastily to what cover they could find, and in a few moments the parade ground was empty save for the many dead and dying who lay upon it.

At about the same moment the furious uproar of fighting died down in Whitehall itself. Pouring over the captured barricade at Trafalgar Square the Reds had found themselves faced by a second one, about a hundred yards farther down, just short of the War Office. Here they almost had to jostle each other to

charge down the narrow space of the street. They were swept away by the devastating fire. The attack was renewed a little later, and was just as mercilessly swept away. A silence that was almost as terrifying succeeded to the fearful uproar of the fighting.

Far down Whitehall the ray of a searchlight glared out. It travelled slowly up the roadway to the square, and showed hundreds of bodies lying still, and some others slowly crawling away. But it showed the second barricade unbroken.

CHAPTER XIII

AT THE NATIONAL GALLERY

GENERAL TOMLIN sat with his Staff in the Dutch Room of the National Gallery. Never in all the history of war was a general more happily and wisely situated. This not merely because of the priceless pictures by Rembrandt, Cuyp, Ruisdael and other masters which covered the walls, but only a stride or two taken from the chair in which he sat enabled him to overlook the main scene of operations, and it is not often that a general can combine his headquarters and his best observation-post in one. More than that, his present situation was strongly recommended by reasons of personal safety. The Government possessed many aeroplanes, and might at any moment use them. And it was hardly likely that they would prevail upon themselves to bomb the most valuable collection of paintings in the world. The idea of going there was General Tomlin's own, and he was very proud of it—as indeed he was of most things he did.

But at the moment he was not thinking of this, and he was in anything but a pleasant frame of mind. There was a scowl on his face as he sat at a long table in the centre of the room, with his Staff about him. There were large-scale maps of the Westminster district before them, and he was poring over one of these. The room was lighted only by lamps and candles on

the table, and they threw curious patches of shining light and deep shadow on the pictures round them. The principle of plunging the city into darkness as a powerful moral aid to the weapon of terrorism cut both ways, and General Tomlin made an exclamation of impatience as he drew a lamp nearer to the map he was studying.

He was a large, fleshy man, with a certain facial resemblance to Oliver Cromwell, even to the mole. It was possibly this which had helped to make him what he now was, and had made him wish, with considerable modifications, to follow in the footsteps of the great Lord Protector. General Tomlin was convinced in his own heart that Fate had cast him for the rôle of a great soldier, and his mind had played lovingly with the title of Dictator.

There seemed no doubt, at any rate, that he dominated this assembly round the table, and there were anxious and worried looks cast at him as he banged his fist on the table.

"Who the hell would have thought they'd have stopped us there?" he demanded savagely of the company in general. "Only ten minutes ago I could have sworn we were going clean through. And now . . . Do you say the attack's absolutely held up, Fisher?" He turned sharply on a red-faced man of about thirty-five, with the four short bars on his sleeve which denoted major's rank.

"No doubt about that, sir, I'm afraid," was the reply, delivered with some trepidation. "They simply couldn't advance. The fire was 'ellish."

"But dammit, round here, by Storey's Gate!" Tomlin planted his thick thumb savagely on a point

on the map. "Why, by God, once through there and we're right in Parliament Square, and everything's over, bar the squealing."

"Yes, sir, but it was an absoloot nest of machine-guns all round that corner. They'd got 'em up on the roof of the Foreign Office and everywhere. I thought we was going through, clean bang. Then our chaps found themselves clean up against it, and *'ad* to get back. There were no two ways about *that.* I was on the Horse Guards' Parade myself, and saw it. . . . Lucky I'm 'ere now."

General Tomlin did not offer any opinion as to the latter statement. He pursed his lips tightly, frowned, and drummed his fingers heavily on the table, looking down at the map.

"That Storey's Gate place is a corner that wants bombin'," he said after an interval. "Wants bombin' badly. And we haven't any aeroplanes of our own, and we can't expect any help from the Hun until to-morrow at the earliest. . . . And I want to get this done to-night. It *must* be done to-night. . . . What about it, Longford?"

Commander Longford narrowed his eyes in thought. He was a big beefy man too, but he had no mole. He had a great idea of his own capabilities all the same.

"It's *the* spot," he said with emphasis. "As you say, once through there and the thing's over. Put the Whitechapel crowd at it. They haven't had much yet, and they're always talking of what they'll do once they get a chance. Let them get their teeth into this. . . . We've got most of St. James's Park." He put his finger on the map. "They could advance carefully through the trees here, and collect, and then

make a rush for it. They've only a few yards to go, and they would very likely get through."

Longford spoke with the most cultivated speech of any man there, and he was listened to with respect. The *bourgeois*—aristocrat, even—who frothed at the mouth every time he mentioned his own class was too valuable an asset not to be appreciated. . . . But Tomlin showed no sign of jumping at the idea.

"They couldn't collect in them trees," put in Fisher quickly. "There's the searchlights, and they're sending up Verey lights twenty to the minute. The men wouldn't have a dawg's charnce to collect. They'd be shot to 'ell. That parade ground and park's a terror. It isn't the same as street fighting, not by a long chalk. *My* idea's to put the trench mortars on the second Whitehall barricade, same as we did on the first. We ought to get positions all right on the roofs of some of them buildings."

"And after that you'll find another redoubt, and behind that another," returned Longford, with a suggestion of disdain or impatience in his voice. "But at Storey's Gate we're right at the heart of the defence. If we get that, as the General says, we get everything."

"Pity Zadoff ain't 'ere. 'E'd find a way out all right." The remark was thrown out in a careless sort of way by a dark-eyed, very Hebraic-looking individual, in civilian clothes, who looked as though he might be a successful Covent Garden fruit merchant, but who was in fact the Secretary of an East End Jewish Tailors' Trade Union.

Tomlin glared at him angrily.

"If you've got nothing more helpful than that to suggest, Levinsky, I should advise you not to butt in

at all. What the blazes could Zadoff do in a case such as this? He's a murder merchant—a fancy terror specialist. I never heard of him doing any soldiering, except with a firing party. As a matter of fact, he's in London already, but he's looking after his own business, and not after mine. . . . And anyhow, I've already decided what to do, but I wanted to see first if anybody had any bright ideas."

The whole group looked at him enquiringly.

"What is it, General?" asked Longford, his tone cleverly pitched to mollify the angry man.

"Fire! We've got the whole of this side of Whitehall at our mercy. We can pitch incendiary shells into all this line of buildings out of the trench mortars. We'll get to St. Stephen's to-night if we have to burn down half Westminster to do it. It'll rattle 'em pretty badly to have the place burning about their ears."

There came a chorus of approval from all round the table at the idea.

"We'll show them whether we mean business or not," Tomlin growled.

He drew a piece of paper towards him, and wrote out an order.

"Take a car and show this all round, Fisher. Hustle 'em. I want the first shells to be pitching in within twenty minutes from now."

Fisher saluted and disappeared.

Tomlin leaned back in his chair and surveyed the company. There was a gleam of excitement in his heavy-lidded eyes.

"That'll give my dear colleagues at Westminster something to think about. I wonder how many times those dam fools have buttonholed me in the Lobby

and asked me if I really meant it. Even when I assured them I did, they only thought it was some sort of joke. I suppose because I played a round of golf occasionally with some of them they thought I couldn't harbour such wicked thoughts." Tomlin laughed. "Eh, Longford? Because you have tea on the Terrace with a millionaire he thinks you're sworn to prop up his millions against all-comers. . . . By God, how I hate some of those comfortable swine who've had all the chances, and never given any away. . . . I wonder what they're doing now. Passing emergency laws by candlelight, I expect. Lot of good it'll do them. . . . I guess the moral effect of half Whitehall burning down will do its bit. When we've got it nicely going we'll attack again, like hell. . . . I'm going to finish this by morning."

"Of course, they're all very solid stone buildings," said Longford.

"I know, Arthur, I know that." Tomlin often addressed Longford by his Christian name, as a special mark of friendship. "But there's enough woodwork and paper and red tape and stuff in 'em to make 'em blaze well. Those incendiary shells will set anything going, if there's only enough of them. . . . And once the buildings are red-hot they can't put up any defence from them. That's the real point.

"See here." He drew the map to him again. "The defence we are really up against is all in this corner. If we can get that we can ignore all the rest. . . . The back of Downing Street and this end of the Foreign Office. If we burn the whole lot down—Prime Minister's house and all the rest included—well, the defence in that corner crumbles. There can't be

any machine-guns from the roof and the windows and over the Prime Minister's garden wall with all that going on. . . . I had a fancy for occupying No. 10, Downing Street myself, but if it's got to go—it's got to go. All in a good cause." The General laughed almost genially. "Got one of those extra cigars on you, Arthur?"

There was a short general discussion on the merits of the plan. Then the General reached out for his gold-braided red cap and stood up.

"Come on, we must get up and see this begin. It isn't every night you can look at a Great Fire of London. And I want to make a little trip round the front before it starts."

The General was wearing heavy field-boots, which sounded loudly on the parquet flooring. A pair of field-glasses, taken from their leather case, hung round his neck by their thin strap. But for the complete and noticeable absence of ribbons on his tunic he looked quite a military figure.

The business-like maps on the lamp-lit table, with the figures in uniform round it, contrasting with the note of wealth and richness imparted by the wonderful pictures on the walls, and the atmosphere of war that hung over everything—all this was curiously like the conventional scene, so often portrayed and described, of a French château in war time.

The company filed noisily out, leaving the room to the candlelight and the pictures.

CHAPTER XIV

REFUGEES

A LULL on both sides had succeeded to the fury of the great assault. The sky was still lighted up by the fitful glare of the Verey lights, and the searchlights were sweeping their beams everywhere, one of them blazing down from the summit of the Clock Tower. Their rays came sweeping over Trafalgar Square in noiseless fingers of intense light, seeming eloquent of an intense watchfulness. Here and there from both sides the rattle of small arms occasionally broke out.

The General and his companions made their way out through the rear of the building, and Tomlin, with Longford and Levinsky, took his seat in a big touring car that was waiting. There were other cars waiting there, their headlights glaring brilliantly in the dark street, and occasional motor cycles dashed up and down. The National Gallery had been made the centre of all the Red administration service. Up Charing Cross Road stretched a line of motor lorries, loaded with small-arm ammunition, and two by two Red soldiers were carrying the heavy boxes down towards Trafalgar Square—down to the firing-line.

The General started off at once for his tour of the "front" before coming back to see the development of his new plan. As they turned round by the Carlton Hotel they had a glimpse of a stream of residents and

visitors being turned out of it on to the pavement, to the accompaniment of shouted commands from the soldiers.

"The new Officers' Rest House, eh?" said Tomlin with a laugh. "Well, we shan't do badly there. Very nice central position."

The headlights of the car cut a lane of light up through the darkness of the Haymarket. They showed the roadway deserted, but on the pavement to their left was a stream of people, some of the men in evening dress, some of the women with evening wraps over their light dresses—such a crowd as might, in normal times, have been coming out of the stalls of a West End theatre. But in spite of their appearance they were all at that moment homeless, cast out on to a London which had become a tragic travesty of its old self.

"Those are the kind of refugees I like to see," sang out Tomlin, with a gurgling laugh. "Walking the streets of London in their evening pumps, and nowhere to lay their pretty heads. Dam thin time they'll have to-night, I'll bet. Lucky for them it's warm. . . . That's the stuff to give 'em."

At the top of the Haymarket a sharp command to stop rang out, and the car pulled up. There was a line of Reds across the roadway. They had electric torches, and were scrutinising the refugees as they came up to them. Those in the car saw them at that moment relieve a woman of her costly evening cloak, and leave her with no covering to her white shoulders.

"Serve her damn well right," commented Levinsky. "They ought to 'ave gone upstairs and put on proper clothes when they knew there was trouble about.

They might 'ave known what was coming the moment we pinched their motor-cars."

Longford took no part in this open exultation. He had often dined in such places as the Carlton, and with such people as were now being roughly turned out of it, and he hardly knew what to feel about the subject. Tomlin's point of view he could understand, even if he was a bit muddled about his own. But to hear Levinsky giving vent to such sentiments made him writhe. He would with pleasure have thrown him out of the car, and so, he knew, would Tomlin. But Levinsky seemed to possess a mysterious influence, and was very strongly in with the Russian crowd. He had not been invited to make this tour of the "front," and neither of them wanted him. But Levinsky had just calmly stepped into the car, and come along. That was his way, and nothing seemed to suppress him.

Two Reds with fixed bayonets came to the car, and one of them flashed his torch over the occupants. He uttered a quick "Right, sir, pass on," and the two stepped smartly back.

"I like to see that. Doing their job," was Tomlin's comment as they passed on. He felt like Napoleon playing at being the Little Corporal.

There were Red patrols at intervals all along Piccadilly. Otherwise the thoroughfare was deserted, but the side streets were full of troops waiting. Before the Ritz Hotel acetylene flares were burning. The party descended and went into the entrance hall of the hotel. In the dim light of candles three Red officers were sitting at a table. There were several bottles of wine on it, with glasses, and they were looking at maps as the General came in.

"Put that stuff away," he roared, pointing to the wine. "We can't afford to have you fellows doing that yet awhile. There'll be quite enough among the men, without you setting the example. . . . What's the situation down in the park here?"

The three officers had jumped up hurriedly. There was little enough in their appearance to distinguish them from many of the men, except that they wore khaki tunics with waist belts, at each of which dangled an automatic pistol.

One of them picked up a map, and showed eagerly how the opposing lines ran.

"They're in a damn bad position," was the General's comment. "All the park in our hands, and Buckingham Palace sticking out like my fist. But we'll leave those railings alone. They'd be too nasty a nut to crack, and wouldn't get us any farther than we are, except the Palace, and we'll have that all right. Where's Colonel Foskett?"

"Just gone down to the Mall, sir. We're fixing their barricades up for ourselves—in case. Colonel Foskett said it was as well to be prepared for anything."

"Quite right, too. Tell him we're going to set fire to half Whitehall—the Foreign Office, Downing Street, and anything else that's necessary. Incendiary shells out of trench mortars. Then at the right moment, when there's been enough burning, we shall attack here." . . . He put his finger on the map. "He'll have his orders along before then."

As they turned to step into the car again they saw that a searchlight was mounted on the top of the lofty campanile of the Catholic Cathedral at Westminster, and its powerful ray was sweeping through the

park, casting the black shadows of the trees on the roadway of Piccadilly. From some of the top windows of the clubs lining the thoroughfare there was a crackle of rifle fire, these presumably being sharpshooters trying to pick off the light.

They turned up Berkeley Street, out of the way of any hostile fire, and by a devious route through deserted streets and squares made towards Park Lane. Mayfair was as silent as the grave as they went through it. Hardly a light was showing anywhere.

But as they reached Park Lane there was, much to their surprise, an outburst of rifle fire some distance up the road behind them, and the unmistakable sound of bullets in the air singing past the car. The driver pulled up suddenly as the General called out to him.

They heard the sound of men running towards them.

"What the devil does this mean?" cried the General. There was a decided note of agitation in his voice. Organised disorder was one thing, but this sort of thing, away from the battle area, seemed irregular and smelt of personal danger.

Longford produced an electric torch, and its light disclosed two Red soldiers running hard, and just drawing abreast of the car.

"Stop!" he roared in a commanding voice that was not to be denied. "What are you running for? What's the matter up there?"

"Patrol of ours just surrounded, sir," said one of the men breathlessly, blinking in the light. "We're the only two that's got away. There were twelve of us."

"Who surrounded you?" demanded the General.

"We think it's a crowd of them League chaps.

There seemed to be a lot of them—fifty, at least. First thing we knew, they opened fire suddenly. All the others were done in, and we 'ad to bolt."

"Then go on bolting, damn your eyes, and tell your commanding officer to send at least a hundred men up here to find that crowd and wipe them out. And tell him General Tomlin said so. . . . Now hurry."

"I think we'll get back," Tomlin said as the men continued down the road towards the Red lines at Hyde Park Corner. "It would be a regrettable incident if those fellers managed to capture this car load, eh? Some score for them if they got hold of the G.O.C. Revolutionary Forces. . . . Anyhow I want to get back Trafalgar Square way. We've been away long enough."

"Rather disquieting incident, that," said Longford, as the car turned round. "Wonder if there's many of those fellows roaming round. We don't want guerilla warfare in our rear to-night."

"I'll take steps to suppress it the moment we get back," the General said. "They may make themselves a bit of a nuisance as long as darkness lasts, but I don't think it's likely to be more than that."

A few moments later they turned again into Piccadilly, and just as they did so the electric arc lamps down the centre of the road sprang into light.

"Hell, just look at that!" exclaimed Tomlin. "That's a bit more of the League's work I'll bet. They've got hold of one of the power stations. There must be gangs of them roaming about. . . . This has got to be stopped at once."

"Any news of that blighter Hunter?" Levinsky asked.

"I've heard nothing, but I expect they've got him. He was one of the first on the list to be swept up. . . . Hope we get news when we get back that the *Echo* has been taken. . . . Doesn't matter a damn from the military point of view, but the moral effect will be great—especially when we've taken over and brought out an all-Red *Echo* the day after. That's where it will hit them."

As they turned down the Haymarket, now also lighted up, they saw something else unusual. The sky over the roof-tops at the bottom of the thoroughfare was beginning to glow red.

"There we go," exclaimed Tomlin in a happier tone of voice. "Now we're really getting to business. Now we *shan't* be long."

CHAPTER XV

THE FIGHT AT STOREY'S GATE

BY shortly after eleven o'clock half the Downing Street side of Whitehall was blazing furiously. There was no question of being able to stay the flames, although the fire-brigades were working frantically. At every moment incendiary bombs were plumping into one or another of the buildings, and it was obvious that in an hour or so at most they would be mere red-hot shells.

The Home Office, the Prime Minister's and the Chancellor's official residences in Downing Street, the Foreign Office and the offices of the Local Government Board were some of the buildings involved. Within half an hour of the opening of the attack by incendiarism, flames were leaping out of all the windows, and as the minutes passed the incandescent cloud of flame and sparks and smoke mounted higher and higher towards the skies, reddening the whole of the heavens and making a terrifying and awe-inspiring spectacle.

The sight of the appalling and senseless destruction that was being wrought worked up the spirits of the Red forces to a pitch of joyful frenzy. There had been considerable depression at the heavy losses sustained in the previous attacks—that and a fierce animal rage against the forces of the "capitalist classes" who were wrong-minded enough to shoot when they were attacked. But now the mounting flames

promised them a swift revenge on all that they had been taught to hate.

In a little while the old houses of Downing Street, the scene of so many vital conferences in the history of England, were mere braziers of fire. The progress of the fire with the big stone Government offices was a more leisurely, more stately business. The flames licked lazily out of the windows, as if they had taken unto themselves something of the Olympian calm of these strongholds of "la carrière," where everything is unruffled and unhurried. But their progress was none the less sure, and before midnight the three main blocks of buildings were one huge furnace, roaring steadily and strongly, which looked as though it might burn for ages.

The buildings at the end of Birdcage Walk, leading up to Storey's Gate, had also been fired, so that this whole corner of the Government defence—the most vital corner—had rapidly become untenable. From the stone arches of the Horse Guards up to this point there was only one place where the defence could retain a precarious hold. The sandbag barricade across the street at Storey's Gate was still manned, and the fierce light from the fire, which made the surroundings as plain as day, showed that the concentrated heat at that point made the tenure of the defence very difficult.

Tomlin, with his companions, surveyed the situation through his glasses from a high window in Carlton House Terrace.

"We've got to rush Storey's Gate when the fire's at its maximum," he said. "It may singe us a bit getting through, but it's when they'll be most rattled.

That redoubt is the only damn place left from which they can fire at us."

"The worst of it is, that glare gives them all the light they want," said Longford. "Our men will make a splendid target."

"It can be rushed," insisted Tomlin. "There's no doubt of it. Look there." He pointed to the jutting wing of the Foreign Office. "Our men can creep round under cover nearly all the way. There's nobody left in that blazing lot to fire at them. They won't come under any kind of cross-fire from Birdcage Walk until they're practically on Storey's Gate. We'll keep the Horse Guards arches busy with machine-guns. One real rush at Storey's Gate and it ought to be over. We'll have the Whitehall defence cut off, and be right in Parliament Square.

"They're bound to have another barricade farther up behind that one at Storey's Gate," continued the General. "But our chaps have got their blood up. This bonfire has done them no end of good. They're out for blood—there's no shadow of doubt about that. They'll want some stopping."

From where they stood they looked on a sea of flame. Occasionally there came the crash of a falling floor or roof, and a cloud of sparks shot into the air, carried on the fiery breath of the furnace. Behind arose the tall clock-tower of the Houses of Parliament, the face of Big Ben brightly illuminated, showing it to be now just after midnight.

"We'll loose it at half-past," said Tomlin. "That will give us plenty of time, and I guess the fire will be just about at its hottest by then. Something new in warfare, eh? to be able to assemble your men like

that. All within a few yards of your enemy, and in the limelight into the bargain—and yet them not able to do anything."

They made their way back to their headquarters amid the pictures, and a few minutes later the motor-cyclists were riding out with the new orders.

Half an hour after midnight a sudden fierce outbreak of rifle fire in Whitehall, punctuated by the crash of trench-mortar bombs, heralded the opening of the new attack. The Government troops were to be kept busy at other vital points while the main attack was delivered.

In spite of the fierce light that beat on them, the assaulting troops had been able to collect unobserved on the Parade. They were in no danger from the defence until they had rounded the jutting angle of the Foreign Office, and even after that it was possible, by hugging the walls, to approach immune almost up to the one point in the blazing area which the Government troops were able to hold. And on to this barricade the Reds poured a concentrated fire until the last moment.

The assaulting troops rounded the corner with a rush, and with fierce yells made for the barricade. The rifles and machine-guns of the garrison rattled out, but though scores of the Reds fell there were too many of them for their rush to be stayed. The garrison also had to fire at an acute angle, and could not bring its full power of fire to bear.

Looking like the demons they were in the red glow of the conflagration, the Reds flung themselves on the barricade. There was a crash of hand grenades as

the first of them reached it and flung their missiles over among the garrison. They were shot down, but others took their places. For minutes the inferno raged, and the steel-helmeted Guards behind the sandbags could be seen leaning over flinging bombs in return. But sooner or later the impetuosity of the attack and the weight of numbers had to tell.

There was savage hatred on both sides—a hatred that had flamed up to fiercest intensity as a result of the tragic events of the night, so that only the desire to kill was felt in the hearts of both the Government troops and the attackers. The defenders were inflamed that so much wanton savagery could be displayed by men of their own race and blood, fighting side by side with the riff-raff of Europe. The attackers were fired by the lust to kill men who, in their blindness and hatred, they thought were fighting against their own class in upholding the "Government of Capitalists."

With stabbing, shooting and the crash of bombs, with curses thick in the air, the fight for a while hung in the balance on the barricade. But the stream of Reds came on without ceasing, and the barricade was won, and what was left of its defenders killed as they fought to the last.

The victors found themselves in a narrow street of stone whose walls were red-hot, and less than another hundred yards down it was a second redoubt which, as they pressed onwards, awoke to life and began to spit out flame. But for the time being there was no staying the attackers. Their hate was at boiling-point, and there just ahead of them, lit up by the flames, was their goal—the Houses of Parliament. They had only to beat down this last barricade and they would be at

the gates of those stately buildings where the law-makers of an effete system even now sat. London and England would be theirs to do with as they wished.

There was a frenzied rush of howling demons up the street, with shouts filling the air, in half the languages of Europe. Many reached the barricade and were shot down while climbing it. For a few critical moments the fate of this last defence also hung in the balance. Some of the attackers succeeded in getting over, and were shot or bayoneted there. It was kill or be killed, and the gasping defenders fought with all the savagery of their opponents. Then round the corner from Parliament Street hundreds of men came running, soldiers and civilians mixed, led by officers with drawn revolvers, and flung themselves into the fight.

The main defence was held. But while the struggle had been raging there the Reds had burst through a barricade guarding a small side street just to the right of Storey's Gate, and hundreds poured through the gap. For many precious moments, while the fight raged at the last barricade, this dangerous gap was open to the enemy. Then as the defence gradually gained the upper hand again a machine-gun swept the main street clear and prevented any further irruption through the gap.

The Reds who had streamed through there made their way by side streets into Parliament Square, imagining that the main barricade was down also, and that the fight was finally won. There were some hundreds of them, and they rushed on exultingly. But as the first of them emerged into Parliament Square

their shouts of triumph died away, for they realised that they were trapped.

The reinforcements which had just arrived at the main barricade also realised immediately what had happened, and bore down on the invaders with a rush. Then followed a mad *tuerie*. Many of the trapped Reds tried to double back the way they had come, but found their way barred by machine-gun fire. They scattered singly or in groups, and were shot down like flying rabbits. Others turned and fought, taking shelter in doorways, and were hunted down ruthlessly. Some cast away their rifles and came forward with hands up, and were shot down just the same.

It was a mad man-hunt that went on to the accompaniment of the roaring flames—in streets that were bright with their glare, and in others that were black with shadow, in which the rifle flashes were like spears of red light. There was no question of quarter. Civilisation was fighting its ultimate battle against all that it had been trying to suppress or eradicate for centuries. Here in this strange backwater of the greater fight it was at handgrips with the Beast, and did not relax its hold until the evil life had been choked out. There were civilians and soldiers who, questing round when the hottest of the chase was over, found lurking fugitives asking for quarter, and on the spot made themselves the Law and executed swift justice. No order had gone forth to say that this should be done. But Civilisation, to survive, must have its sterner qualities, and this was a moment when mercy would have been a treason to all it was fighting for. The men who now dealt out death where mercy was asked were as impassively the instruments of Justice as the judge who

puts on the black cap, and they administered it just as unquestioningly. That morning they had been peaceable, ordinary citizens, hoping as always that England would yet right herself without giving way to madness. Now they were shooting and killing in cold fury. The transition had been swift, but this now seemed as natural as the other had been.

There was no further attack on the main barricade. When the first pearly light of dawn showed in the sky the fires were still burning strongly, although they had long ago died down from their worst fury. But the main defences of the Government remained unbroken, and the storming of the main redoubt at Storey's Gate was the high-water mark of revolutionary success in London.

CHAPTER XVI

LOOT

IT was following on the failure of the second great attack that the West End of London was delivered over to anarchy.

The second repulse coming, as did the first, just at the moment when victory seemed on the point of being achieved, was a heavy blow to the spirits of the Red Army.

To the lowest elements—those who had been attracted to the movement merely by the promise of destruction and loot—the news that the Government main defences still held, in spite of the very heavy losses incurred in trying to force them, was regarded as a signal to take matters into their own hands. Up to now the bait held before them had been the sack of Parliament—an attractive prospect, even though it meant only the destruction of lives and authority, and not the immediate possession of loot. . . . But this idea disposed of, they remembered that easier and more attractive spoil lay to their hand—unlimited loot for the taking, with no danger in doing it. They had arms in their hands, and there was nobody to stop them.

Somewhere about two o'clock in the morning the orgy of robbery and destruction began. Singly and in small parties the Reds stole away from such authority as was exercised over them, and began to smash the windows and pillage the shops and stores in Regent

Street, Bond Street, Oxford Street, and the West End quarter generally.

Weeks before this, many jewellers and art dealers had taken the precaution to remove the most valuable portions of their stocks, and had hidden them away elsewhere. But more than enough remained to make the sacking of the West End the most valuable prize that ever fell into the hands of armed ruffianism.

Once the movement had begun the public-houses were early broken into. Many of the men carried grenades, and with these it was easy to burst open the most stubborn door or iron grille. Very soon the streets were filled with parties of armed ruffians fired with liquor, and ripe for any mischief or devilry.

Fortunately one horror was almost entirely missing. The region was practically empty of population. With hardly any exceptions, the shops and other premises attacked were empty of residents at night, and most of those few who did sleep on the premises had hurried away hours ago to seek shelter with friends in other parts of London. There was loot such as no rabble had ever before dreamed of—but there were no women. And with few exceptions the attractions of the defenceless shops and stores proved a sufficient bait, without tempting the forces of anarchy farther afield in search of other prey.

In the early stages of this sudden disaffection from such discipline as they were able to wield, the Red leaders made energetic attempts to arrest the movement. Whatever their ideas of it may have been on moral grounds, they knew that from a military point of view it was highly dangerous to them. . . . But

the power of the Red discipline was based on success, and, so far, things had not gone well.

At first the street patrols in the region nearest to the " front " stopped such parties as they saw deserting, and turned them back, using their rifles on occasion. But the movement grew, and, hurriedly, numerous Red squads, each of forty or fifty men, were sent out with imperative orders to disarm and bring back all such marauders. But by now, thousands of men were out of hand and—most of them more or less drunk—were determined not to go back to storm barricades when they had such pleasurable excitement as looting within their grasp. So that the patrols who were sent out to arrest soon found themselves fighting instead, and the systematic looting of the main shopping thoroughfares proceeded to the sound of shouts and hurrying feet and rifle shots.

This soon developed to the point that the Red patrols —angry, no doubt, in their hearts that they were still submitting to a discipline from which the mutineers had broken away for their own profit—began to shoot all looters at sight. So that many a ruffian who stepped back again out of a shattered shop door, or turned away from a smashed plate-glass window with his pockets bulging with spoil, dropped dead from a Red bullet at the moment he had acquired his riches.

One curious consequence of this situation was that the Reds, the better to aid their own process of repression, caused the street lights to be turned on throughout the area concerned. And the sudden glare of the arc-lights revealed the pavements strewn with costly fabrics, and jagged holes in huge plate-glass windows; with ruffians sitting in the gutter trying on new boots

just stolen, and others who had made their hurried choice from a jeweller's stock turning to run from the hurrying feet and the shots of an approaching patrol.

A further development of the situation now began to show itself. In many cases the patrols, seduced by the sight of much treasure going begging, themselves turned looters, throwing their shadowy discipline to the winds on seeing such a tempting opportunity of putting into practice their fervent beliefs on the subject of other people's property. News of what was to be had for the mere picking spread down towards the "front," and ever fresh bands of marauders slipped away to take their share.

This process of disintegration, indeed, might have spread up to such a point that half the Red Army at least would have split up into a mere scattered, plundering rabble. But there came a totally new factor into the situation which stayed this, and brought a certain measure of coalescence even to the mutinous bands who were now sacking London.

Scattered about London there were now many bodies of Leaguers who had not been able to assemble in time to obey the general command to concentrate at Westminster. Later in the evening they had gradually collected at their various meeting-places, only to find that the situation had already crystallised, leaving them, as it seemed at first to each unit, powerless to help in the general scheme. The position of affairs at Westminster, in its broad lines, had soon become known through London, and the various units of the League realised it quicker than the general run of people. Fortunately the organisation was well supplied with

motor-cars, and communication between the various units was soon established. Moreover, many of the outer telephone exchanges had not been interfered with by the Reds. Gradually some sort of cohesion was established between the various district groups. The senior officers met to discuss the situation, and decided that as the whole crisis of the situation lay in Westminster, any help they could give should be thrown in there, in a concerted movement.

This decision was followed by the despatch towards the centre of numerous scouting parties in motor-cars. Each party left its car in charge of one of their number in some quiet side street, and ventured down into the darkness of the Red zone to glean as much information as possible. There had been many adventures in the doing of it, and some of the scouts had not returned. But long before midnight the general situation was fairly well understood. Most of the main roads into the centre were blocked by Red barricades, but the city was too vast for this to prove a complete barrier, and most of the cars succeeded in getting through and back again. It was decided to employ harassing guerilla tactics behind the Red lines.

There was no definite plan, save that each detachment was to cause as much confusion and damage as possible in the sector of the Red circle nearest to it, and to raid and harass the enemy in every way that suggested itself. For the present the operations were only intended to be carried out under cover of the hours of darkness.

As far as possible each group was conveyed towards the centre in motor-cars, these being loaded to their utmost capacity and, if necessary, making several

journeys. The various groups were split up into detachments averaging about forty men, each one being in charge of an officer who had, before this, led enterprises just as desperate, if not more so. Each group had its rendezvous, and once the infantry had set out on their enterprise the plan was to turn the motor-cars into a kind of motor cavalry, and with three men in each car, in addition to the driver, to cause as much trouble as possible by swift surprise attacks on any small bodies of Reds encountered. In a considerable number of cases these cars were armed with Lewis guns.

The new factor began to make its presence radically felt in the early hours of the morning. Some detachments were at work before midnight, and it was one of these of which General Tomlin had such sudden news in Park Lane. Another detachment had also made a surprise attack on one of the power-stations supplying the western district, and kept the light going until they had judged it wise to retreat before a much larger body of Reds sent to clear them out. But the Reds were not really aware of the scope of the menace in their rear until a later hour—until, in fact, it became apparent that the wholesale looting was being put down by an agency other than their own.

These scattered bands of looters—and the patrols which were looking for the looters—proved at first to be very easy game for the Leaguers. Wherever they were met with they were mopped up with the greatest celerity. One Red detachment which held its ground against a sudden swoop in Regent Street was entirely destroyed by a motor-car party armed with a Lewis gun, and the motor cavalry proved to be especially

useful in hunting down smaller parties and fugitives in side streets.

For an hour or more this extraordinary phase of the general disorder continued—a long succession of exciting or fantastic incidents. There was, for instance, the bizarre affair of a score or more of looters who had broken into one of the largest stores in Oxford Street and were caught as they were emerging, laden with spoil, through the shattered plate-glass windows by a patrol of Reds of about equal numbers. But the struggle between these two factions had scarcely begun when a detachment of Leaguers appeared on the scene. The two parties of Reds joined forces at once, and there followed a fantastic fight which did not end until the survivors on the Red side had been chased throughout the innumerable departments of the great store and exterminated.

By two or three o'clock in the morning looting in the West End was practically suppressed, save in the case of small scattered parties who had wandered far afield, or were operating quietly in side streets. And then there followed a lull. For the first time since the beginning of the outbreak there was for a space absolute quiet on both sides. Westminster stood to its defences, and the Red Army remained quiescent. Save for the burning buildings in Whitehall and the trailing fingers of the searchlights there was no sign of activity of any kind.

It was suddenly broken by a series of audacious raids executed by the Leaguers in rear of the Red forces. From out of Mayfair on to Hyde Park Corner, through Soho down into the Haymarket, into Sloane Square and at half a dozen other points the armed

cars of the Leaguers suddenly appeared, poured in a hot fire from their machine-guns and rifles, and dashed away again. The result was to draw off considerable bodies of Reds, who followed in the track of the retreating cars and found themselves received by strong bodies of Leaguers well posted to receive them. There followed a period of hot guerilla fighting, in which the scouting of the motor cavalry proved invaluable to the Leaguers in a series of running fights, which gradually spread out, fan-wise, away from the main centre of operations.

General Tomlin was sitting again surrounded by his Staff in the room at the National Gallery. There was more light now, but there was a decided touch of gloom in the faces of some of those round the table.

"If only we had those damned aeroplanes here now," Tomlin was saying savagely, "we'd blow Westminster to bits about their ears. But they don't start until to-morrow. . . . There's the wily Boche for you. . . . He wouldn't throw in his bit of help until he saw we were well started."

"They didn't want to risk another blow at the British Empire until they were convinced we'd really begun to pull it down for them," said Longford.

"That's so. Anyhow, some time to-morrow Westminster will begin to feel all broken up. Our little fire will be child's play to it. We stand fast until then. When the bombing's over we push in with every man we've got and take over what's left of the Houses of Parliament. This London business must be wiped up completely some time within the next twelve hours. There's too much in the Provinces hanging on it for

any more delay to be healthy. . . . We'll have to draw off from that *Echo* business. They're holding on to it too tight, and we can't afford to have two or three thousand men kept up there when we may want them all down here. The *Echo* will have to throw up the sponge with the rest when we've finished up with Westminster."

"I'm not too easy in my mind about these Leaguer fellers who are ripping up and down the West End," put in Levinsky surlily. "That never ought to 'ave been allowed to 'appen."

Tomlin glared at him with hate in his eyes.

"Dammit, we've chased 'em away, haven't we? Do you expect things to go *all* our own way? It will be light soon, and that'll settle their business finally. They're mosquitoes, that's all."

He looked at his watch.

"It's a quarter to four. In about nine hours from now the first of the bombers will begin to arrive. The situation can't change until then."

"We'll hope not," said Levinsky, with the hint of a sneer in his voice, "unless it's for the better."

"Dammit!" Tomlin blazed out at him, his anger breaking bounds. "To hear you sitting there, with your dark ugly mug, one would think we hadn't done anything. We nearly got there to-night, and to-morrow afternoon—hell, what am I talking about—to-day, *this* afternoon, we *will* be there. I'd rather have got Westminster without the bombers. Those aerial torpedoes will make such a mess of the place, and it would have been better to have it all clean and tidy to move into. . . . But that's their look-out now. Anyhow, sometime to-day the Red Government will

be sitting in Westminster, what's left of it, and that's something to be going on with. . . . And now I'm for a couple of hours of bed. Who's coming to the Carlton with me? You coming, Arthur?"

The company rose, most of them looking tired and haggard in the first early light of morning which was filtering down into the room through the skylights.

Levinsky went to the wall and unhooked one of the pictures. It was Rembrandt's "A Jewish Rabbi."

Tomlin boiled with rage as he saw the action. At that moment he forgot the internationalism of which he had so often boasted. He felt wholly British, and not a citizen of the world. And he felt that he would have loved to wring Levinsky's neck.

"Here, what are you going to do with that?"

"Take it as a sooveneer."

"But look here, Levinsky, no looting. Not amongst us, at any rate. We leave that to the rabble, and they've been getting shot for it." Tomlin spoke loudly and sternly.

Levinsky laughed.

"This isn't looting. This is sentiment. This old boy is the very spit of my old father, and I said to myself as soon as I seen it, 'That picture's mine.' You bet I'm going to pinch it. After all, in times like these you can't afford to lose a chance. You never know what to-morrow will bring, these days." And Levinsky disappeared through the door, taking his masterpiece with him.

Tomlin turned to Longford, his fists clenched, his face contorted with helpless anger.

"By God, Arthur, but I ought to shoot him, that's what I ought to do—I ought to shoot him. . . . Him

and his damned Russian crowd—the airs they're giving themselves, blast them. One would think they were running the show."

"Well, I'm afraid they are—very largely."

"Damn them!" Tomlin breathed heavily through set teeth. "I tell you, Arthur, that sort of thing makes one feel British—just British—dammit, English if you like! It makes me feel like saying, 'To hell with all this international stuff.' . . . But come on, I must keep my temper." He mastered himself with an effort. "I've got too much to do. Let's go and get some sleep while we can."

CHAPTER XVII

PRISONERS OF WAR

THE three watchers on Olympia all felt very grave and depressed after Hunter had reported the substance of his conversation with Melrose. He had rung up at a moment when things were looking very black for the defence, and Melrose had reported the situation just as he understood it to be.

They stared out towards the glow of the conflagration. They could also see the green glare of the Verey lights —faint, but discernible, against the crimson background of the heavens—and the stabbing, white rays of the searchlights as they moved about restlessly.

Hunter, as he gazed through his glasses, was trying to picture the scene that was hidden from him—the carrying of the main barricade at Trafalgar Square, the break-through into the park, and the opening of the new attack, as described to him very briefly by Melrose. And at this very moment, too, the *Echo*, with his own " Iron Division," was in the thick of it, and hard-pressed at that. . . . If only he could be taking a part somehow, helping to strike a blow at this moment for England in her extremity ! He was chafing, raging almost, at being so completely cut off from everything at such a time. Even as he now looked at the reflection of the battle the final catastrophe might be happening, and the Reds swarming

into Parliament Square, with London in their hands. . . . But for Violet he would have been down in the streets long ago, making his way to where such tremendous things were happening, and taking his chance with the rest. . . . But that was the one reason why he was where he was, and for that reason he must keep command of his emotions. They were not out of the wood yet, by any means. If Westminster fell, the *Echo* would certainly soon follow, and he would be very much a fugitive.

It was Billy who first broke the silence.

"Well, we live in times, don't we? Fancy the original Mother of Parliaments being in danger of capture by an army of unwashed gunmen in Whitehall."

"It became the Grandmother of Parliaments," said Hunter. "That was largely the cause of all the trouble. The Old Lady has been failing for a long time past."

"If they get the whole political crowd it will be some boost for the Reds. A Government doesn't cut any great amount of ice once it's been captured. Even in Mexico it isn't regarded as the correct thing."

"It will be no more than some of its members deserve," said Hunter viciously. . . . "But, as you say, it will be a mighty grave thing if the Reds do get them. In fact, it might be the knock-out blow for us as far as London is concerned. And if London goes, Heaven knows what will happen to the rest of the country. However, we are not done yet. We beat off the first attack, and I've no doubt we'll do the same with this one."

He was careful not to say just how desperately

worried and anxious he felt. He did not want to depress Violet too much, as she might have need of all her courage at any moment.

Gradually as they stood there, watching the conflagration and listening to the faint sounds of the fighting, they became aware that the streets below were waking up from the silence that had so long held them. A car passed noisily somewhere close by, then stopped. Then another, and soon the streets seemed to be alive with them. But there was no movement apparent in the street down below at their end of the building.

The sounds of activity continued, and there was the noise of somebody hammering hard on a door, followed by the harsh sound of splintering wood.

"It's down at the main entrance," said Hunter. "I wonder what it's all about."

Time passed, and then suddenly the great glass building below them was illuminated with what, to their eyes now accustomed to the darkness, seemed a blinding white light.

The two men looked at each other.

"What do you make of that?" exclaimed Billy. "Sort of cuts our line of communications, doesn't it?"

"You're right. It's a development I hadn't reckoned on. It may complicate matters."

"Suppose we go out along the roof and do a bit of scouting? Seems to me it might be worth our while thinking of beating it out of this while there's time—if there is."

"Right—but we shall have to keep very low with that light glaring up. First of all, let's fix you up,

Violet, in the sleeping-bag. You may as well get some sleep if you can. We'll trot out and see what's going on."

She gripped his hand.

"Don't go running into any more danger than you can help, Bryan," Violet pleaded. "We're safe here for a time, at any rate."

"All right, little one. I promise you we're not going far afield, but we must see what all this means. You just lie down and take it easy, and we'll be back soon."

They went cautiously along the ridge of the roof, and soon became aware that there were men walking about, some of them carrying lights, in the yard through which they had come. Any escape that way seemed out of the question. They therefore continued along the roof to where, near the middle of it, a sliding section half open would give them a view of the interior.

Lying down, they peeped below. At first the glare of the arc-lamps that sizzled and flickered beneath them made it difficult for them to make out what was going on. But gradually they saw that the great hall below them was full of men, who were moving up and down busily.

Some six or seven weeks before, preparations were being made at Olympia for a great furniture exhibition. But when only a small proportion of the exhibits had been installed the breakdown of all transport, due to the general strike, had caused the abandonment of the exhibition. Such exhibits as had arrived at Olympia had been left there, and the Reds far down below on the floor of the building were now busy putting the place into something like order, under the directions of a few men wearing the red brassard. Soon

the two watchers realised what was being done. A dozen or more tables were being placed in line across the hall, not far from the main entrance. And arranged round these was an oval of arm-chairs and divans of all kinds—Empire, Louis Quinze, Sheraton and the rest.

"Reminds me of the Peace Conference in the old days at Versailles," said Billy. "Say, that's exactly what it is, more or less. This is going to be some sort of Bolshie G.H.Q. The Red Panjandrums are going to place their regal persons on that elegant furniture and draw up plans for the sack of London."

"Something of that sort. . . . But look what's coming in at the door. Prisoners, by God!"

Through the door, guarded by Reds with fixed bayonets, came a double file of men, most of them middle aged, and all of a certain class. Several were in evening dress, and among the last to come in was a woman. Hunter put his glasses on to her immediately, and with a start of dismay recognised her as Mrs. Sheringham, a lady whom he knew very well. Mrs. Sheringham had taken an active part in the work of the Liberty League. She was a widow who had lost her only two sons in the war. "I do not see why they should have sacrificed their lives so that the country they fought for should now be handed over to the horrors of Bolshevism," she had said to Hunter, and it was under such a stimulus that she had worked for the cause.

Examining the rest of the prisoners with more care, Hunter found that half a dozen or more of them were fairly close personal acquaintances, and that many others he had met, or knew well by repute. There was

Wilfred Hendy, the editor of a monthly review which had been unsparing in its attacks on Bolshevism and all its vile works; there was Sir Ernest Ryland, a well-known Member of Parliament, who not long before in the House had denounced the increasing tyranny of the Trade Unions, and demanded that the Government should take effective measures against their ever-growing menace; there was Marshall Knott, head of a big firm of provision merchants, who had resisted a lightning strike of his employees over some trifling affair, and after a long fight had completely broken it.

A white-haired, almost venerable old man he recognised as Lord Ferndale, aged seventy or more, a well-known banker who had never ceased to bombard the Press with letters calling on the people to react against the tide of Communism and Labour tyranny which was gradually killing the economic life of the country. And there was the burly figure of John Day, M.P., a Labour leader of the old type, who had played a distinguished part in the war, and who for months past had continually raised his powerful voice against the insane and vicious policy of the type of man that had succeeded him. At least half the prisoners Hunter recognised as men who in some form or other had distinguished themselves in active opposition to the sinister tendency of the times.

He told Billy what he knew of the prisoners, picking them out individually as they looked through their glasses.

"It is evident that just about the time they sent for me they had many other parties out all over London looking for others they had marked down," he said.

"I expect that all those unhappy people down there have been on a sort of Black List for long past."

"And but for your useful pistol practice you'd be among the bunch."

"I expect so—there or lying somewhere else on my back by now. For all we know, there's been a lot of murder of that kind going on all over the place."

"You may be pretty sure of it, old son. And I wouldn't give much for the chances of those people down below."

Hunter groaned.

"My God, no! And it's in London! And it can't be stopped! And some of us have been saying for years past that it would come to this, and we were regarded as fools, or worse. . . . If only I could see a few people I know of standing down there instead."

There were altogether about forty prisoners, and they were now herded into a corner of the great building, with a line of Red Guards standing before them, talking and laughing among themselves, the butts of their rifles planted on the ground.

"Even I—and God knows I had few illusions on the matter—but I always hoped, against my own common sense, that if it did come to revolution there would be none of this. I always maintained that the English character did not possess that bottom slime of cruelty and devilry which is necessary to do this sort of thing. But look at those swine laughing and joking among themselves. . . ."

"At least half those fellers are dagoes of one kind and another," said Billy, looking at them carefully through his glasses.

"Yes, but we've got our own scum—although I

can't imagine anything but the scum doing this. I don't think the ordinary workman, who's had his head turned by Communist clap-trap, will make up their firing-parties for them. . . . What did Carlyle write when he was describing the killing of the Princesse Lamballe, in the French Revolution—' Oh, for the hammer of Thor ! ' wasn't it ? By Heaven, I wish I had it now, and the power to wield it."

" He was a Hun, anyhow, old man Thor, wasn't he ? That's the kind you need to talk on an equality with the Bolshies."

" Look here, Billy. If it does come to the worst—if they *do* shoot those wretched people down while we are here—I don't think I shall be able to stand it. Those people are my friends, and they've been trying to do what I've been trying to do. . . . I've got that rifle. Do you think I ought to make a diversion from here if it comes to shooting them down ? Will you stand by me ? "

Billy was quiet for a few moments, thinking hard, before he replied :

" Well, old son, if you *insist*, if you absolutely insist, I don't see any way out of standing by you. But have you thought it over ? If we butt in from here I don't see how it can save *them*. But it certainly will mean that you'll go through it, and I shall go through it—and what's more, your wife will. If I thought it could save those people down below, I'd say, ' Go right ahead.' But it couldn't. We wouldn't have a dog's chance. The place is full of 'em. . . . Do you want to see this roof swarming with bloodthirsty dagoes, looking for the three of us, and very pleased to find that one of us is a lady ? "

"You're right, Billy. If there were a chance of saving them—if I were alone—I'd do it. But Violet makes all the difference. . . . Anyhow, I'm going back to her for a moment. I'm going to pitch her a yarn about this being a sort of Red drill hall, so as to have some sort of explanation of the firing—if any takes place. In that case, I don't want her to realise what's happening down below. . . . And more than that, I'm going to get on to Melrose, and see if there's any chance of anything being done. If there's the barest hope of saving those people, I've got to find it."

CHAPTER XVIII

A LESSON IN TERRORISM

BACK again in the lantern, Hunter found Violet lying down in the sleeping-bag and on the point of going to sleep. He explained that the Reds were apparently preparing to use the place as a sort of headquarters and drill hall, and added that they were fixing up a rifle range for practice. She was drowsy, and allowed him to make her more comfortable.

"Now try and go to sleep," he said. "It's the only thing to do. I'm going to make out a code message to Melrose, and ask him if there's any chance of his helping us to get out of this."

He was glad to see that by the time he had composed his message, which cost him some care and ingenuity, she had apparently dropped off. He described the startling development at Olympia, and asked if there was any possible chance of anything being done to rescue the prisoners. The answer to that, he knew beforehand, depended largely on the situation at Westminster and at the *Echo*.

Having spoken his code message to the office, he sat with the head-piece on waiting for a reply.

In about five minutes' time he heard Melrose's voice calling him.

"Ah, there you are," said Hunter. "Is that message all clear?"

"Quite, and I understand just how you must feel about it. But I don't see yet how I can help you out."

"What's the situation?"

"Better, thank God, as far as this place is concerned. We've beaten off what Bateman says is their main attack. There's still a devil of a racket going on outside, but everybody seems to think the worst is over. They've had trench mortars on to us, and it's been pretty bad. But we've held out, and that's the main thing."

"Thank God for that! That's great news. And Westminster?"

"Good too, as far as we know it. Message through from Langton only a few minutes ago. He's not sure of the exact situation, but apparently the Government has beaten off the second big attack. Half Whitehall burnt down, but they've been kept off. The news, in fact, is very encouraging from there, only we don't know what the next Red move will be, and when they'll attack again. But they've had very heavy losses. They may not be so keen on trying again for a little while."

"We shall hold—I am sure we shall," said Hunter fervently. "But what about this place? Is there any hope? It probably seems very much of a side show to you, but if anything can possibly be done I want you to have a try. It'll be awful to know these people are going through it, and not be able to do anything to stop it. I'm speaking very guardedly, by the way. There's always the chance of our talk being tapped. Be careful."

"I know, I know. . . . I don't see what can be done, but I'll do my best. At the very earliest possible

moment I'll put it to Bateman and Shotley, and you know they'll do the impossible, if there's the slightest chance of it. But for the moment I don't see any hope. . . . You may have to steel yourself to it. But I'll call up as soon as I can say anything."

"Right—I suppose we shall have to leave it at that. Let me have any news as soon as you can. If you don't get me at once, keep on calling. I may be some little distance away from the telephone, but I'll come back to it from time to time."

"All right. Good luck, and keep your pecker up. I'll put it before Bateman as soon as I can get hold of him. He's pretty busy, as you can imagine."

Hunter went back along the roof, feeling miserable and desperate in spite of the better news of the general situation. For the moment his feelings were concentrated on what he felt would almost certainly happen down below, and although he had invoked the only possible chance there was of obtaining help, he had known, even in doing it, that it was a forlorn hope.

He had been away about a quarter of an hour when he joined Billy again at his post of observation, and reported the result of his conversation with Melrose.

"I think you may count any idea of help right out, old man. When this business begins we've just got to try and pretend that we're a hundred miles away from it. I know how you feel, but it just isn't practical. . . . And say, there's a number of the Red main guys arrived while you've been away. There they are, standing in a bunch, near that end table."

As he spoke one of the men detached himself from the group and gave some order to a number of soldiers.

As a result of it the straight line of tables and chairs was altered to a horseshoe shape.

"More like the Peace Conference than ever," murmured Billy.

Other "main guys" began to arrive, and in a little while there were nearly thirty of them. Some of these also Hunter knew. He commented on them in reply to Billy's eager questioning.

"Who's the Holy Roller with side-beards, who looks as though he ought to be handing round the plate?" Billy asked.

"That's the famous Muttlebury—one of the world's wonders. As you say, he ought to be a churchwarden, or something of the kind. Instead, for some unknown reason, he has chosen to develop from plain ordinary socialism into the fiercest of red revolutionaries, demanding blood and Heaven knows what. Most people who know him say he's a nice, friendly soul, with a plain wife and a large family, all wearing spectacles. But he leaves the bosom of this charming circle every day, and goes to a back room in Fleet Street to write flaming fulminations against the capitalist and *bourgeois*—although he's a fairly wealthy man himself, and lets somebody else manage his linoleum factory. He's a crank, with the unfathomable mind of the crank, and that's all you can say about him. At this moment he's probably quite muddled in his mind as to whether he's going to assist at a massacre or a meeting. We've got a lot like him in England, and they've caused even more trouble than they intended to."

"Sort of feller who didn't know it was loaded, eh?"

"That's it, exactly. There's another one much

on the same lines, although he's not so much a crank as a political wire-rope walker. Locock, I mean—the little man standing to the left with a light hat. He's been hunting with the Government hare and the Labour hounds for years now, and there are at this very moment millions of worthy people in this country who regard him as a sound, reliable man, who's out for peace. I'll bet you that as he stands there his brain is in a whirl at the idea that at last he's had to come down openly on the side he's always been working for. At this moment he'd probably give half he possesses—and he's not so badly off either—to be safely addressing a revolutionary meeting at Glasgow or Swansea or somewhere, and then going comfily to sleep in the best room at the best hotel. He must be feeling very agitated just now."

"And who's the big husky guy with the pleased smile, who looks like a White Hope being interviewed by the reporters?"

"Ah, now you come to the real stuff, Billy. That's the famous Alf Billings. Alf has lived in the lap of luxury for years past, and knows how to choose a good cigar and wear a dinner-jacket. He was almost a society pet at one period. I've been at a dinner-party and heard him talking red-hot revolution, and people listening with amused and polite expressions on their faces, and saying that he was very entertaining. But at heart Alf is a bloody-minded rascal—as bad a fellow as that big chap you saw lying in my study. He's out for power, and doesn't mind what other people pay for it. That engaging bonhomie of his has been his biggest asset. People have thought he's said all these things without

really meaning them. I was in the audience at a real revolutionary meeting down in the East End not so long ago, and they would have been surprised to see Billings' face and hear his language then. . . . Whatever happens here to-night won't come as a surprise to Alf."

"Now all that was real interesting," said Billy earnestly. "I've got so used to seeing these revolutions and things all over Europe that I've come to regard them as sort of Nature stunts, like cloudbursts or cyclones. But when one hears the individuals picked off like that by a real political sharpshooter—well, it makes one realise that the good old human equation's there every time."

So, discussing revolution and its makers, they lay there on the apex of the roof, looking at the opening stages of the drama down below. But all the while he was talking Hunter could not rid his mind of that unhappy group in the corner, and the thought of their certain fate gave him a sinking at the heart. Not once again after they first came in had he turned his glasses on them. The thought that he should be there, knowing what their end was to be, and yet powerless to help them, was agonising.

There was now a sudden movement among the group of Communist leaders, and half a dozen of them —headed by Muttlebury and Billings—went to the main door. Their attitude suggested that they had gone to meet somebody to whom they attached great importance.

In a few moments they reappeared, coming back from the entrance, gathered obsequiously round a central figure. They all walked towards the tables,

talking animatedly. The scene suggested nothing so much as a royal personage being received at an exhibition, and deferentially shown his way about.

"Gee whizz!" almost shouted Billy. "Do you see who it is? It's old man Zadoff. I saw him just over a year ago in Hungary. I'd know him again anywhere."

"You're right, Billy. I've only once seen a photo of him, but that's Zadoff right enough. . . . So that's what we've come to!"

"No wonder they're kow-towing to him. Look at the whole lot of 'em gathering round now like a bunch of young ladies being presented to a famous literary celebrity. How are you?—dee-lighted to meet you. Say, he's got all the affability of a bishop meeting the bell-wethers of his flock. And he's come to show 'em how it should be done. This is surely some pleasant occasion. If only somebody would hand round the sherbet and cakes, their cup of joy would be bursting."

Hunter set his teeth as he looked at the features of the man of whom all the world had heard, but who remained very much of a mystery. It was Zadoff, the emissary of terror—the man who had passed through Europe like a torch organising and stimulating terrorism, and who, wherever he had passed, had left behind him blackness and horror and desolation. And as Hunter studied him now through his glasses he could make out every detail of the features of this international Robespierre: his narrow, Mongolian eyes, his pale sunken cheeks, drooping moustache, and the white of his chin that showed through a straggling black beard.

"Sort of face you might expect to see on a tea-chest," said Billy, hitting it off perfectly.

And Zadoff was now in England, bland and smiling there within a few feet of him, as it seemed; receiving the adulation of his acolytes in devilry. It would have been ludicrous, had it not been so horrible, to see Muttlebury with his fatuous, cheesemonger's face, with its absurd side-whiskers, exerting himself to be fulsomely pleasant. It was a strange combination—the English crank who apparently confused terrorism with the temperance movement, and the urbane, easy-mannered terrorist from Russia, who could invent devilries as easily as he could turn a polite phrase.

With much ceremony Zadoff was shown to the central seat at the head of the horseshoe—a magnificent red morocco easy-chair of English make, which some confiding manufacturer had sent to London for exhibition.

With Muttlebury to the right of him and Billings to the left, Zadoff sat down, and the rest of the makers of revolution, some thirty or more, distributed themselves round the horseshoe.

And then Muttlebury arose to make a speech of welcome. Here in the early hours of the morning, with the noise of battle faintly audible in the air, and unhappy prisoners huddled a few yards away waiting to be shot, Muttlebury wished to say a few pleasant words to the distinguished visitor. All his life he had been doing this sort of thing, from his earliest days, when as an earnest young man he had first taken the chair at a local Socialist debating society. And it did not occur to him for a moment that this was not an excellent and fitting occasion

to "say a few words." He had lived for speeches, and was as bland at this moment as he would have been at a wedding breakfast.

A few odd words came up to Hunter as he lay up there on the roof. He was familiar with the devious and baffling mind of the *genus* crank. But Muttlebury at that moment was surely surpassing anything ever done by his kind before. Hunter was struck with wonderment at the exhibition.

Throughout the speech of welcome "our trusty comrade from Russia," as Muttlebury described him, smiled pleasantly, almost deprecatingly. For a few minutes the tragic farce continued. Then Muttlebury sat down, with an expression of serene content on his plump face.

Billings followed him at once. He held what was apparently a list of names in his hand, and he made a speech of quite a different kind. His powerful voice rose up to them, and they heard most of what he said: ". . . first tribunal of its kind in this country . . . moment had come to put into practice without flinching what they had been so long preaching . . . final overthrow of capitalist classes . . . establishment of proletarian rule throughout the world." Once he spoke of "active enemies of the cause" and waved his hand to the prisoners standing in the corner. There was no doubt as to the tenor of Billings' discourse. He sat down with the air of a man who had disposed of a piece of business, and not of one who had made a speech.

A moment later he rose again.

"Comrades, we shall take them as they come," he announced, and sat down again.

At a signal, two of the guards standing in the corner came forward with the first man to their hand. Hunter did not know him. He was of middle age, slightly bald, and dressed as any business or City man might be. Standing at the foot of the horseshoe, with a guard on each side of him, he faced his accusers.

Billings consulted his list, and said something to Zadoff, who nodded his head vehemently. There was another expression on Zadoff's face now as Hunter looked at him. His black eyes glittered, and, although he remained motionless in his chair, there was something in his pose which spoke of a fierce intensity. He looked like some devilish idol come to life, and presiding intelligently over a sacrifice in his honour.

They could only see the prisoner's back as he stood to meet his fate, but it was enough to show that he faced his accusers boldly. Billings, half rising in his chair, shot a series of questions at him, to which the prisoner made no kind of answer. Billings' voice rose.

"You did your best, by bribes of money, to get men to desert from their Union and to go on working for you. Isn't that so?"

For the first time the prisoner moved as if to speak. They heard him say:

"You seem to know all about it."

"Did you or did you not? Answer me that." Billings bellowed the words at him, and banged the table with his clenched hand.

"Oh, go to hell!"

The voice of the prisoner, reckless but with a sug-

gestion of weariness and contempt in it, came up to them faintly.

"My, but he's game," murmured Billy.

Billings turned angrily to Zadoff and said something rapidly to him. The Chief Terrorist nodded.

"Take him over there," Billings shouted, pointing to the empty floor to the right of where the tribunal was sitting, "and two of you look after him."

And even from that short experience it was easy to see the gulf that separated Zadoff the master from Billings his pupil: the calm finish of the one, and the blustering self-assertive mediocrity of the other. Whatever brutalities he might accomplish, Billings would never be an artist in terrorism.

With much the same procedure five more men were examined, including Hendy, who was put through a cross-examination, which would have been farcical had it not meant so much, as to who had prompted him to attack Bolshevism in his monthly review —an inquisition which Hendy for the most part treated with contemptuous silence. Billings did practically all the talking, though now and again there came a question or a comment from one or other of the men sitting round the horseshoe. And not one of the prisoners faced the situation other than courageously, although there was none who gave expression to the open defiance and contempt of the first.

There were now six men standing under guard to the right of the tribunal—six men judged and condemned. Billings again consulted Zadoff, and stood up.

"Comrades, we are now about to make the first example."

The guards in charge of the six victims hustled them roughly towards the wall of the building, and lined them up at intervals of a yard.

There was some confusion in choosing a firing-party, and for a few minutes a process of selection and rejection seemed to be going on among the Red Guards scattered about the hall. But at last all seemed ready, and a dozen men stood ready about fifteen paces from the first six who were to be butchered.

Hunter had determined not to witness the actual execution, but he was keenly alive to what was happening just preceding it. Sick at heart himself, he yet noticed that Muttlebury seemed anxious and worried. Several times while the final preliminaries were going on Muttlebury plucked Billings by the sleeve, leaning back behind Zadoff to do so, and talking to him earnestly. Billings answered him each time very abruptly and turned impatiently away from him. And at last Muttlebury, obviously a prey to emotion, jumped up, and began to speak rapidly, almost hysterically, in a loud voice. They could hear most of what he said.

"Gentlemen," he began, with unconscious irony, "I wish to ask whether you are all agreed that it is really necessary to shoot these people. . . . I never really thought . . . At any rate, let the execution be postponed until . . ."

There came a babble of protest from round the tables, and Billings leaned from his chair and pulled Muttlebury violently back into his seat. But Muttlebury jumped up again, his face aflame with emotion.

"I will be heard," he shouted. "I have always

been against the taking of life—even of human life. . . ."

A chorus of protest drowned his words, but he still continued to shout, waving his arms furiously. Zadoff turned in his chair, quietly, and looked up at Muttlebury. And then the real artist in the Russian showed itself.

He spoke to Billings, who at first looked startled. Then as Zadoff talked further a grin overspread Billings' features, and he nodded his head rapidly in agreement. With the uproar still continuing he signalled to a group of guards standing near. They came up at a run, and he gave them an order. In a twinkling three of them had plucked Muttlebury from his seat, and rushed him to the wall. He kicked and struggled frantically, shouting at the top of his voice, and displaying surprising strength and agility. There was a call for something to bind him with, and in a few moments he was tied by the arms and legs and stuck flat against the wall. But he still struggled and shouted, with the result that he toppled helplessly forward on to his face.

At this a big arm-chair was brought up at a run from the plentiful stock in the centre of the building, and Muttlebury, hoisted to his feet again, was pushed back to the wall with the heavy piece of furniture now holding him securely, no matter how much he tried to writhe and struggle. But nothing could still his voice, and he continued to shout.

Hunter looked at the faces of the men on the tribunal. Three or four of them seemed to be enjoying the amazing spectacle. But the majority were apparently astonished, even dismayed, at the extraordinary

turn affairs had taken—that one of their number should suddenly find himself judged and not judging. It was a lesson in practical terrorism which did not seem to be altogether to their liking. Here and there heads were put together, whispering. But the calm man at the head of them, who had come to show how such things should be done, dominated them all. They were already his creatures, terrorised themselves. There was no sign of active protest, in spite of the frenzied appeals Muttlebury was now addressing to them.

All heads were now turned in the direction of the firing-party and their victims. The six martyrs about to be murdered stood there with a calm courage which Hunter groaned to think might have been put to better use. But Muttlebury was squirming desperately in his bonds, and shouting out appeals for help.

"It is murder, I tell you," he cried, "foul murder. Haven't any of you the pluck to face that Russian devil. . . . For God's sake, some of you . . ."

A guard wearing a sergeant's stripes, who had taken up a position at the end of the firing-party, gave an order. The rifles came up, and Hunter turned his head away. There was a ragged volley that echoed thunderously in the great building. An uncanny quiet followed, in which Hunter suddenly became aware again of the faint tap-tap of firing from the direction of Whitehall. It seemed almost like an echo.

When he looked down again the tribunal seemed about to pull itself together, and get to work again, although one or two heads were still turned to look at the sight by the wall. Billings stood up.

"Comrades, we've just witnessed a very useful example of how things should be done. The idea, I need hardly tell you, came from Comrade Zadoff. We've no room for fainthearts. We can't afford to have people with us who don't know their own minds from one minute to another." Billings looked fiercely round the faces of the tribunal. "One of our number is now missing because he was very big at talking, but no good when it came to practical work." He looked at his watch. "And now we'll get on with the business."

There was a murmur of assent from his listeners, and Billings signalled for another victim to be brought forward.

"Say, have you seen enough?" came from Billy, in a strangely subdued voice.

"Oh, Christ, yes, more than enough."

"Come on then. Let's get out of this."

CHAPTER XIX

HOPE BY WIRELESS

BACK in their retreat they found Violet sleeping. Billy looked down at where she lay.

"Curious, isn't it, for her to be lying asleep up here—especially when we think of what's happening down below. I expect she's tired out, poor girl. . . . Say, do you feel like sleep, Hunter?"

"My God, no."

"Nor me, either, although I generally take any chance of a nap I can get when I'm out on a job. We'll just sit down and have a smoke. . . . We must do something."

They had talked in hushed voices. Hunter mechanically filled his pipe, but that done he dropped it and sat staring in front of him—seeing again the horror and the brutality of that scene down below.

"It's funny, you know," almost whispered Billy, after a long pause, "but I feel all turned up too. I've seen pretty well every sort of violent death in my time, but I can't help thinking of those poor fellers lying at the foot of that wall. I suppose it's because they belong to the Union."

"Union! What Union?" Hunter's voice broke out harshly at the sound of the word. "Why, those poor devils were shot because . . ."

"Oh, I didn't mean that. I mean the Breakfast-Eating Union, of course. That explains why I feel

so upset. Those fellers belong to our own crowd. Now I've seen every kind of thing happen—revolutions, massacres, pogroms, refugees by the million, and all the rest of it, with whole villages and towns dying of starvation, and people eating grass and roots, and Christ only knows what else. And I thought I was hardened to anything. But I see now. All those people I've seen before were dagoes of one sort or another. I was merely a spectator, and it didn't occur to me it was up to me to worry. You know what I mean. It can't be done. If the whole world wants to go crazy, one can't shed tears for the lot of them. . . . But when you see your own crowd going through it, it's another story. . . . Say, think of all those poor devils huddled up in that corner, waiting!"

"I know, I know," groaned Hunter. "For God's sake don't talk of it, Billy. And if they'd all done what I've been preaching for months past—what I was lucky enough to do myself—well, some of them might have been dead already, but it would have been better than this. And a few more of those swine would have been dead too."

"I expect they were all taken by surprise, old man. It probably came too quick. They're game enough now. Not that it cuts any ice, worse luck. It only makes those revolutionary fellers all the wilder when they see decent people dying like gentlemen. I've noticed that more than once. . . . D'you know, I figured out long ago that if those aristocrats in the French Revolution had only squealed a bit at the beginning there wouldn't have been so much guillotining. But they all died so nice and

pretty that those filthy old *sans-culottes* went right through the whole bunch of them, just to see if they couldn't find one with a yeller streak. . . . And anyhow, it makes 'em mad to see people doing something they've never been brought up to do themselves."

"There may be something in that, Billy, although most of those fiends below don't know what mercy is. But it's all part of the envy and class-hatred on which revolution thrives."

They were silent for a long time. There was no longer any sound of battle from Westminster, although the fires were still blazing furiously.

Then the building below them echoed to the crash of another volley.

"They're working through them quicker," said Billy. "Getting used to their new job." But the set look on his face and the way in which his fists were clenched belied the apparent lightness of his words.

"It's ghastly—horrible," moaned Hunter, his face held desperately in his hands. "And we've got to sit here and listen to them going through it to the bitter end. . . . Look here, Billy, when Violet wakes up we'll have to pretend it's just firing practice, as I said. She'd go mad if she knew what it really is."

"Right." Billy pushed open the door as he spoke, and sat looking eastwards, out towards the fire. "Look, there's a bit of light in the sky over there, apart from the fire. It'll be sun-up soon."

The idea that it would soon be the dawn of another day in no way cheered Hunter. He was beginning to wonder what would be their own end to the adven-

ture on the roof. Where would they be and what would have happened at the end of the coming day?

And then there came a buzz from the telephone. Like a flash Hunter slipped on the head-piece.

"Hullo, hullo, that you?" came Melrose's voice.

"Yes, yes. What's the news?"

"The best. Can you take down a short message in code?"

"Yes. . . . Go ahead."

Hunter wrote down the few sentences given him, and then asked Melrose to hang on while he decoded them. The message read: "Shotley with hundred and fifty men on their way. Coming by river. Should be near you in half-hour's time."

"Splendid, old man, splendid!" cried Hunter. "You don't know the good that's done me. . . . I'll say no more, for safety's sake."

"I hope to heaven everything goes off all right," said Melrose. "Anyhow, they're absolutely full of beans at the idea of what's to be done. . . . You'll freeze on to this chance to get away too."

"You bet I shall waste no chances over that. I can't tell you how much this has bucked me up, Melrose. I'll tell you all about it when I see you."

Hunter and Billy shook hands fervently over the news.

"It gives one something to live for, Billy. God knows how many will be sacrificed before the crowd gets here. . . . But anyhow, those who have gone will soon be avenged. By God, I swear it. There shall be no mercy for any of the brutes we get hold of. . . . And Zadoff! He doesn't get out alive, to

practise his devilries elsewhere. I'm determined on that, whatever happens."

"Bully for you, Hunter. I'm with you there."

"A hundred and fifty of the best. Picked out of the Iron Division, I'll bet you they're pretty good. There's hardly a man of them who didn't kill his Boche hand to hand in the old days. They're fighters, and they'll put Zadoff and Company through it in style. . . . And at the right moment we'll cause a diversion from the roof."

"That's talking. That's when it will do some good."

Hunter picked up his rifle, looked it over carefully and filled the magazine with five cartridges.

"It's going to come in useful after all, bless it. Not wild geese this time, eh, my beauty, but wild animals—wild men, the worst ever seen. See that little peep-sight, Billy? A peach. You mention any button you please on Mr. Zadoff's waistcoat, and I'll guarantee to hit it. . . . And now, look here, I'll make some coffee, and then we'll wake Violet, and get everything ready. Thank God, we're going to be able to do something at last."

CHAPTER XX

HUNTER SHARPSHOOTING

HAVING drunk the coffee and eaten some biscuits and the remainder of the tinned tongue—" an early sitting of the Breakfast-Eating Union," as Billy called it—everybody felt better. Up there on the roof the hour before the dawn had been distinctly chilly, although Violet had been warm and comfortable in the sleeping-bag. And she had been awakened to the news that they were to be rescued, and was wonderfully cheered up by it, although she had no idea of the greater significance attaching to the *sortie* of Shotley and his men.

Hunter was a little undecided as to whether they should wait on events where they were, or whether the two of them should take up their position again at their point of observation and wait there for the arrival of the rescue party. Presumably Shotley would attack at the main doors at the eastern end. But there was the point to be taken into consideration that, now that it was growing light, they might possibly be observed on the roof.

While they were discussing this there came the dread sound of another volley below. Violet jumped.

" It's curious they should be practising firing at such an hour as this, Bryan."

" We mustn't be surprised at anything they do," replied Hunter with assumed carelessness.

But this decided him. He had felt that another volley was due, and had hated the idea of being there looking down on the last preliminaries.

"I think we'll take to the roof again, Billy," he said. "They ought to arrive pretty soon now. We shall have to watch the light, and crawl back here if it seems dangerous to stop there."

They made their way again along what had now become a familiar journey, Hunter this time taking his rifle. The tribunal was still sitting, exactly as they had left it. Many of those sitting round the horseshoe now looked tired and haggard, but Billings was still full of energy, and Zadoff, with his unwinking, tireless look of a graven image come to life, was the keenest of them all.

One prisoner only now stood alone on the right of the tribunal, so presumably there were five more to face Billings before the firing-party lined up again.

The next victim to be brought was Lord Ferndale, a white-haired old man who now showed the same courage at the closing moments of his career as he had always displayed in the making of it. He had started life as a bank clerk, and was as much a "self-made man" as any of those now preparing to send him to death. Billings said something in the ear of Zadoff, who seemed to look at the prisoner with a keener interest.

Billings rapped out an abrupt question at his victim, and without waiting for an answer was following it up with another, when outside the main door of the building there came the sound of half a dozen rifle shots fired in quick succession.

Instantly the attention of everybody on the tribunal

was turned in that direction, and the prisoner was forgotten. There came a longer outburst of firing, followed by shouts, and then the crash of three or four loud explosions at the very door itself.

"Mills bombs," cried Hunter. "That's the way to get in."

It was difficult for them to mark all that happened below in the crowded, breathless moments that followed the explosion of the bombs.

The floor of the great building was instantly filled with figures running here and there, as though an ants' nest had been suddenly disturbed. The Red Guards picked up their rifles and rushed to repel the attack. The members of the tribunal were on their feet, and in a moment the horseshoe formation was broken up. Some of them joined in the rush of the Red Guards towards the door. But most of them made away from the danger-point, farther into the hall, scattering as they did so.

But Hunter was careful in the pell-mell confusion below to keep his eye on the principal figures.

At that moment Zadoff and Billings were standing alone, the latter talking excitedly and gesticulating, his big frame towering above the man from Russia. The Master Terrorist was still calm, but his face was anxious as he looked towards the doorway, from where now came the indescribable uproar of a hand-to-hand battle.

Hunter took up his rifle.

"Put your glass on Zadoff," he said.

The bead of his foresight dwelt for a moment on the pale bulbous forehead which had produced so many dreadful schemes for the undoing of mankind. Then

he pressed the trigger, with a savage joy in his heart.

"Forehead, plumb centre. I saw it," cried Billy, with a whoop of triumph.

Zadoff fell flat on his back and lay there, spread-eagled—a colossal power for evil suppressed for all time by one tiny bullet. Billings jumped as though he had been shot himself, and looked wildly round, trying to find out from where the unexpected attack had come. At that moment the Reds holding the doorway broke and fell back, and a rush of the attackers came into the hall. Billings rushed up to the guards to rally them, roaring out with his bull's voice, and seizing a rifle from one of the flying men. He crouched down behind one of the settees arranged for the tribunal and lifted the rifle to fire.

"Watch Billings," sang out Hunter.

But as the sight of his rifle dropped into line on Billings' head a thought came to Hunter, and he shifted his aim to the big man's firing arm, before firing himself.

"But you've only winged him," shouted Billy.

"I know. I changed my mind. I want to get him alive if it's possible. Keep your eye on him, Billy. . . . Where's that fellow Locock? . . . By Jove, there he is, bolting for the other end. I nearly lost him. . . . A leg will do for Locock. . . Got him. We'll meet later, I hope."

The effect of Hunter's shooting had not been lost down below. The Reds, driven in at the front, and now thinking they were being attacked in rear, began thoroughly to lose heart, and fell back. The Leaguers rushed in with a yell and a cheer, and Hunter—ex-

ulting at seeing in action for the first time the body he had done so much to create—saw that Major Shotley was well to the front, a spitting revolver in his hand. A Red Guard, with more pluck than many of his comrades, came at him sideways with the bayonet, and Hunter had much pleasure in dropping him with a well-placed shot. The tables were turned, and his heart sang within him.

Hunter re-filled his magazine, his eye questing round on the amazing scene down below. He picked up Billings and Locock, both making for the back entrance—Locock limping. His rifle came up again. If they were going to escape he would have to finish the work he had begun. But at that moment there came a burst of rifle shots from the rear. The Leaguers were attacking from there, too, then. They had almost certainly got every exit well covered—trust Shotley for that. The Reds who had been fleeing that way rolled back again, Billings and Locock among them.

But the struggle was not yet over. In the side galleries that ran round the hall some scores of Reds had gathered, and these now opened a brisk fire on the Leaguers.

What Billy called a " dog-fight " followed. Small parties of the Leaguers rushed up each side staircase armed with hand-grenades, which they rolled and lobbed along the galleries. There was an inferno of noise, with the crash of glass following each shattering explosion. Hunter continued his sharpshooting, and dropped several Reds who were particularly busy with their rifles. Billy too was taking pot-shots with his pistol at a group of Red Guards sheltered in an

angle of the gallery, who were firing rapidly. Then they saw a bomb drop among them, and the firing from that group ceased.

It slackened generally, and the Reds were throwing away their rifles and coming forward with their hands up. Then they heard firing outside the building, suggesting that escaping Reds were being accounted for. There was no doubt that the attackers had the situation well in hand.

From time to time Hunter had cast an eye on what was left of the prisoners who had been awaiting execution. Very early in the attack their guards had deserted them, and they had remained throughout in the corner where they had all along been—huddled. But now Hunter saw a number of Leaguers shepherding them outside into safety, and the glad handshakes that were being exchanged were eloquent of what both rescued and rescuers felt at the new turn in the situation. There was a woman among those who were saved, Hunter was much relieved to see. The fate overhanging Mrs. Sheringham had been depressing him a great deal.

They decided now that it was time to see about getting down to join Shotley and his party, and made their way back to the lantern.

Violet met them with a white, anxious face, and Hunter suddenly realised what an ordeal it must have been for her to remain there alone, listening to the appalling sounds of the battle down below, and not knowing which way success was turning.

"What news, Bryan?" she asked faintly.

He took her in his arms and gave her a hug.

"The very best, darling. Shotley's crowd has

smashed them up, and we're going to clear out at once. . . . Come on, let's get busy."

The firing had now entirely ceased, and the great building beneath them was strangely quiet.

"We won't take all this stuff with us," said Hunter, looking round. "I'll have to come back for some of it . . . some day. I'll take the prayer-rug, though. The dealer who sold it to me said it would bring good fortune, and perhaps he was right. Come on."

This and his precious rifle and a few other things they transported to the top of the circular ladder that curled away from them down over the glass roof, then did the same with Billy's cameras. It was now quite light, and in the east they could see the rim of a golden sun just beginning to peep through the smoke that now hung like a cloud over Westminster.

It was now Violet's turn, and getting her out of the lantern was a much easier job than getting her in. For one thing, she had become accustomed to the sensation of height, and for another it was simply necessary to take her and lead her away from the sheer edge of the building, and not towards it.

"It seems years since we came up here," she said, as she reached the top of the circular ladder. "Are you certain it was only last night?"

They descended the roof, and a few moments later Hunter was assisting her carefully down the last perpendicular ladder to the ground. As his feet touched solid earth again—a wonderful sensation—Major Shotley came up to him.

They wrung each other's hands, and began talking at each other like machine-gun fire.

"And so you came by the river," said Hunter, after each had paused for a moment to give the other a chance of saying what he wanted to.

"Brilliant idea, wasn't it? Nobody ever thinks of using the Thames, but we did. When Melrose first put the idea of rescue to Bateman and myself we didn't see the ghost of a chance of it. Then like a flash we thought of those two big launches that he's got to take the papers to the aerodrome. Once we'd thought of that it was done. We're holding the Embankment, as you know, in both directions. So we packed the two boats as full of men as they would hold, and came up at full steam to Hammersmith Bridge. We didn't know what we might butt into, but as a matter of fact we had no trouble at all. We worked round through back-streets to Olympia here —luck all the way. And now we've got to get back there—Hammersmith Bridge. We must clear off as quick as we can, but there's lots to do first."

CHAPTER XXI

JUSTICE AND MERCY

WHAT Major Shotley described as the "cleaning up process" took longer than was anticipated. The interior of Olympia was a gruesome sight, with bodies lying in all directions, and great holes torn in the side of the building by the explosion of the bombs.

Seven Leaguers had been killed in the attack and some twenty wounded, but the losses on the Red side were much heavier, the bombing alone having accounted for over thirty of them. The raiding party had brought their own surgical dressings with them, and the wounded were efficiently patched up. Their dead they could only leave there, laid out reverently in a row near the unfortunate people who had been executed. There was no chance then of doing more for them, there being the possibility that the Reds might return to attack with superior forces at any moment.

But there was much to do before departure. The rescued prisoners were armed with spare rifles, and looked as though they ardently desired to use them. They were all loud in their expressions of gratitude, but there was no time to listen to what they had to say for the time being.

Hunter had at once enquired for Billings and Locock, and found that they were among the prisoners, to-

gether with the greater number of the other members of the tribunal. It was a big bag, and the loss of them would be felt by the Red organisation. There were also between fifty and sixty of the Red soldiery, many of them foreigners, chiefly of Russian extraction.

Violet, with Mrs. Sheringham, had gone, with an escort, to pay a hurried visit to the flat, and Hunter had his hands free. With Shotley he went into the smashed, disordered building, with bodies lying everywhere, to have a look at the Red prisoners. They were now grouped in the same corner where the others had been, with a strong guard of Leaguers over them. Billings, Locock and the other leaders were mixed up indiscriminately with the Red soldiers, and appeared to be in no way desirous of calling attention to themselves.

"There's some beauties among them," said Shotley. "Just look at some of that scum. What are we going to do with them?"

"That's what I want to talk about," said Hunter. "We'll have a council of war on this. Get your officers together, and we'll talk it over."

In one of the offices of the outer yard they held a council of war. Like his half-dozen companions, Major Shotley was wearing his old army tunic, shorn only of its old regimental badges. The officers boasted a distinguished collection of war ribbons among them, and looked very business-like with their revolvers strapped on to their belts. Shotley was wearing a grey felt hat, but the others had all found their old army caps. By tacit consent Hunter presided.

"Well, what about it? Do we shoot all this crowd

or not?" he opened bluntly. "It's either that, or we turn them loose to do more mischief. They murdered eighteen of those unfortunate people, and they would have murdered the lot if you hadn't arrived in time."

"Shoot them, of course," said Shotley simply. "I don't see any way out of it."

"Nor I. That's how Galliffet stopped the business in Paris in '71—and the Commune was a picnic compared to what we're faced with. Should you have any difficulty in finding firing-parties from among your men?"

"Not the slightest. Why should I? You've preached too hard for that. . . . And the crowd we've got in there! Well, look at their faces, especially the foreign lot. *Corps d'élite*—Headquarters Bodyguard, eh?" He laughed grimly. "A lot of cutthroats."

"Well, there we are," said Hunter finally. "We should be false to all we're fighting for if we didn't treat these people as ruthlessly as they would treat us. They started it, we didn't. . . . But first of all, let's have Billings and Locock in for a little talk. . . . The only thing I feel sorry about is that we can't have Zadoff in along with them."

In a few moments the two Communist leaders were brought in, Locock limping and looking very pale and frightened. Billings was nursing his wounded arm, but was making a better attempt to brave out the situation.

The two men faced a tribunal in their turn, with a guard of six Leaguers behind them.

"You, Locock, and you, Billings—we're going to

shoot you," began Hunter, without any preamble. "Do you want to say anything before we do?"

Locock turned a shade of green, and seemed as if he would like to speak, but couldn't. Billings made a more successful effort, but his big, well-fed frame was quivering with fear.

"What right have you to judge us? We don't acknowledge your authority."

"I'm afraid you'll have to," returned Hunter dryly. "It's the only one there is. And what right had you to send those people to their death this morning?"

"I had no hand in that," put in Locock quickly.

"You had. You were on the tribunal that pretended to judge them. I saw you, and you made no protest. It's too late now. This is where your political tight-rope walking comes to a full stop. You're a Red, you've taken part in Red murders, and you're going to meet the fate of one."

"Those people who were shot had all been working against our class," burst out Billings. "They were the people who would try and grind down . . ."

"*Your* class. What *is* your class? Why, for the past twenty years you've been spending as much on yourself as would keep a dozen working-class families. The working men are not your class. You belong to the parasites. . . . And if that's what's worrying you, I will see that your firing-party is made up exclusively of working men. There won't be any difficulty about that, Shotley?"

"Not a little bit. They can have architects, doctors, barristers or horny-handed sons of toil, just as they wish. We've got all kinds."

"But you can't shoot wounded men," quavered Locock. "We're wounded, both of us."

"Not badly. I winged you both, so that we should have the opportunity later of judging you, as you judged others. I could have killed you both, had I wished. But I wanted you to feel what it is like to face a tribunal. . . . I hope you like it."

"But is there no such thing as mercy?" Locock again forced himself to say.

"I didn't notice any this morning—not even when your own comrade Muttlebury was put against the wall. He begged hard enough, didn't he? Perhaps I'd better explain that I was on the roof, watching it all. I had the pleasure of shooting your friend Zadoff. And I was able to get help here in time before you were able to shoot all those poor people who were in your clutches. . . . I see that startles you, Billings. If only you'd known I was there, eh? It wouldn't have taken you long to pronounce sentence on *me*, eh?"

Billings looked at him with narrowed eyes. He seemed to be on the point of a furious outburst, but apparently decided it would be better to contain himself.

"But, Mr. Hunter," Locock began again, in a tone that was almost wheedling, "you can't dream of doing this. I have always been a moderate man. As you know, I have many friends in the Government. They would never countenance . . ."

"What Government? The Red Government?" cried Hunter harshly. Locock was quiet again.

"Look here, Hunter." Billings was making a supreme effort, and tried to put something of his

famous bonhomie into his voice. "You've won on this little game, and I hope I'm sportsman enough to know how to take it. I was doing what I thought was right, and you're doing what you think is right. But you've won, and you can afford to be generous." He steadied himself before making his final throw. . . . "You don't really mean it, that you're going to put us against a wall."

"Yes, I do. Neither of you has a word to say in mitigation of his crimes. You can't find anything to say. You, Billings, are a black-hearted scoundrel, and you are very largely responsible for the misery that now afflicts this country. You, Locock, might have done good had you possessed the pluck. You've been playing a double game for years, and you finally find yourself on the side of murder and anarchy—and if you now find you've made a horrid mistake, that's entirely your own fault. The unanimous verdict of this court is that you both be shot forthwith."

"Take the prisoners away," Shotley ordered.

"Blast you, Hunter, you rat," Billings burst out. "By God, if I'd only known . . ."

But the guard of Leaguers bundled them out without ceremony, and they heard Billings' curses growing fainter as he was pushed along through the yard back into the main building. From Locock they heard no sound.

"Well, gentlemen, that's that," said Hunter. "As to the rest of the leaders, I don't think we'll bother to see any of them. Any man who sat under the presidency of Zadoff deserves shooting for that alone, whatever else he's done. . . . And as to the foreign Red Guards—the Russians and Letts, and whatever

else there may be—well, we won't waste any time on those either. They're beyond the pale. . . . The only point I wish to raise is whether we should try and discriminate between any of the so-called Britishers in the crowd—whether we might look them over, and give any of them a chance. There may be a few deluded fools among them who are where they are without quite realising what it means."

"Time's flying, Hunter," said Shotley, looking at his watch. "And I can tell you, my men are not dying to see any kind of mercy shown to the Reds. We've had heavy losses at your office, you know—and every life lost is a life wasted because of the cursed villainy of these people. And I should take it for granted that every man we found here—a sort of bodyguard of the cream of the Reds—was a particularly bad lot. And how can we discriminate? If you spare a few, why not spare the lot? . . . Besides, don't forget we're here because of your own teachings on this very point."

"I know. I agree with everything you say. Only, I've felt all along that among our own men there must be a very large proportion who are not really bad, but who have been led away by the evil propaganda of their leaders. They're there, a lot of them, because they've had their heads filled with vile nonsense—because of the misery and unemployment which has been brought about by these same leaders—because of the general unrest and misery of the time—because, in a word, of what men like Billings have been doing for years past. I can't get rid of the belief that true Bolshevism can't exist in the heart of anything like a real Englishman—they're

not cruel and brutal and vile enough for it—they don't realise what they've embarked on. I haven't a scrap of mercy for the leaders—the people who have caused it all—as you have seen. But as we now have a batch of their followers over whom we have power of life and death—well, I should like to look them over for a few moments before we say the final words. It won't be at all pleasant, but I feel it's a duty."

"Right, if you absolutely hold to it," said Shotley, convinced a little, in spite of himself, by Hunter's point of view. "I'll have the possible sheep separated from the undoubted goats, and you can look them over. I don't envy your job. . . . But we must get a move on. We can't afford to risk much more time here. There's a lot of nasty work to be done before we're through with it all."

Shotley now sent his officers away with various orders for the rapid carrying out of the grim work ahead. One instruction he gave was that any of the rescued prisoners who wished to enrol themselves in the firing-parties, and so avenge those whom they had seen murdered, should be allowed to do so.

A few minutes later Hunter and Shotley followed. One officer had been given the task of separating the "sheep," and in a near corner of the building Hunter now found a double rank of about thirty men drawn up, with a dozen stern-faced Leaguers in attendance on them. Hunter faced them, and realised at once what an unenviable task he had started on.

The men had been quick to realise that here was a possible way of escape from the certain fate that lay in store for their foreign "comrades." Hunter could see that at once by their faces. They were

a mixed lot, and there were many for whom Hunter, for all his pride and belief in his race, could find no feeling of kinship. But there were others who he felt instinctively were sound enough at heart, and were merely the deluded instruments of unscrupulous minds. . . . He wondered how to begin. He had set himself a nice problem. How to make the choice?

"How many of you served in the war?" he suddenly rapped out, as harshly as he could. "All who served in the war hold up their right hands. Quick now!"

The question puzzled them. They seemed to wonder whether or not it was a trap. But a dozen or more hands went up, some fairly quickly, others with hesitation.

Hunter signalled to two of the Leaguers, who from their dress might have been anything from barristers to bank clerks. He spoke to them rapidly in an undertone.

"Look here, just examine these men and find out whether they're lying or not. Just a few questions to find out what units they were in. You'll soon be able to tell. Take them aside and get through them as quickly as you can."

There came the crash of a volley from the far end of the building as he spoke. Shotley was wasting no time.

Hunter turned again to the white faces of the men who were left, and scrutinised them. He was about to do a terrifying thing—to rely on his own judgment in rapidly summing up these men and deciding as to which should be taken and which left.

His heart sank within him as his eyes travelled

quickly down the double row of faces, and back again. There came cries and shouts, and another volley, as he did so, and the faces before him quivered with terror. There were eyes that followed his, as if fascinated. He had to think of what he had seen from the roof, of all that he had felt and suffered while Zadoff was holding his court, to be able to control himself for the task.

He saw faces which depressed him. The Communist movement had attracted to it the lowest dregs of society, and he remembered now how shocked he had once been in his earlier days at some of the types he had seen on Epsom Downs in a Derby Day crowd—the sediment of a race. And here were similar faces, rendered still more dreadful by terror.

But there were others—men whom he felt were not bad but wholly misguided—men whom he felt upheld his belief in the inherent decency of his own kind. . . But it was an appalling task that he had set himself.

The crash of the rifles came at frequent intervals, and there were even more terrifying sounds in the air. . . . Some of the Communists were not dying so well as their victims of an hour before.

Hunter signalled to nine or ten men and bade them stand aside. The residue remained before him, their white faces drawn and eyes staring at him. There were men there whom he knew had entered on this dreadful course with exultation—on whose ears the gospel of terrorism and bloodshed had fallen appealingly. And yet, he began to feel, who was he to judge? What motives, what accidents, might not have thrust them into this which, if he but knew them, would sway his judgment? And he had power of life and

death over them, and must decide quickly. The killing in his study—the sharpshooting from the roof—those things he would do again, gladly. . . . But this!

He became aware, as another volley rang out, that Shotley was standing by his side.

"Well, how are you getting on?"

Hunter took his arm and walked away, out of hearing of the men who waited on his decision.

"Shotley—I'm up against it—badly."

"I can see that by your face. I knew you would be, the moment you began to try and pick and choose. . . . Hopeless."

"I've made a rough choice . . . those two groups over there. I was going to go rapidly through them again. . . . But this lot remains."

"A nice lot too. . . . What have you gone on? Faces?"

"Mostly. But the first lot over there are ex-Service men. That's the first choice I made. Those two men of yours are questioning them now, just to find out what they did—what they served in."

Shotley looked the three groups over.

"Well, as far as faces go you've made a fairly good choice, although there are some tough-looking customers among the ex-Service lot. Though damned if I know why because a man fought in the Great War he should try and cut the throats of his countrymen in this one. . . . Anyhow, this lot remains. We can take them over and deal with them."

"By God, Shotley, I was wondering . . ."

"I was afraid it would come to that. You want to let the whole lot off."

"It's a terrible position I've put myself into—to say yes or no in cold blood like this."

"Look here, Hunter, you're losing your nerve."

Hunter looked into the face of the man addressing him—the level grey eyes, the lean face and the firm mouth and chin under the clipped moustache. It was a face in which character predominated over intellect—but it was a face which commanded every respect. Shotley was a type of which, fortunately, England had many. Hunter had met them by the hundred in the war—men very much on Shotley's lines—the typical battalion commander or second-in-command, men who had had much to do in pulling Britain by main force successfully through her great ordeal.

"I'm not a bloodthirsty person, Hunter," Shotley went on. "I'm a partner in a modest firm in the City, and I like to play golf at the week-end when there are no wars or revolutions on. But I'm also one of your disciples, Hunter, and I'm full of it. This country is plunged into bloodshed and horror, and it's a disease that must at once be burnt out with a red-hot iron. Otherwise the disease will be triumphant, and we shall all be its victims. You've told us so, many a time. But for you I shouldn't be here. We've had over fifty killed in your own little personal crowd, the Iron Division, and you know what sort of men they are—many of them with wives and families, and that sort of thing. But for you these men wouldn't have died fighting. They died in defence of what you've taught them—and God knows it's a good enough cause. . . . We've followed you, and you've got responsibilities. Is this the moment to be weak, Hunter—or strong?"

Hunter thought again of Zadoff and his council. It was a scene he had to keep before him to prevent the agony of his position overwhelming him. He breathed deeply.

"You're right, Shotley. And you are in command here."

"I command these men, that's true. But this choice is yours, not mine. And time is short."

The two men looked at each other, eye to eye.

"Then I decide," said Hunter. "I'll go again through those I've put aside, and all those whom I feel justified in so treating we will keep as prisoners and hand over to the Authorities—when there are any. . . . These others I leave to you."

"To be shot," said Shotley, remorseless.

"To be shot."

"Right."

Hunter turned away, heard the sound of another volley breaking in on the sharp command uttered by Shotley as he marched the men off, and, fighting against the feelings that surged within him and threatened to make him unequal to his task, walked to the two Leaguers to hear what their report was on the group they had been questioning.

The grim work of Shotley's men was soon over, and Olympia, which had seen the sitting of the first Terrorist council in England, saw a swift and terrible vengeance.

Shotley had been as expeditious as ruthless over the business. The prisoners were quickly separated into groups of six, and these were marched in quick succession to the same length of wall where the tribunal

had sacrificed its victims. There was no flinching or hesitation on the part of any of the Leaguers concerned. They understood quite clearly that they were here dealing with the very heart of the Communist movement. Both among the leaders and in the ranks of the Red soldiery they were executing justice on representatives of half a dozen European countries—men who had been gradually filtered into the country as part of the deliberate movement to strengthen the revolutionary forces in England with chosen emissaries of the worst elements in Europe.

There were cries and curses and appeals at the last moments, but to a great extent the prisoners accepted their fate with that semi-paralysis which grips men at such a time; which seems to repress even any desire to make a hopeless attempt at escape. It was ruthless, but the men who were responsible for it had no shadow of doubt that they were doing the right thing for their country.

As for Hunter, who had turned to examine the men he had set aside, he found the conclusion of his task no easier. Their tongues loosened by the hope of life, and stimulated by the terror of what was constantly happening near them, they had poured out their pitiful tales. They had realised that in this man lay their one chance of escaping the firing-party, and he was overwhelmed with stories of misery —"five kids, sir, and nothing coming in for three months" . . . "forced us to go on strike, then the strike pay gave out and the only chance of getting anything was in a Red battalion"—and many other such explanations or excuses. At moments the

tragedy verged on the ridiculous as the men, competing for mercy, tumbled over each other in their eagerness to talk, and closed round him in a ring until they were harshly ordered back into line. He knew that he was listening to much that was untrue; that many of these men, spurred now by fear, were glibly pretending to be what they were not; that some of them, at least, a short hour ago, were ready for any bloody deed, and glorying in it. One man who said that he had served was soon proved to be a liar, but pleaded that he had a family "and took a charnce" in saying what he did.

But Hunter could see, particularly in the case of some of the ex-Service men, that there was much that was good. Here were men who had certainly fought their country's battles, and who had wished her well. And in the fragmentary, gasping recitals that were given him it was easy to trace the whole course of the tragedy—the ever-increasing deception of life in the distracting years following the Armistice; the general unrest, first created and then cleverly exploited by unscrupulous demagogues; the general feeling that "everything had gone wrong"—that where so much good was awaited in the New World that would follow the war nothing but evil had resulted. . . . He heard the cry of men who felt incoherently that everything must be wrong with a system which gave them so little, and who had hit out savagely and blindly against it at the first opportunity, without realising that in so doing they were the creatures of an evil directing power, which was the cause of their recent miseries, and their present crimes against humanity.

And though he knew that among the men before him cunning eyes were watching him to see how much he had been "taken in," Hunter accepted it for the sake of those who were worth saving. He had manœuvred himself into an impossible position, and realised that there was only one way out of it. He swallowed the bad for the sake of the good. And such relief had rarely before been seen on human faces as when he announced that for the time being, at any rate, they would not be shot, but that they would be kept as prisoners and handed over later to the Authorities, to be dealt with as the law of the land should decide.

"Thank Gawd, sir . . . thank Gawd. . . . Gawd bless yer, sir . . . You're a good 'un, sir"—these and other exclamations, fervently uttered, greeted his decision. One man wanted to cheer, but Hunter repressed him with a glare. And one shouted, "To hell with the Reds. Give us a chance to fight on your side"—a conversion which Hunter, after making all allowances, decided had a ring of sincerity in it.

He felt limp and exhausted as the men were marched away into the yard, to await the general departure. . . . Shotley was right. It was a task which he had not properly measured when he began on it.

As the men disappeared out of the door Billy came up to him, carrying his heavy camera on its tripod.

"Say, Hunter, you're not looking your best. . . . Well, it's been a pretty trying morning—and I'm not sure this last chapter ain't the worst. I've seen some funny sights, but I'll admit this has been pretty tough. How are you feeling?"

"All right. . . . But, as you say, it's been pretty trying."

"Did you notice I'd been busy—professionally? Well, I don't know that my people will use this sort of stuff, and I don't know that I want 'em to. But it's on record, anyway. . . . Hell! There goes another lot. That must be about the last of them. One of those Red fellers who stopped me yesterday evening wanted me to show America that Old England knew how to get a move on. Well, I reckon this is a pretty good sample—and in the right direction. . . . I'm afraid old-man Zadoff didn't bring his kindergarten any luck."

Hunter looked up quickly at the mention of that name.

"That reminds me, Billy. I knew there was something I had forgotten. I'm afraid my job here isn't finished yet. I must go over Zadoff, Billings and a few of the others to see what papers they may have on them. . . . Do you feel like giving a hand?"

"Sure, Hunter. I think that's a job two might do better than one. I know where Zadoff's lying—way over there."

They turned and walked towards where the firing-parties had now finished their work.

CHAPTER XXII

DOWN THE RIVER

AT Hunter's suggestion the wounded were to be left at the West London Hospital, which they would pass on the way back to Hammersmith Bridge. A number of motor-cars were chosen from the scores available in the streets outside, and the wounded carefully placed in these.

Then the outposts were recalled, and the Leaguers fallen in and marched away. As they swung quickly down the Hammersmith Road, Hunter's spirits revived. He put behind him the mental turmoil of his experiences in Olympia. . . . But for his own continuous efforts the civilian army of which these men were a small part would not now be in existence. He knew little or nothing of what was going on all over the country, but he felt convinced that the League, sooner or later, would get the upper hand, even though in most towns and cities its mobilisation could only have been effected at the very last minute.

The men he was now marching along with were of a kind to inspire confidence. They were of all kinds —professional men, clerks, shopkeepers and some workmen—the latter a few of the great number throughout the country who had not been terrorised or tricked into swallowing the evil nostrums from Russia. Practically every one of the men in the "Iron Division" had served in the war, and

there was a considerable proportion of ex-officers in the ranks. Here and there an old khaki tunic was to be seen, and most of them wore the old army web ammunition pouches over their civilian clothes. In the ranks Hunter noticed a postman and an electric-tram driver, both in their uniforms, several motor-bus drivers, a private chauffeur, very smartly clothed in green livery, half a dozen railway employees, and a number of men who might have been labourers or navvies. It was not a class war, but a war of sanity against delusion.

The company halted outside the West London Hospital, and Hunter and Shotley went inside to see what could be done about the wounded.

The tired surgeon they saw was not too pleased at first to hear what was required of him, but soon resigned himself to it, especially when they had given him a rough idea of what had happened at Olympia.

"Things are so mixed up that I don't suppose they'll make a great deal of difference," he said resignedly. "Pretty state of affairs, isn't it? Don't see any chance of getting milk to-day. It will go hard with many of the patients if we don't, and of course most of them here are working-class people. That's the funny part of it. But we're not so badly off as some. The West End hospitals are chock-a-block with wounded. We've got a few score here —both sides. They've been filtering along in all sorts of ways. A damned commissar fellow, a German, I'll swear, came here last evening to tell me we were only to look after the Reds. I told him that if I couldn't look after who I pleased the Reds

could die for all I cared, and he soon changed his tune."

The wounded were carried inside, and they left the surgeon, who said he hadn't been to bed, to his worries. The company continued on its way to Hammersmith Bridge through deserted streets. At the pier leading down from the bridge two powerful steam launches were waiting, with a dozen Leaguers left in charge. Everybody tumbled aboard as quickly as possible, and they started off down the river.

"Hope we shan't be spotted going back, or there may be a bit of sniping," said Shotley. "Apart from my own little beat I haven't the vaguest idea where the Reds are and where they aren't."

He now described to Hunter the attacks on the *Echo*. The first had been a comparatively small affair, and had not tested the defences greatly. But shortly after ten o'clock several thousand Reds had been in action against them, and after a lot of firing had attacked strongly down the various streets leading to the office, and along the Embankment. There had been heavy machine-gun and bombing work, and the Reds had also brought two trench mortars into action. These had caused heavy casualties among the Leaguers until they were both rushed and knocked out by bombing parties.

"But do you know what really saved the situation?" said Shotley enthusiastically. "It was those paper reels—your idea, Melrose said. They make the finest barricades known to man. Damned expensive, I've no doubt, but I desire nothing better to sit behind than a five-mile reel of newspaper. We couldn't

possibly have held the Embankment without them—it's so wide. But with a couple of Lewis guns facing each way and a line of reels across they couldn't touch us. We stopped two rushes down on the Embankment, and then they gave it up at that spot. It's not a pleasant place to try and take against machine-guns and the sort of barricade we had. Lovely field of fire."

Shotley, although he did not know much about the general situation, had much that was interesting to say, and had a most attentive audience, which included Hunter, Violet, Billy, Lord Ferndale, John Day, M.P., and others of the released prisoners, who also told their stories. Lord Ferndale had been gathered up at his house in Grosvenor Square. There had been a ring at the front door, and on it being opened five men had crowded into the hall. He was dressing at the time, and heard a shot. On coming down immediately he found that a footman who had attempted to bar the passage of the miscreants had been killed, and the rest of the servants were huddled into a corner, a man with a pistol menacing them. Lord Ferndale had been immediately surrounded and hurried away as he was.

John Day had been pounced on as he was coming out of his flat near Marylebone High Street and hustled into a motor-car with a pistol at his head. Any idea of resistance was out of the question. Mrs. Sheringham had been told by her maid that two men were waiting in the hall to see her on urgent business, and a minute later found herself being driven off. All had much the same story to tell—taken completely by surprise, plucked instantly

out of their normal surroundings and in a twinkling finding themselves under the menace of instant death at the hands of scoundrels who laughed at their dismay and discomfiture.

Hunter realised to how little he owed his own life and all that had followed—to the fact that he had his pistol handy, and the determination to use it, come what might. For without the circumstance of his own initial victory there would have been no rescue at Olympia, and he would have been among the victims.

The launches had passed Putney and were approaching Wandsworth Bridge when those on board noticed coming towards them a tug towing a huge barge filled with bluejackets, soldiers, sand-bags, coils of barbed wire and other munitions—all, as it seemed, mixed up in happy confusion. The effect of this sight on the Leaguers was electrical. It brought from them a spontaneous hearty cheer, which was echoed by the mixed fighting force in the barge, varied with cries of "Cheerio," "Now we shan't be long," and "Watch the Navy."

The sight did everybody a power of good, and they soon understood the exact significance of it as they passed under the bridge. Soldiers were busy at each end of it, piling up sandbags into barricades. At Battersea Bridge they found the barricades completed, and machine-guns mounted, and through his glasses Hunter could see an officer—steel-helmeted and with revolver buckled on—talking to two of his N.C.O.'s, his arm outstretched, pointing at something, obviously giving them instructions.

The business-like look of it all heartened him enormously. England was awake and active!

So it was with all the other bridges they passed under, and the Leaguers in the launches exchanged cheery greetings with the soldiers looking down as they passed. Then they steamed down the noble reach before the Houses of Parliament, with the fretted Gothic façade of the great building and the towers and spires of Westminster looking wonderful in the early morning sunshine.

"Hullo, a submarine ahead!" exclaimed Shotley, as they approached Westminster Bridge. "Signalling to us to stop."

As they manœuvred alongside a naval lieutenant addressed them from the sandbagged tower of the submarine.

"What's this lot, and where are you off to?" he asked, looking quizzically down on the mixed crowd in the launches.

"We're not going—we're coming back," replied Shotley. He gave a very brief outline of their mission, and what had been done.

"This is Mr. Bryan Hunter," he concluded. "You've heard of him."

"Rather. Pleased to meet you." The lieutenant saluted cheerily. "You're the hit-back-at-any-price man. Same here."

Hunter asked what the situation was at Westminster.

"Don't know. Only arrived an hour ago from Chatham, and haven't been ashore yet. All quiet for the time being, as you see. Lords and Commons sleeping the sleep of the just, having been jawing all

night. Over there it's all Red." He waved his hand in a sweep towards the south shore of the river. "We're holding every bridge-head. Hope to be going ashore a little later to have a look at the natives —buy oranges and nuts in the bazaar—you know the sort of thing."

"Are all the bridges down this way the same?" asked Hunter.

"Every one. The Silent Navy did it in a few hours. Late last night the Thames Grand Fleet stole out of Chatham. You know—the usual long, lean grey shapes. We were a gallant armada—submarines, motor-boats, barges, tugs and God knows what else, and every gallant craft carried a cargo of sand-bags. We pinched the bridges and stuck sandbags and machine-guns fore and aft on every one of 'em. It was a bright scheme, and is only another example of the all-conquering might of Sea Power. The consequence is that if the Reds on one side of the river want to talk to the Reds on the other, they'll have to swim for it. I've heard we've got a Dread-nought on the Regent's Park Canal, but of that I'm not quite certain."

Hunter laughed heartily at his breezy nonsense. It was a wonderful change from the atmosphere he had been living in. While the lieutenant rattled blithely away Billy was looking at him with every approval. He suddenly bent forward to Hunter.

"Say, Hunter, I think this is where we part. This is the plumb centre of all the trouble, and I want to freeze on to this feller and go ashore with him. Hand me over to him with a testimonial and tell him to be kind to me."

Hunter did as he was requested, not troubling to spare Billy's blushes in his warm recommendation.

"Very pleased," said the lieutenant. "There's no order against it. In fact, I'm instructed to apprehend anybody of a suspicious nature found prowling about the river." He winked at everybody in general. "Come on over," he said, addressing Billy.

"He'll do all right for me," murmured Billy. "No starch about him. I guess he'll never be an admiral."

He shook hands warmly all round, and asked Violet to be sure to invite him to her dinky apartment when it was all right again. Hunter was sorry to see him go, and the old habits of the special correspondent tugged at him to go ashore at Westminster himself. It was tantalising to pass there, and not see what the heart of London looked like under the shock of internal war. But his duty lay farther on.

"So long," called out Billy as they dropped away. "And keep up that fancy shooting of yours. It may come in real handy one of these days."

They noted now that each bridge had machine-guns posted to sweep up and down the Embankment—a fact to which Shotley ascribed their freedom from any sniping when passing the stretch of riverside past Charing Cross Bridge, from which point the Reds were in control. On this stretch also they passed several big coastal motor-boats, each one carrying two machine-guns, and protected by sandbags.

They disembarked at Cleopatra's Needle, and Shotley sent an advance party of a dozen men up

the steps first to see if there was likely to be any opposition from the Embankment gardens across the road, or from any of the windows of the tall blocks of offices opposite. They offered a splendid target to any snipers so posted, but no shots disturbed the still morning air, and the whole party disembarked.

As they reached the Embankment level Hunter saw some scores of bodies lying scattered over the wide roadway.

"Now then, how would you like to charge from here along to that barricade?" Shotley asked. He pointed to the barricade of newspaper rolls, stretching from side to side, where here and there a head showed above the big white cylinders. "See the two Lewis guns peeping out. No joke to charge up to that, eh?"

Hunter felt strangely moved as they squeezed through a narrow gap in the barricade. Here was a situation he had visualised a hundred times, but it did not lessen his wonder at seeing it come to pass. There were some fifty men now manning the barricade at this end of the defences, and from all sides he was greeted. . . . "Good morning, sir. . . . Good morning, Mr. Hunter. . . . Glad to see you're safe." It was good. He felt like a grand seigneur entering his own castle as he responded to the hearty greetings of the men he had raised.

"The wildest stories were running round about you," said Shotley, "but by the time we'd pushed off with the rescue party I think they'd all got the story correctly. They'll have the details soon enough when the company gets among them."

Some two hundred yards farther along the road

was a parallel barricade, facing to Blackfriars Bridge.

"That Navy stunt of guarding the bridges makes a lot of difference to us here," went on Shotley. "We can take it that on the Embankment we are as safe as houses. . . . Another score or so of bodies lying out there, you see. . . . We shall want an armistice or something soon. Anyhow, if things get very bad there's always the river."

It was only when they had turned up the street leading from the Embankment and arrived at the corner of the *Echo* building facing up towards Fleet Street that Hunter realised how severe the battle had been. Here holes were torn in the roadway by trench-mortar fire, there were holes in the walls, and practically every window round about was smashed. The barricades here were stronger than on the Embankment, and more heavily manned, and the men were sitting down behind them, with no heads showing.

A man in the faded tunic of a captain came up and saluted Shotley, and then shook Hunter warmly by the hand. He was a barrister named Lennox, and Hunter knew him well.

"Don't linger round this corner," said Lennox, leading the way. "There's a sniper somewhere up the street there we haven't been able to dislodge, and he is sending a shot down here occasionally."

Safe in the shelter of a building opposite the main door of the *Echo*, which shielded them from any possible observation, Lennox described the present situation, and pointed out to Hunter an adjacent block of offices which they had had to clear by means of bombing parties.

"I think we have the situation absolutely in hand," he said. "Every possible approach is well held, and if they couldn't get past our barricades last night they won't have a dog's chance in the daytime. We've got a dozen sharpshooters on the roof, every one with glasses, and I think they'll keep down pretty well all the sniping. There's only just one man we haven't been able to silence up to now."

"And our losses?" asked Hunter.

"Just on sixty killed—chiefly trench mortars. That's all we're really afraid of. If they brought any more along and lobbed them over from Fleet Street it would be mighty awkward. . . . I'm all for pushing our barricades up as far as Fleet Street to prevent that, if it can be done, sir." He addressed the last remark to Shotley.

"I think you're right. I'll have a talk to Colonel Bateman. Where is he?"

"Inside somewhere, sir, sleeping."

It was amazing, thought Hunter, how soon everything was dropping back into the familiar usages of war time. The "Iron Division" had never even been embodied before. There had only been a few conferences at the *Echo* offices with the officers concerned. Yet after only half a day's service together officers and men were showing all the corporate spirit of a battalion of soldiers long trained together in arms.

Once he had arranged about the Red prisoners—who were consigned to the machine room, in the basement, under guard—and seen to the immediate wants of those who had been rescued, Hunter went direct to his own room with Violet and Mrs. Shering-

ham and fixed them up as comfortably as possible to get some sleep. Then he went down to Melrose's luxurious room. He found the blinds drawn, making a dim twilight in the room, and Melrose stretched out on a couch, fast asleep. In every room he peeped into somebody was asleep—sitting in chairs or lying on tables. There were Leaguers lying down in the corridors, their heads pillowed on their rolled-up jackets or coats. It was a Palace of Sleep—in which he seemed to be an intruder. . . . He suddenly realised that he was dog-tired himself. He felt, with a rush of weariness, the strain of the night that was past, and making his way back to Melrose's room he dropped into one of the easy-chairs which adorned that apartment, and went fast asleep on the instant.

CHAPTER XXIII

ZADOFF'S LETTER

A FEW hours later Violet, Mrs. Sheringham and Hunter were enjoying a pleasant breakfast with Melrose in his room. There were boiled eggs and coffee and bread and butter and—as is always the case with impromptu meals taken in odd circumstances—everybody agreed that it was the best breakfast they had ever tasted.

" By the way, now that I've got this obstinate young lady here, is there any job we can usefully put her on to ? " said Hunter, referring to Violet. " It's not good for people to be idle in times like these."

" There's the canteen," replied Melrose. " I imagine they're not overstaffed there. Our warriors need a lot of feeding."

Violet was very pleased with the idea, and Mrs. Sheringham begged that she might be given work there too. Breakfast over, Hunter took the two ladies away and, with some relief, installed them in their new duties. Then he returned to go over the situation with Melrose, feeling free to plunge into affairs as he had not done since that dramatic moment—ages ago as it seemed—when he had heard the first outbreak of firing in Hammersmith Road.

Hunter told his story in more detail, and received from Melrose the tribute of many exclamations, both

sacred and profane. Then Melrose gave a short outline of the situation.

"We're not out of the wood yet, by a long way," he said, "but there's no doubt about it, the situation is very encouraging all round. You know what happened to the second big attack in Westminster—held up completely, and hardly a shot fired since. In the country the Reds have got the upper hand in one or two places, but they haven't had a walk-over anywhere. In Glasgow they apparently control the whole situation for the time being. There was heavy fighting there—quite a battle in George Square—but the League hadn't had time to get itself properly in hand. It's rather like reading the results of a general election in the old days." He picked up that morning's *Echo* and glanced through it. "At Sunderland we've won, hands down. Manchester is like London—in the balance Same at Liverpool. Some of the heaviest fighting has been there—you know what kind of a mob Liverpool can produce when it likes. South Wales is pretty bad apparently—that was to be expected. The Reds seem to have the whole district pretty well in their hands. Of course, it's all in the industrial centres—apparently hardly any disturbances at all in the country districts as yet. Territorials are out everywhere, and apparently thoroughly loyal. So far there is very little news of what the Regulars are doing. But as for the League—it's on the job everywhere. It's clear already that without it the situation would have been hopeless. So that's something for us to be going on with."

"How about distribution?"

"Everything seems to have gone off splendidly.

We only printed half a million—and half size, as you see. The boats got down the river all right, and the aeroplanes went off without a hitch. I expect that half-million were spread out all over England hours ago. We know that everything worked very well with the two 'planes that did London, and we've had messages from all over the country saying that people are scrambling for them as if they were gold nuggets. They'll pass from hand to hand, of course. We took good care to have a plentiful supply dropped over the Reddest centres, and apparently the parcels opened beautifully everywhere—although Heaven knows how many copies are lying hidden on roofs, and places like that. Anyhow, it has been a good start."

"I'll take a copy up to my room," said Hunter, "and get to know all there is to know. . . . Good Lord . . . !"

"What's the matter?"

"These papers! I've got my pockets stuffed with them—taken off Zadoff and the rest. I've never thought about them since you woke me up in the chair there. . . . I must go through the lot at once, and see what they contain. What a fool I am! There may be all sorts of useful stuff in them."

He hurried up to his room, emptied his swollen pockets on to his desk, and began to examine the papers. He went first through those he had taken from Kautsky, the man he had executed in his study. There were, to begin with, over one hundred and fifty pounds in Treasury notes, and it occurred humorously to Hunter as he put them aside that here might be a useful and legitimate fund to set against the damage done to his flat. "Reparation, restoration and indemnity," he

murmured, as he turned to the other papers found on Kautsky.

Most of them were in English, and a quick study of them showed that they had reference to the Red organisation in London—information which would have been invaluable a few months or even a few weeks ago, but which was now quite outdistanced by the explosion of events. But they would all be useful as showing the ramifications of the Red movement. There were a number of love letters, in varying handwritings. Kautsky, in spite of his unprepossessing appearance, had evidently been something of a Don Juan. And there was a scrawled letter in Russian, with a Moscow address. Hunter read it through with some difficulty and found it was a panegyric on the all-conquering march of Red rule throughout the world, with burning wishes that the work of Kautsky and his brothers in England would soon produce a similar state of affairs in "the last European stronghold of capitalistic and bourgeois slavery."

"Not much in all that," said Hunter, and turned at once to the papers he had taken from Zadoff.

The first thing that caught his eye was a typewritten document in Russian headed "Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Moscow." It was a long letter of instructions, signed by Mezditch (otherwise Silbermann), the Russian Minister for Foreign Affairs, giving instructions to Zadoff to proceed on a mission to England and there, following on the impending institution of Communist rule, to put into the fullest possible practice the methods of propaganda and "persuasion" which had proved to be so signally successful in other European countries.

The document, which was only dated a week before,

conferred on Zadoff absolute power in all his dealings with the English Communists. Any difficulty he experienced in obtaining all the help he needed from his English "comrades" was to be at once reported to headquarters in Moscow, which would take immediate steps to deal with the matter.

"In all affairs which are not strictly military operations," the letter ran, "General Tomlin and all the other English leaders must give you an absolutely free hand. Strict instructions to this effect have already been sent to those concerned in England. There must be no obstacle put in your way to the ruthless application in England of those methods of force and terrorism which have proved so uniformly successful in the past. You are to stand aloof from any such weak considerations as mercy or clemency which may influence the Englishmen from time to time in their dealings with their own countrymen. It will be your duty to see that there is no falling away in this respect from the high standards imposed elsewhere."

Hunter thought of the neat little hole in Zadoff's forehead which had put a sudden end to the career of this brilliant apostle of ferocious terrorism.

The document went on to describe how Zadoff would proceed at once to Berlin, where he would obtain certain important documents and instructions; thence to Brussels, where an aeroplane would be provided which would land him in England, where he would be met by motor-car and conveyed to London in time for the outbreak of operations there.

This document also, Hunter thought with a sigh, was more interesting than valuable. But it was a further proof, if any were needed, of how much England's

troubles were the product of foreign organisation; how both Russia and Germany were plotting for the downfall of the British Empire, and also how the outbreak in England was timed in accordance with arrangements made abroad. It showed also how entirely the Labour conferences with the Government had been a mere bluff, which was abandoned the moment the Communists knew that the time to strike had come.

The reference to a document from Berlin sent Hunter questing through the papers to find something in German. He soon put his hand on it—a folded typewritten sheet of stiff parchment paper. It bore no heading, and was undated. Hunter could read German moderately well. But a rapid glance through the sheet showed him at once that this was something beyond his powers. He very soon saw, in fact, that it was in some sort of cipher. He puzzled over it uselessly for some minutes, but could make nothing out of it. But his desire to know what was in it, what the famous Terrorist had picked up on his way through Berlin, increased with every moment he looked at it.

He took the lot down to Melrose, who was particularly interested in the Mezditch letter to Zadoff, which Hunter translated for him.

"Ambassador Extraordinary from His Majesty Satan, eh?" he mused, "and now lying on his back in Olympia. What a wonderful career you have nipped in the bud. . . . But as to this thing in cipher. You feel that it is important?"

"I do, in my bones. I feel that Whitehall ought to have this and, if it is possible, get it de-coded at once. I should like to get it into the hands of Sir

Charles Randall at once. It may be of tremendous importance."

"It's a case for Colonel Taggart, if anybody. He's supposed to be a genius at that game, isn't he?"

"One of the big finds of the war. . . . And he's still at the War Office. I think it's our business to get this into his hands as soon as possible. How can I get up there? By launch, I suppose. There's no other way."

Melrose agreed with all he said, and Hunter went out to see about getting to Westminster immediately. Outside in the passage he met Colonel Bateman.

"Just coming to look you up," said the Colonel. "Damn funny thing. The enemy's cleared off. We've had patrols out all over the place—down to Ludgate Circus and up to Temple Bar. They've cleared off. Bit of a triumph for the Iron Division, eh?"

"Rather, Colonel. Congratulations. . . . It's great news. But what do you make of it?"

"Don't know, unless it is that they want to concentrate all they've got at Westminster. They've had very heavy losses there—we know that. Anyhow, it's very cheering. First definite victory for our side."

Hunter found Shotley, and they went down to the river together. The men at the barricades were taking it easy, some sitting down asleep, their backs to the rolls of paper, others drinking tea out of steaming mess-kettles, and some of them reading fiction magazines. It seemed quaintly like an old-time scene from some quiet sector of the trenches in France. The good news that the Reds had withdrawn had soon spread, and there was an air of quiet content over everybody, following work well done.

"I'd like to come up with you and have a look at

Westminster," said Shotley, " but I shall have to stay here and see what's going to happen. . . . Good luck."

Hunter dropped down a rope ladder hanging over the river wall into the nearest of the launches and sped off towards Westminster. He noticed that the river was now much busier with naval craft. He counted three submarines in line up to Waterloo Bridge. Several pinnaces fortified with sandbags and machine-guns were doing patrol work, and a K lighter of the type first introduced at the Dardanelles was wallowing slowly up the river. It was very heavily laden—obviously stores or munitions of some kind. Altogether the Navy seemed very much in evidence, and it occurred to Hunter that when General Tomlin and the rest laid their plans to sack London they must have overlooked the Thames and its possibilities.

Just short of Waterloo Bridge a pinnace stopped them, and a very tall but very young midshipman questioned Hunter in very abrupt fashion. He seemed to need a great deal of convincing that Hunter was hurrying to the War Office, and Hunter hesitated to give his name. He felt that the young man had perhaps not yet begun to read the newspapers.

The pier at Westminster Bridge, where he arrived a few minutes later, had all the appearance of a miniature naval port, with a line of lighters lying alongside, discharging cases of munitions by means of small but powerful cranes. From mid-stream a stationary patrol boat was sending up a thick cloud of smoke to act as a screen against the operations at the pier. It struck Hunter as a humorous touch in the midst of this grim business.

At the top of the steps he found his way barred by a

soldier in battle order, wearing a steel helmet. In a few moments he was explaining his business to a subaltern, who dropped his severe expression and beamed when Hunter explained who he was, and produced documents to prove it.

They were standing just within the barricade running across the wide bridge—a most impressive construction of sandbags, several layers thick, with fire-step, bays, embrasures for machine-guns, and all the paraphernalia of war lying neatly about.

"The control is very strict," said the officer. "I'll send a man along with you to the War Office."

Hunter felt strangely moved to see Westminster in its present guise. The air seemed charged with the spirit of war. Occasionally the crack of a rifle rang out, and there were several aeroplanes flying low somewhere overhead.

With the corporal detailed to accompany him he turned the corner into Parliament Street, and experienced a shock of dismay at the dolorous aspect of the line of destroyed Government buildings, now mere empty, smoking shells. Whitehall itself was deserted, but the vista was broken by a succession of sandbag redoubts stretching right across the thoroughfare, each of them at present having openings in the middle and at each end to allow of passage. And at frequent intervals along the footpaths were double walls of sandbags placed in zig-zag form.

"There's been a lot of sniping all morning," said the corporal, explaining the purpose of these. "They're on the roof of the National Gallery and other places, and can see right down here. We can go a roundabout way through Scotland Yard if you like, sir."

Hunter preferred to keep to the route they were taking.

"I don't see any of those League chaps," he said. "Where are they all?"

"All over the place, stuck away in all these buildings," replied the corporal. "Hot stuff too."

Hunter realised now that the crack and ping of rifle fire was going on all the time, from both sides, though not with any intensity. It sounded like the ranges at Bisley. The corporal further explained that at vantage points on all the roofs sharpshooters with glasses were trying to pick off the opposing snipers, and doing it with considerable success.

They arrived at the War Office and so to the same ante-room where during the long years of the war the constant stream of callers sat and waited, and sent their names wandering on slips of paper through innumerable corridors. It was deserted now, and the uniformed porter on duty stared, considerably impressed, to see this stranger delivered up with a smart salute. The War Office was now the Front itself, and not merely the outer gateway to it.

Hunter sent up an urgently-worded note, and had to wait five impatient minutes, which seemed half an hour, before he was shown up. He found Sir Charles Randall in an inner room which he knew was not his usual office.

"I've shifted my quarters, as you see," he said. "A wandering incendiary shell came through my window early this morning. Fortunately I was out, and the damage wasn't as much as it might have been. . . . Now what's doing, Hunter? Your note sounded mighty urgent."

He talked lightly, but seemed pale and harassed, and obviously had slept little or not at all during the night.

"First of all I shall have to tell you a short story," replied Hunter. And he told as briefly as he could his experiences at Olympia.

The Minister's eyes widened as the narrative proceeded, and showed frank astonishment at the end of it.

"This is amazing news, Hunter. Sounds like the *Arabian Nights*, or something. But what a bag—Zadoff, Billings and the rest. And what a mercy you mopped up that pestilential little feller Locock. We heard Zadoff was coming, but that's all we knew—frankly. And now to hear he's lying with a hole in his head. Great! You're to be heartily congratulated, and so are we. Hunter, I ought to stand up and make you a speech, in the name of my country. But I won't. . . . Let's have a look at those documents instead."

While Hunter was explaining all he knew about them the War Minister rang a bell.

"Colonel Taggart is here—fortunately," he said. "Just good luck that he isn't away on his summer leave. We'll get him to put ice on his head and see what he can make of it. He can smell out a cipher like a pig smells truffles."

Colonel Taggart proved to be a tall thin man, with a stoop and a studious expression. He heard all his Chief had to say, and then disappeared with the cipher document, promising he would report immediately he had made anything out of it.

"And now, Sir Charles, may I ask how you are

feeling about the situation generally?" Hunter asked when they were alone again.

"To the inventor of the Liberty League and the suppressor of Zadoff and Co., much is permitted," returned the Minister with a smile. "I'm feeling much better about it than I did, say, at midnight last night, or at two o'clock this morning. We had a narrow squeak at Storey's Gate, you know. A good deal has happened since we last met, eh? Well, first of all, the Army is as sound as a bell. I knew it would be—but after all, you can never be sure in affairs of this kind. Only three battalions in all have seen red—two of them at Aldershot. They had a rough time before the affair was wiped up, and I *don't* think there'll be much in the way of disciplinary action against those who did it. Then a battalion went wrong at Newcastle-on-Tyne. That's more serious. They're in with the Reds there, and the situation is bad in that particular place. . . . But taking it all round we have a great deal more reason to be joyful to-day than we had last night. We are beginning to know what we are up against."

"And London particularly?"

The Secretary for War rubbed his hands together and looked dreamily before him.

"I think we shall have them smashed before the night's out," he said after a pause.

"That's splendid. I felt things were better, but . . ."

"Yes, I think so," continued Sir Charles, still dreamily, as though there had been no interruption. "Westminster was a scene of great activity during the early morning hours," he went on, as though quoting

from something. . . . "Of course, it isn't my department, but I forgot to mention that the British Navy is still the British Navy. We understand that our friends the enemy had great hopes of it turning completely Red. But so far I understand every ship we've got possesses its time-honoured tint. They're not even pink. Of course there are probably disaffected men scattered all over the Fleet—there's undoubtedly been an immense amount of propaganda going on amongst them. But the movement has not been big enough to enable the wrong 'uns to get together. And of course the Bolshies have been led away by the usual lower-deck grousings. . . . Not to mention the fact that a considerable number of excellent A.B.'s have been taking good Bolshie money and having a good time on it—and then telling their officers all about it. . . . It's a wicked world. . . . Anyhow, to conclude, the Navy has been very useful to us here."

"I said to myself, when I came up the river just now, that Tomlin and Co. must have forgotten it when they made their plans to take London."

"They did. Tomlin's not the first great military commander who's forgotten something, eh? But of course they expected to take all Westminster at a bound last night, and weren't thinking about anything else. They'd counted on having a Red Cabinet Council, or whatever they'd call it, in Downing Street before this. They didn't think there was need to do much else except show they meant business. . . . And of course our revolutionaries have been pushed on to make the plunge at all costs. The foreign element doesn't much care what direction the anarchy takes

so long as it's brought about. They made Tomlin press the button, and they expected to do the rest."

They went on discussing the situation generally, and Hunter told of what had happened at the *Echo*, and the latest development there. But he wanted to get back to one point.

"You talked about having them smashed before the night's out. Might I ask . . . ?"

Taggart entered at this interesting moment, but though Hunter was burning to know what the result of the analysis of the cipher document was, he did not forget his interrupted question.

"I was afraid it was going to be a little difficult at first, sir," said Taggart, "but here's what I make of it." And he handed a sheet of paper to Sir Charles.

The Secretary for War took it lightly. But his face grew pale and set as he read it. He turned swiftly to Taggart.

"Go and tell Air-Marshal Hayling that I am coming to see him immediately on urgent business." Then he turned to Hunter.

"Thank God you brought this immediately, Hunter. This says that if the Red operations are at all held up, two hundred and fifty heavy bombers will be ready to start at twelve o'clock to-day from the aerodromes in Belgium and concentrate on Westminster. Fortunately the Air Ministry personnel moved in here from Kingsway last night when first we knew something was really going to happen." He looked at his watch. "Half-past ten. There's time to do a lot if we're quick, but our attack will have to be speeded up. We must spread ourselves right out of Westminster as soon as we can. We've brought tanks and armoured

cars in sections up the river, Hunter. We were going to attack early this afternoon, but it'll have to be hurried up. Keep it absolutely dark, for God's sake. Look here, I'll scribble out a chit which will help you. Come and see me again just whenever you wish. If I'm busy you'll understand. . . . And go and have a peep in Westminster Hall."

He seized a pen, scribbled frantically for a moment on a sheet of War Office notepaper, handed it to Hunter and was gone from the room. Hunter read:

"Pass Mr. Bryan Hunter anywhere in Westminster," with the Minister's signature underneath.

Hunter left the room clutching the precious bit of paper. He felt shocked by the news.

"Two hundred and fifty heavy bombers," he murmured to himself with awe. . . . This put a different complexion on things.

It was a real invasion by air. The power and scope of aeroplanes had developed to such an enormous extent during the years following the war that a heavy bombing machine had become an engine of destruction such as was not dreamed of even in the closing stages of the great conflict. The bombs and torpedoes they now launched were of terrific power.

Two hundred and fifty aeroplanes carrying such devastating powers of destruction—or even a quarter of that number—would be able to wreck Westminster. And England had now no kind of aerial defence—except that of her own aeroplanes.

This was, indeed, the true defence against such an attack. But Hunter wondered, with apprehension at his heart, what was the real state of England's aerial arm. This also had been the target for constant

Labour criticisms, although the Air Force had not been singled out for such virulent attack as had the tanks. And he had been given to understand that the Government had exercised a considerable amount of camouflage with regard to the Air Force, and had kept its resources far more abreast of modern needs than was generally realised.

But even so the situation had suddenly become grave and threatening as it had not been before. The fate of England now depended on her ships of the air, just as surely as in the past it had rested on her Wooden Walls or her Dreadnoughts. Everybody at some time or other had talked of an Armada of the Air which some day would rush swiftly across the narrow seas and in the thunder and lightning of an intense bombardment would, in one swift blow, paralyse or destroy the nerve-centres of the Island Power. Only, people had always vaguely talked of "the future," without realising that in the domain of the air progress had advanced with such giant strides that yesterday was infinitely farther away than to-morrow. . . . And now the blow was to be delivered.

The fact that it meant that Germany would in an hour or so be at war again with England hardly occurred to Hunter. . . . There would be time enough to think of that if London could weather the storm that was about to break.

CHAPTER XXIV

SUSPENSE

HUNTER was held up repeatedly as he walked back along Whitehall, but the slip of paper he held in his hand passed him through at once. There were only soldiers in khaki to be seen, Regulars and Territorials both. He began to wonder when he would get a glimpse of the Leaguers, and decided that as none were on view he would seek them out.

Back again in Parliament Square, he saw a solitary policeman standing at a corner with an unfamiliar-looking large revolver strapped to his waist, who told him that the big Wesleyan Central Hall close by was one of the places that was full of the Leaguers. Picking his way through protecting sandbag walls and barbed-wire "knife-rests," and passing close behind the all-important inner barricade near Storey's Gate, he walked past the Abbey and Westminster Hospital —noticing that the entrance-hall was crowded with men on stretchers—and arrived at the main door of the building.

A professional-looking man of thirty-five or forty, who looked as though he might be a solicitor, wearing a soft green hat and with cartridge-pouches buckled round the waist of a well-fitting suit, barred Hunter's way with his rifle and abruptly asked him his

business. The incident pleased Hunter, and he was vain enough to announce who he was.

The sentry smiled.

"Our C.-in-C., so to speak, without pay or allowances, eh? Lieut.-Colonel Ebury is inside, Mr. Hunter. I suppose you want to see him."

"Oh, then you are the West Hampstead crowd. . . . Yes, I should like to see him very much."

A few moments later he was talking to Colonel Ebury and a number of his officers, some of whom Hunter had already met. Most of them wore their old khaki tunics, and the O.C. was in full fighting kit.

"The wife made me keep the old rags," he said, catching the visitor's appraising eye, and half apologising, "but I don't think she thought I should ever have to wear 'em again."

They had much to talk about. Colonel Ebury's battalion had taken part in the defence of Storey's Gate, and he had some thrilling details to give of that fight.

"Now that last night's dirty business is over, they're keeping us tucked away," he said. "Only the pretty little soldiers must walk up and down in the daytime, what? Do you know, I believe the official mind's a bit jealous of us. They think we ought to be in khaki! . . . But perhaps they're right. We can't all be hanging round the street corners, looking on at the sniping. . . . Mind you, without the League Westminster would have been all-Red by now. There's about eight hundred of us in this building, and I'm told there's the best part of twenty thousand hidden away like this throughout the Government area. It's a big line to hold, right round."

Hunter thought, as he talked, of what he had just learned. In an hour or so this very building might be a smoking ruin. He remembered what Sir Charles Randall had said about it being necessary "to spread ourselves out of Westminster as soon as we can." But he was unable to say anything about the menace from the air to those he was now with, and in spite of his apparent cheerfulness he could not share their thoroughly optimistic mood.

"Think we shall be here another night?" Ebury asked. "I don't," he went on, without waiting for an answer. "Hush . . . tanks! Sounds like the Great War, doesn't it, when we first heard of 'em and wouldn't believe it. But they're here all right. Crawled up the river or something. My impression is that we shall biff them clean out of it to-day. Then there'll be some nasty scenes all over London, won't there, with those swine running wild all over the place. That's where the League will come in again. I tell you, Hunter, without our lot the Government and everything else would have been scuppered."

Hunter left soon with hearty hand-shakes all round, but feeling very troubled at the thought of what he knew to be hovering over the optimism of his friends. The secret he carried with him assorted ill with the general feeling of cheerfulness which seemed to be subtly pervading the whole neighbourhood. The word had mysteriously gone round that something good was coming which would soon put an end to the reign of the Reds, and every face he saw seemed to reflect this.

In his mind's eye he saw the aerodromes over in Belgium, with the giant bombers drawn up in line,

ready to loose such powers of destruction as even modern war had not experienced.

His paper and himself were both very severely scrutinised at the entrance to Palace Yard, but he passed through to the entrance to Westminster Hall, where the double guard seemed to let him through with much reluctance, in spite of his authority.

He knew what to expect, but all the same the scene came as a surprise. There were tanks, and pieces of tanks, all over the broad stone floor, and under the ancient roof squads of mechanics were working feverishly, with compressed lips and fixed expressions. Hunter learned that the tanks were of a new model, small and handy, and capable of doing easily thirty-five miles an hour on such a surface as the streets of London. He also learned that hidden away in Dean's Yard the finishing touches were being put to a score of armoured cars.

It was now after eleven o'clock, and it suddenly occurred to Hunter that it would be interesting to look up Langton, the *Echo's* representative in the House of Commons, and see what was happening there.

It took Hunter some little trouble to find him, but eventually the two of them were sitting in the Press Gallery. The House was full, nearly four hundred members being present. Langton explained that the previous sitting had risen at two o'clock in the morning, and that the Members had passed the night in the smoke-room, the committee rooms, and anywhere else they could find. Everybody looked very tired. The House was now sitting in Extraordinary Session, called to discuss the events

which had occurred since the adjournment of the night before.

There were only some Ministers of minor importance and a few Under Secretaries on the Treasury Bench. But in a few moments the Premier came in, tossing his white locks with something of a defiant gesture as he took his place, followed by several members of the first string of the Cabinet.

There was a sympathetic outburst of those quaint sounds which the House of Commons is pleased to call "cheers" as the Premier rose to make a statement on the position of affairs.

Undoubtedly, grave as matters were, he said, there was just as undoubtedly reason for optimism—a statement which brought forth ironical noises from one or two quarters. As the House knew, the two great attacks of the night had been beaten off, with very heavy losses to the enemy (a Labour Member objected to the term, but let the matter pass at that) and, unfortunately, with considerable losses on the side of the Government. The conduct of all those who had taken part in the defence had been admirable, whether Regular troops, Territorials, Police or the members of the Liberty League.

The House would have heard with regret of the great destruction which had occurred to Government buildings, but he was glad to be able to say that most of the archives of the various Departments of State concerned had been saved.

As to the immediate future, circumstances did not permit him to speak in any detail, but there was every reason to hope that the situation promised a swift turn for the better. Certain measures, which

it would be best for him not to go into at the moment, had been taken, and his military advisers assured him that they ought to be more than sufficient to cope with the situation in London.

With regard to the Provinces, news was scanty and somewhat contradictory, but on the whole there was every reason to say that the forces of law and order were holding their own. But the general situation throughout Great Britain was still in too great a state of flux for any very definite pronouncement to be made as to the ascendancy of one side or the other. It was useless to deny that the situation was one of exceptional gravity. Much would depend on the turn of affairs in London itself, here within a few yards of where they were sitting, and as to that, he would repeat there was every reason to anticipate the best.

Finally he wished to underline the fact that there had been practically no defection on the part of any of the Forces of the Crown. Their loyalty was unquestioned. The whole of the country was under martial law, and commanders of troops in the various areas had authority to act entirely as they thought fit. With firm hearts and unfaltering footsteps they must go through to the end with this unfortunate and bitter struggle. Nobody deplored force more than he did, but the Government would shrink from no measure within their power to stamp out this explosion of anarchy which threatened civilisation to its very foundations.

"Pity you didn't think of that long ago," came a voice. But on the whole this very typical Government pronouncement was received with every favour.

There was little or nothing in it of which Members were not already aware, but there was a certain comfort in hearing the head of the Government say the same things which most of them had been discussing among themselves up to a few minutes ago.

A Member whom Hunter recognised as Sir Harry Bampfylde, a warm supporter of the League, jumped up to ask whether the powers under Martial Law given to commanders of troops would apply equally to those in command of bodies of the League who were fighting "on their own," with no support either from Regular or Territorial troops.

"Obviously that must be so," returned the Premier. "The organisation known as the Liberty League was yesterday evening incorporated in the Forces of the Crown. Any commander of such a body is therefore a military commander invested with full powers to act as the situation demands."

"I only wished to say," went on Sir Harry Bampfylde, "that not long ago the Right Honourable Gentleman himself said that the organisation in question was a provocative movement which could in no way be countenanced by the Government. As the League will undoubtedly save the situation —if the situation is saved at all—would it not be a graceful thing if the head of the Government would retract those words and bestow on the League a belated expression of approval?"

The Premier seemed nonplussed for a moment, but his noted readiness in reply did not altogether fail him.

"We are dealing with the situation as it stands at the present moment," he said. "As the organisation

in question has now received the full approval of the Government, it is quite obvious that the Government now approves fully of the organisation in question."

A happy smile ran along the occupants of the Treasury Bench. Even at such a time they felt that the verbal dexterity of their Chief was something that really mattered.

Questions and answers and interruptions followed thick and fast. There were a number of so-called Moderate Labourites present who made remarks which showed that at least half their sympathies were with the men on the other side of the barricades—who treated the mad anarchy in London as though it were a mischievous episode which deserved little more than mild censure. There were also Liberal Members of the crank variety—people whose mental processes were like a crazy maze with no exit—who showed that they were even now more troubled by the methods necessary to put down anarchy than by the anarchy itself. They said things for which, at such a time, they ought to have been taken out and shot. And yet, save for a few angry retorts from some outraged Members, the Mother of Parliaments seemed to smile blandly on their dangerous folly as mere playful idiosyncrasy.

Hunter found that the whole thing affected him with a depressing sense of unreality. In an hour or so at most this very Chamber would be a target for the most destructive missiles ever launched. It might be blasted by devilish powers which in a few crashing, thunderous seconds would blow into ruins the forms and traditions of centuries.

He wondered if the Premier himself knew of what was about to happen. It was possible that he had not yet been told. . . . But if he had, and could sit there with unmoved face listening to some of the imbecilities that were cast up before him, then it was heroic.

"Let's get out of this," Hunter whispered to Langton. "Some of those people down there are more than I can stand."

They went to a depressing refreshment-bar and drank coffee.

"You mustn't take too much notice of those chaps," said Langton. "Every Parliament has its damned fools. . . . Take it all round, the House is sound."

He had spent twenty-five years chronicling the processes of politics from the Press Gallery and still felt all the enthusiasm for it which might be expected from a casual visitor admitted for an afternoon to the Strangers' Gallery to hear a more than usually interesting debate. He was a sturdy upholder of everything that had to do with the House, and could hardly bring himself to believe that a man could not be all that his country should require him to be once he had the magic letters M.P. after his name.

Langton was bubbling over with the optimism of the moment. He had heard a little while ago from a well-known Member, a personal friend of his, that things would soon be looking very much brighter, and that as far as London was concerned the danger might be said to have ceased to exist.

Hunter found it very difficult to listen to all this. His secret was beginning to weigh heavily on his

spirits. He felt that he would like to tell Langton that his beloved House might very soon go up in clouds of flame and dust. . . . It was unreasonable of him, perhaps, but he felt irritated by everybody else's good spirits.

He left Langton still talking in the happiest frame of mind, and went out of the Houses of Parliament by a door that led him into Palace Yard.

It was very obvious at once that great changes had taken place while Parliament had been talking.

A double row of tanks was drawn up in the yard, their purring engines making a sustained roar. Once outside the railings he found that all round the square bodies of troops—both men in khaki and the Leaguers—were drawn up in the shelter of the various buildings, screened from any observation by the enemy. Down by the Abbey was a long row of armoured cars.

There was now a lively fusillade from both sides, and bullets were whining across the square, occasionally smashing a window somewhere and bringing down a tinkle of broken glass.

At that moment Hunter saw Billy hurriedly crossing the square, carrying his camera, and with two soldiers following with the rest of his gear. He caught sight of Hunter and came over to him.

"Say, I guess the old British worm's turning at last. I've come to see these tanks as they go out."

Hunter asked him how he had fared since they parted at the bridge.

"Had the time of my life. That Loot was a sport and gave me an A1 breakfast. He belongs to the Union all right. Then he put me ashore and I've

been hopping round ever since. Got the Premier and his Cabinet having breakfast, all of 'em looking mighty solemn. Got the Members of the House of Lords trooping in to business. Got the room of the War Minister, burnt out by a flame bomb. And the hospital over there. And of course all this barricade stuff, and the rest of it." He waved his hand over to the burnt-out buildings. "And I met a General, one of the main guys of the show. I told him all about Olympia, and he was very friendly and gave me a couple of friends to run round with me when the real fun starts. . . . Of course you're wise to what's going to happen. They were going to attack this afternoon, but for some reason I haven't figured out they're hurrying it up."

Hunter wanted to tell Billy. . . . It was a burdensome thing to possess such a secret.

CHAPTER XXV

ENTER THE TANKS

THE Government attack took place at twelve o'clock and came as an almost complete surprise to the Red Forces.

For half an hour before that time the rifle and machine-gun fire had continued, gradually increasing in volume. Under cover of the uproar, and with every precaution, the tanks were moved to the most advantageous positions for attack.

The main assaults were delivered at precisely the two points where the Reds had most furiously pressed —against their barricade, which now stretched across the end of Whitehall, covering the approach to Trafalgar Square, and against the captured redoubt at Storey's Gate, now also turned by the Reds into a formidable defence.

Just before twelve o'clock the opposing Government redoubts at these two points were carefully thinned in the middle, leaving only a single wall of sandbags to resist the passage of the tanks. These the leading tanks charged, and rushed on over the "No-Man's Land" separating the two forces.

In Whitehall six tanks were used for the attack, those behind following at close intervals after the leader. As the first tanks rushed along there came in the first few moments a wilder burst of firing from

the Red barricade. But this died away almost immediately. Their sudden appearance had something of the effect which the tanks caused on the German infantry when they were first used during the war. There was a panic among the Reds at the barricade. They were perfectly familiar with the idea of tanks, but they did not expect to see any emerging from Westminster. And they knew how hopeless it was to try and resist them in street-fighting. The Reds, indeed, had been very clear on that point all along.

As the first tank struck their barricade, and thrust its way through, the Reds manning it scattered right and left. From all points in Trafalgar Square a hail of bullets was directed on the agile monsters as they clambered through one after another—giving something of the impression of a crazy obstacle race at a gymkhana—but rifles or machine-guns made no more impression on them than green peas. Within little more than half a minute the whole half-dozen of them were in Trafalgar Square and—raying out fan-wise—firing on everything they saw with their machine-guns. There were large groups of Reds to be seen on every side, and the machine-guns had no lack of targets.

The burst-through at Storey's Gate came at almost the same moment, and the tanks rumbled swiftly across the Horse Guards' Parade, with a mob of scattering fugitives before them. Many of the flying Reds took cover amid the trees of St. James's Park, and were, for the time being, safe. But those who fled blindly before them were lost. The tanks caught them up, and passed on. Two of the tanks, turning

to the right, charged at full speed through the sand-bags under the Admiralty Arch and followed in the track of those from Whitehall. Another climbed fantastically up the broad Carlton House Steps—a sight to inspire terror into anything born of woman, as it crawled up like some huge, uncannily intelligent toad. It burst, with its last breath as it seemed, through the barricade at the top, and then, again on the level, ran along at amazing speed, its machine-guns rattling furiously.

Another took the barricade at St. James's Palace, and the remaining two, crashing through the railings into the Green Park, rolled swiftly up the hill into Piccadilly.

In the space of only a few minutes a complete and amazing change had come over the scene. It was now the turn of Authority to speak with something of the voice it should have used months—or years—ago.

Up the Strand and the Haymarket, along Piccadilly and Regent Street, and throughout the main street of the West End the swift chariots of destruction pursued their way. Before their impetuous pursuit the Red forces were of no more account than flies. In Charing Cross Road one tank came across a line of ammunition motor-lorries whose drivers were making frantic efforts to get away. Not realising what they had to deal with, the tank crew opened fire. There was a rapid series of heavy explosions as the lorries went "up," tearing a great hole in the street and shattering the buildings on either side. The tank stopped. Then it crawled in and out of the crater in the street and went on unharmed

through the ruin, while demolished walls crashed down behind it.

One-half the number of tanks available had been held in reserve to see how the first attack progressed. When it was seen that the siege of the Reds had utterly collapsed before their new antagonists, the remaining half of the tanks were sent out to crumple up the western half of the investing circle, in the region running from Hyde Park Corner, down through Belgravia and Sloane Square to the river near Chelsea Hospital.

Up to now this had been a very "quiet sector." At no point on this half of the circle had the Reds attacked with any determination, contenting themselves with heavy firing. But all the same the Government had been compelled to hold this region almost as strongly as the other, for fear of a sudden surprise attack there. In the first phase of the Battle of London all the advantages had been in the hands of General Tomlin, and it was lucky that he did not know how best to utilise them.

And now the moment had come to deal with this sector. Half the remaining tanks went swiftly round to Hyde Park Corner, and while three of the six drove into Hyde Park itself, driving its defenders ahead in a mob which scattered through the trees towards the Marble Arch and Bayswater, the other three circled round to take the Red positions in rear. Simultaneously the last six tanks went through the Red defences in the Sloane Square region and elsewhere. It was here a repetition of the scenes in Trafalgar Square, with the difference that the Reds were taken in front and rear. In and out of the

stately squares of Belgravia, down into Chelsea, down the Brompton Road and through Knightsbridge the chase went on.

In all the streets that radiated outwards from the invested area were to be seen the bodies of Red soldiers. The unchained fury struck them with the speed and ruthlessness of lightning. Many were caught by the machine-guns as they were clambering into windows or breaking their way into doorways. There was no ill-advised mercy. Here was the power to crush an evil thing, and it was used to its full effect.

A few minutes after the last of the tanks went out the armoured cars were unleashed. It was quite well understood that in the first rush of the tanks through the opposing lines many of the Reds would escape or be overlooked. The instructions to the armoured cars were to look out for any such re-groupings, to break them up, to carry the pursuit into a wider area than the tanks were intended to do, and at the same time to announce by their presence the good news to London that Authority—the State itself—once more ruled in the capital.

Within half an hour after the first launching of the tanks the Red Army of London, as a coherent force, had ceased to exist. Some thousands were killed in the first shocks of the pursuit, and the rest were scattered far and wide. And though later many of them re-formed—though the last word of anarchy had not yet been said in the great metropolis—yet from that moment the power of the Reds in London was broken. There was only one army—the Government's. The rest consisted of bands of ruffians who

were bold enough or ruthless enough to play out their desperate game to the last.

And the breakdown of the forces of evil was accomplished only by machines. The tanks and the armoured cars had the situation so well in hand that there was no need to sacrifice any further lives in the initial scattering of the Red Forces. So much precious blood had already been spilt in upholding the Right that there was every desire to avoid any further sacrifice now that the monster could be crushed safely in the protection of armour. And though the forces in Westminster would gladly have followed in the wake of the triumphant chariots they were for the time being held back. Not a life was lost on the Government side in this breaking down of the Red cordon. It was only in the final stages of the suppression in London that civilisation again had to pay the price of its continuation.

As the reports came in of what the tanks and armoured cars had done the troops in Westminster were moved after them. Out and farther outwards they moved, in a widening circle, carrying security with them into regions which, for a brief, nightmare period, had been the haunt of savagery—and away, though none of them knew it, from a terror even more awful than the one that had just been broken.

CHAPTER XXVI

INVASION BY AIR

HUNTER and Billy were at the barricade in Whitehall when the tanks went through. They stood with the men in the steel helmets while the defending wall was thinned to admit of the passage of the monsters, Billy with a constant eye cocked to all that was going on round them, and busy at frequent intervals with the handle of his camera. The fusillade was at its height, and Whitehall was full of flying bullets which came singing over the eight-foot-high barricade. Just behind them was the War Office, with its smashed windows. Hunter wondered what had happened in there—what decisions had been taken following on the deciphering of the message from Berlin.

They could just see the nose of the first tank peeping out from the sheltering corner between the War Office and the Office of Woods and Forests. An officer of the Tank Corps stood at the corner with his eye constantly glancing at his wrist-watch. Then he waved his hand, and the tank moved slowly out of cover. It was just twelve o'clock, and Whitehall's first experience of "zero hour."

Everybody at the barricade had moved aside, leaving a wide passage in the middle. The tank circled into the road, straightened out again, gathered speed with amazing rapidity, and charged full tilt at the weakened barricade.

The sandbags flew into the air as it hit them, and the troops at the barricade gave a yell of delight. Another tank followed, and the rest, lurching playfully over such obstacles as remained. A hail of bullets now flew through the breach and sang over the top of the barricade, but, all the same, adventurous heads were peeping over, while some of the troops were using periscopes. The hail of bullets ceased, and then there came a delighted cheer as the first tank crashed through the Red barricade, followed swiftly by the others.

"Gee, but I've got some bully pictures," shouted Billy. "I guess that beats anything of the kind ever seen before. But I must get 'em clearing Trafalgar Square."

"Best wait a little," said Hunter. "There'll be lots of those chaps hanging round yet."

But Billy had folded up the legs of his tripod and was running hard down the street, followed by his two soldiers. Hunter decided that it would have been sheer foolishness to follow. The surrounding buildings were by no means clear of Reds, and there was no use in inviting a sudden end to his interest in all the proceedings. Through his glasses he could see a good deal of what was happening in Trafalgar Square. There were scores of Reds rushing up towards St. Martin's Lane, and he could see them falling before the fire of a tank that was now rushing up the square, some of them dropping at the foot of the statue to Edith Cavell.

A little later the armoured cars passed through, and then after an interval came detachments of troops, in battle order, whose business it was to search through

the blocks of offices and the hotels in the area just cleared, and make sure that dangerous parties of Reds were not left behind—the old process of "cleaning up" the battlefields of France now applied to the streets of London.

Then came larger bodies of troops, and following them a long column of the Leaguers—some thousands of them, with khaki webbing strapped over every possible kind of clothing, and officers in every possible kind of hat. It was curious that though most of the officers had saved their old war tunics only a small proportion of them seemed to have been able to put hands on their old military caps. . . . They made a thoroughly impressive body of men—the modern equivalent of the London train bands of long ago.

In half a dozen directions Westminster was thus emptying itself to form that cordon round central London, far greater in extent than the first, which during the days that followed was such a great factor in restoring tranquillity.

Shortly after half-past twelve, while the troops were still streaming out of Westminster, Hunter went again to the War Office. Through corridors that were busy with hurrying people, all bearing on their faces an air of great haste and urgency, he made his way up to the office of the War Secretary. The door opened and a secretary came out, showing that Sir Charles was now alone at his desk.

He discussed what had happened in the greatest spirits. The attack had succeeded perfectly. There was no doubt that they had broken the back of the trouble—as far as London was concerned, anyhow—

and that was a good beginning for the rest of the country.

"There are a great many fewer Communists in the world than there were a short half-hour ago," he said.

"Yes, but . . . ?" began Hunter, and went no further. The Secretary for War understood perfectly well what he meant. He looked at a small clock on his desk.

"I expect the first real aerial battle in history is just about to begin, somewhere off the coast," he said gravely. "As you see, we're emptying Westminster of all the troops, and we're evacuating all the hospital patients we can. St. Thomas's Hospital isn't as full as the rest, and they're taking most of them over the bridge now. . . . In an affair of this kind, of course, one spot may be as safe as another. Still, Westminster is the danger-point, and we must do what we can."

"But what about the invasion itself? How are we meeting it?"

"Within five minutes of your leaving here every aerodrome in the country had its first instructions. Every fighting aeroplane that was flying elsewhere on any other business was instantly recalled by wireless. And now everything that can fight is either up in the air or preparing to get there. They're going up in relays, according to the situation of the aerodromes. The Huns won't have it all their own way. . . . And if their bombers *do* get here, ours go to Berlin. It's the only way to deal with the situation, and a visit there is long overdue."

"And the Air Marshal—is he feeling confident?"

"He was fairly cheerful when I last saw him. This hasn't *entirely* taken him by surprise, you know. Only this morning he'd had news of activity in the aerodromes in Belgium . . . we've got plenty of friends over there, of course. But your cipher document was the first definite thing we've had to go upon. . . . Things were happily more ready than the public would dream was the case, and you can take it that the Air Force is pretty keen."

"I suppose there'll be nothing done in the way of warning London?"

"Not a thing. Everything is disorganised. And besides, what's the good? It would only cause panic. I suppose we shall get a bit of that in any case. . . . It will be a nasty shock."

"And this place—what about your people here?"

"One of their principal objectives, eh?" Sir Charles smiled a little wryly. "Well, somebody's got to be here. There's the wireless, although we're now busy in fixing up a supplementary set—two, in fact. I'm going to send everybody out who has no particular reason to stop here."

"And the Cabinet, and all the rest of them?"

"They were warned a little while ago, and they'll scatter anywhere they like within the new cordon. The exodus of the M.P.'s is proceeding at the present moment, I believe. But I expect some will stick to Westminster. There are some very useful vaults under the House, as you may remember from your history book. This is the Gunpowder Plot reversed. Guy Fawkes is striking from above instead of from below. . . . If the Huns' original plan of concentrating on Westminster is carried out, well, it won't

be so bad for London as a whole. But if they find out the Reds have been thoroughly beaten here, and I dare say they know it already, they may scatter their stuff anywhere. . . . And now, au 'voir, Hunter. It's absurd the way you make me talk. Still, even the official mind can't ignore your services to the cause. But there is plenty to be done yet."

Hunter went out, a keen admiration for the man he had just left mingling with his apprehension for the fate of London. Of all places in the great city the War Office was perhaps the very last one in which anyone with knowledge of what was to happen within the next hour would choose to remain.

He walked back along Whitehall, feeling the suspense hanging over him like a cloud. The place was now almost empty, save for the debris of war. Here and there sappers were busy with reels of telephone and telegraph wires, running them hurriedly over the sandbag walls. There was no sound of firing now, or of anything else, and the silence oppressed him.

At the corner of what was Downing Street he paused to look through the ruins on to the green of the park beyond. . . . It might have been Ypres in its earlier period of desolation.

The sense of loneliness increased as he gained the corner of Parliament Square. Several motor ambulances passed him, driving swiftly over to Westminster Bridge. When they had passed there was nothing living in sight. It was uncanny thus to be in the heart of Westminster at midday and see it a dead, silent city.

A half-formed idea was in his head as to what to

do during the coming crisis. He remembered a conversation in a mess at Constantinople when, apropos of the British air raids on that city during the war, it had been argued that the safest place in such circumstance, and at the same time the best place to see all that was happening, would be the balcony of a minaret. Only in the extremely unlikely chance of a direct hit on such a small target would there be any danger at all. A miss of a foot would be just as good as a mile. And it occurred to him that the balcony of the tall campanile of the Roman Catholic Cathedral would offer practically all the advantages of a minaret.

He began to walk quickly in that direction. And as he rounded the corner opposite the Abbey he came across Billy, his two faithful soldiers still with him, sitting eating sandwiches with his back propped against the pedestal of the statue to Abraham Lincoln.

"Hell," called out Billy, with his mouth quite full, "here's a living being at last. Say, Hunter, is this the Deserted Village, or what? I came back here after a pretty lively time, thinking I might find you and dig out lunch somewhere. I wandered on and on, and didn't see a living soul. And then I saw my distinguished fellow-citizen here, and felt I'd really struck a friend at last. Abe has comforted me quite a whole lot."

"But haven't you heard yet?"

"No. Say, what's the matter? You're looking like Ophelia. I'm beginning to feel quite skeered. What's doing?"

Hunter took him aside and gave him an outline of the situation.

"Hell!" exclaimed Billy earnestly. "That certainly is an explanation. You know, I dislike aeroplanes more than anything. Anything down below doesn't worry me, but those damn things have no respect for the movies or anything else. . . . And are you going to beat it out of the danger zone?"

"More or less." Hunter explained what he intended to do.

Billy looked very thoughtful.

"It's not too much in my line, Hunter. I tell you, I don't like aeroplanes. They don't appeal to me. Going with you through that stunt up on Olympia was one thing, but this . . ."

Hunter explained his minaret theory.

"You're right. There's a good deal in that. And anyhow, I'd hate to see you start off alone. . . . Come on, you boys." He turned to the two soldiers. "Let's get a move on for the next act in this Wild West Show of yours."

They found a strong guard of soldiers at the Cathedral, in charge of a sergeant-major, and nothing but Hunter's magic piece of paper would have secured them admission. There were more sappers working on the staircase as they made the ascent of the tall tower. Hunter guessed that this was one of the subsidiary wireless stations of which Sir Charles had spoken, a surmise which a little later he found to be correct.

Billy exclaimed with admiration when at last they stood on the balcony, three hundred feet above the ground, and looked out at the magnificent panorama of London spread before them. Westminster

lay at their feet like a beautiful relief map—a city of palaces, with the green of trees and gardens peeping out everywhere.

"My, but it's pretty near as bully a view as the one from the old Woolworth Building. . . . Now if we'd only been up here last night instead of in that greenhouse place of yours, what shouldn't we have seen. This is *the* O.P. of all London."

"If we'd been here last night we shouldn't be here now," returned Hunter. "Don't forget that it's only because of what we found on Zadoff that anybody knows what's going to happen."

"That's true. It was sure Providence that chased you up there. . . . I'm going to take a panoram of this, whatever happens. It'll make a lovely addition to my Bird's Eye View of European Capitals series."

"It probably won't look like that much longer," said Hunter.

It was a beautifully clear day, and they could see almost to the outer edges of London. Hunter looked at his watch. It was a few minutes past one o'clock. . . . *They* would not be long now. He felt his heart beating fast. The climb had been a stiff one, but it was more than that.

A few fleecy, white cumulus clouds drifted across a serene sky of blue. It was terrible to think how soon death and destruction would be dropping from that smiling prospect.

He searched the eastern horizon with his glasses. . . . Far away he saw a speck, and another and another. There was no doubt about it. They were coming. . . . The price for weakness in Victory

was now to be paid. Here was what the Germans had planned and hoped for ever since the days when the assembled statesmen at Versailles had played at their fatal game of trying to make a perfect world out of very imperfect material.

CHAPTER XXVII

ENGLAND'S CRISIS

ENGLAND on that morning was as much at the crisis of its fate as when Philip launched his Armada, or when Nelson fought Trafalgar, or Haig told his hard-pressed armies that they were fighting with their backs to the wall.

And yet only a tiny handful of people in England knew it—knew that out of one crisis had sprung another, and that to the dangers of internal revolution, waged on the fierce, implacable scale that marked everything inspired by the godless powers enthroned in Russia, were now added the terrors of swift invasion by a foreign enemy.

Following on the war, which gave such an amazing impetus to the aerial arm, the danger of invasion by air in the future had been present in the minds of most people.

But gradually, as the stress of internal politics developed, the idea of aerial danger from Germany receded into the background, and was almost forgotten. The nation had so much to worry about at home that it could spare no thought for anything that might be happening outside. The bugbear of Germany was replaced by a spectre even more terrible—a monster even less human than the Hun of execrated memory, which overturned nations and civilisations by subtler means than force of arms,

and left them lying in blood and ruin without hope of redemption. Gradually, even, the people of England, or many of them, began to see in Germany many virtues that did not exist elsewhere. There came no stories of bloody revolution from Germany —no reports of massacres and street fighting, of wholesale rape and misery beyond words. The description "peaceable and industrious" was now nearly always applied to Germany. It was, apparently, a nation of honest and worthy Fritzes, sturdily labouring to reinstate themselves in the world after the errors of the past. The country had a President, who wore no spiked helmet, and made no flamboyant speeches. The story of Germany's cruelty and blood-guiltiness in the Great War seemed to belong to a remote past—remote almost as Waterloo.

Germany had become a land which shone with honest virtue in a festering and repugnant Europe. True, she had treated every signature to every treaty she had signed as a scrap of paper. True, she had not carried out a single one of her promises to the old Allied Governments. . . . But people were too tired to become indignant. Their nerves had been at full stretch for too many years, and now the creeping terror of the Continent was on their own doorsteps. . . . True, also, that Germany had overrun Belgium and Holland at the very first opportunity. . . . But at least these countries were safe from Bolshevism. They were lucky!

So that even among hundreds of thousands of people who a few years before would have counted it as the greatest sin and weakness to hold the slightest good opinion of the "Huns," there had now crept

in the idea that Germany was an entirely new Germany. True, it was said everywhere that Germany was as active as Russia in promoting discord within England—that she was ever plotting her revenge for having failed the first time. . . . But somehow, even when they said it, people did not believe it. Or rather, the obsession of that other terror, which was both within and without, drove the idea of any German danger so far into the background that it ceased to count. There was only one thing that mattered—that "glorious wind from Russia," as an exalted writer had put it in the earlier days when all the people who felt they were intellectual felt also that there "must be something in Bolshevism." Alas! that the "glorious wind" had increased to a pitiless gale which had blown the standards of civilisation to ribbons all over Europe.

So, hiding conveniently behind a terror which they had done so much to bring into the world, the Germans quietly made their preparations and watched the growing power of the Bolshevik movement in England. They were ready to strike at any moment, but they wished to deliver one stunning blow at a time when its effect would be so overwhelming that there could be no question of reprisal. Britain's wonderful development and prowess in the air during the Great War had not been forgotten. But Britain was not the same now. She was at last gripped fast in the ensanguined claws of the Red Terror. And a Britain attacked from the skies at precisely the right moment—bombed off her last foothold into the final abyss of red revolution—would be a Britain that could not hit back. Once the Reds

were in power the story of the British Empire was written. . . . There could be no reprisal from a country in uproar, and with the very heart of its Government lying in ashes from a surprise aerial attack on a gigantic scale.

More than once before in its history the ancient British Lion had surprisingly awakened from slumber to show that it still possessed the power to fight when attacked. But this time there seemed no possible doubt to every foreign observer that the historic old beast had passed to its final senility.

Germany's aerial fleet was launched and on its way. The squadrons of heavy tri-plane bombers, many-engined and carrying huge torpedoes and bombs of devastating power, were led by a cloud of swifter and smaller fighting aeroplanes whose rôle it was to beat off any hostile formations that might be encountered and leave the way clear for the heavier and slower machines, whose function was primarily to destroy and not to fight.

Divided into five separate huge squadrons, they streamed in a great V-shaped formation over the flat shores of Belgium like a monstrous flight of wild geese. The roar of their innumerable propellers filled the air with a sound like constant, unbroken thunder. Ahead and on the flanks of each squadron of aerial battleships flew the fighting planes, their speed at present suited to their convoy, but ready at any moment to dart forward to the attack.

It was by far the greatest gathering of aerial force ever put together, and the fleets between them carried more than enough explosives to reduce the whole

of Westminster to a dust-heap. They flew in line ahead at ten-mile intervals.

But the leading squadron of fifty bombers, with its attendant scouts and fighters, was only within a few minutes' flying distance of the English coast when Berlin received news by wireless that a radical change had come over the situation in London, and that the Government troops, far from collapsing, had completely scattered the Red forces by a surprise charge of tanks and armoured cars. Moreover, there had been no sign of defection on the part of the Army, and there was every reason to believe that there was a sudden great activity throughout the British aerial forces.

There was some very hurried thinking in the Wilhelmstrasse. It was realised at once that here was a vastly different situation. Even if the German aerial fleet was able to beat aside any opposition hurriedly brought to meet it and reach London, there was now nothing to prevent the British retaliating in kind on Berlin. The speed and range of aeroplanes had so vastly increased that a descent on Berlin was easily within the possibilities of the British machines. And there were no illusions in Berlin as to what British airmen could do when put to it.

The heads of the German Government, with their Air and Military advisers, were already gathered together to await the first reports of the progress of the invasion.

There was a hurried council over the new development. The wilder spirits insisted that now the invasion was launched it should be allowed to

go forward at all costs. Germany had shown her hand, and it was too late to draw back. But the view prevailed that the invasion must be a complete and crushing success, or must not be launched at all. It was based on the supposition that the Red forces in England would carry all before them. But here was the news that at the most vital point of all they were scattered. If England still retained enough internal cohesion to be able to strike back through the air, Berlin was as much at the mercy of England as London was at the mercy of Germany. The power on either side to launch terrible destruction through the medium of the air was more or less equal. And if the resistance of England could not be broken by means of a stunning aerial attack in conjunction with the triumph of the Reds, then Germany was only bringing down terrible reprisals on her own head.

As to the fact that Germany had shown her hand by the launching of her aerial fleet, that would not matter providing it were recalled in time. They knew enough about the English character to know that this move would be followed by no reprisals providing no actual attack had been made. England also had quite enough to attend to at the present moment, and was not likely to force any trouble that could be avoided. And an explanation that the German aerial fleet had merely set out for "manœuvres" on a grand scale, and had possibly sailed a little farther towards England than was intended would be quite sufficient—in view of England's present distractions—to gloss over the incident.

So the more cautious spirits in Berlin argued, and they carried the day.

Within little more than five minutes of the receipt at the Wilhelmstrasse of the wireless news describing the changed situation in London, an urgent wireless message ordering instant recall to its bases was sent to the German aerial fleet.

But it was too late for the order to be obeyed entirely. By the time it was despatched the first squadron had reached the English coast. It was almost instantly engaged. And though the remaining squadrons of the fleet wheeled in obedience to the peremptory call from Berlin, the first squadron found itself cut off and fighting for its existence almost immediately it had passed over the English coast-line.

At the various aerodromes strategically placed on or near the east coast of England the fighting planes had been hurriedly prepared in obedience to the call from Whitehall. There was none of the calm leisureliness that Drake displayed on Plymouth Hoe. It was a feverish, frantic rush to get as many fighting 'planes into the air as possible to meet the approaching danger. And the last-minute caution displayed by Berlin saved the situation.

The British aeroplanes rose to a forlorn hope, and found themselves engaged with only a fifth of the German Fleet. The first German squadron was immediately cut off, and found as much danger behind it as ahead. Its Commander, during the Great War, had several times raided London in Zeppelins. There was no doubt of his courage—nor of the intensity of his hate. He had been one of those who during

the war, had frequently boasted that "London would be laid in ashes." He had seen Britain emerge victorious and his own country defeated, and—like so many other Germans—he could never rid his mind of the conviction that it was merely a curious, inexplicable accident that the war had so ended. But here at last was an opportunity of really putting into execution what he had so often dreamed of. The powerful squadron he now commanded made the memory of the Zeppelins seem puny and almost ridiculous. He could unchain lightnings immeasurably more dreadful. It was therefore entirely in accord with his long-cherished inclinations that he decided that to return would be as hazardous as to press on, and so made up his mind to fight his way on to London and wreak all the vengeance he could on the "perfidious capital."

The squadron roared onwards to its original objective, while ahead, on its flanks and in rear, the fighting planes wheeled and circled, and burst into flames, and crashed in flaming spirals to the earth far below. For long the formation of giant bombers was unbroken, but as they pressed onwards more and more British fighting machines rose to the encounter, and with their light guns, firing high-explosive shells, attacked the big triplanes. A large number of these were sent below, their great bulks striking the earth with tremendous crashes and a terrifying outburst of flame and flying metal. But the bombers were equipped for fighting too, and were able to do a lot of damage, while being themselves hard to "sink."

Many of their opponents were disposed of. To

London, and over it, the amazing, epic fight went on. Half the German squadron reached its objective, and while the gun crews of the big machines fought off the attacking British aeroplanes their terrific cargoes of explosives were launched on the city below.

CHAPTER XXVIII

AGONY

WITHIN a few minutes, as Hunter and the others on the campanile watched, the first of the German bombers arrived over Westminster. They were flying at a height of only three or four thousand feet, there being no anti-aircraft guns to fear. At that height their great size was very apparent, and the roar from their multiple propellers made the air vibrate. Round and about them flew smaller planes, wheeling and diving, and from the bombers themselves came the rattle of machine-gun fire and the louder reports of their 6-pounder quick-firers.

Up to six and then a dozen of the attacking bombers Hunter counted, and there were others behind stretching away to the horizon with the smaller machines, as it seemed, mixed up higgledy-piggledy with them.

Through his glasses he could see the nearer machines in clearest detail—their three twin decks, the dull gleam of their armoured sides, and the gun flashes from the two circular turrets on the top of each. As they came rapidly up he concentrated his attention on one German bomber which was being fiercely attacked by three British fighters. They had closed to within two hundred yards, and were hammering away with their light guns. As he looked one of the British machines crumpled up, and fell like a pocket-hand-

kerchief with a stone in it. Though but a detail in what was happening, his heart seemed to fall with it. Then to his inexpressible joy there came a sudden burst of flame from the huge bomber, it wavered in its flight, he saw its propellers stop, there was a final outburst of firing from its turret guns, and then it crashed down. It seemed to be ages in falling, and he followed its downward plunge through his glasses. It disappeared somewhere behind Waterloo Station. He saw a burst of flame and smoke and debris shoot upwards from the ground, far above the house-tops, and a few moments afterwards there came the rending sound of its impact—a boom and a crash in one.

And then the earth shook and burst into flame, with crashes of appalling intensity, as the charges of explosives dropped down.

He saw one corner of the massive Victoria Tower of the Houses of Parliament fall aside as if shaved off by a gigantic knife. For a moment it hung poised, leaning outwards, and then the column of severed masonry split up into separate masses and fell down vertically. And even as he noticed that the Union Jack still flew on the riven summit of the tower, four hundred feet from the ground, he saw the western façade of the Abbey and one of Wren's towers disappear in a mist of flame.

There came the stunning crash of an explosion from somewhere much nearer to them which turned him weak and sick with its intensity. The tall solid tower on which they stood trembled violently, as if it would fall from mere shock. And then crash succeeded crash with hardly an interval, and all West-

minster heaved and shook as if moved by an earthquake and riven by the red eruption of a Krakatoa.

It was impossible to look any more. Hunter crouched with his head in his hands on the low stone balustrade, feeling as it shivered as if in agony that at any moment the campanile would collapse; not caring if it did, but conscious only that he was shaken to his soul and would willingly have died there and then to escape the physical and mental agony of those thunderous concussions.

The thought of instant disintegration, if chance so willed that he should be closely involved in one of those outbursts, did not disturb him. He was terrified by the inhuman, cruel clamour, as if the world itself were in violent eruption; that and the constant shivering and rocking of the solid masonry on which they stood. He remembered ramming his fingers into his ears, and remaining there, eyes tightly closed, his hands pressed fiercely to his head, in a convulsive attempt to shut out the noise.

How long he remained thus above the shaking, exploding earth he could not tell. . . . It seemed to him after a time that the tumult was passing. Gradually he became aware that the convulsions of the campanile were ceasing. . . . The tower was still again. He removed his fingers fearfully. There was a noise as of ringing steel in his ears, but there came no further rending crash. There was silence —such a silence, after that devastating storm, as mortal ears had never before felt.

Slowly he straightened himself up, with an insane fear that if he were not careful he might set the campanile rocking again.

With screwed-up eyes, shrinkingly, like a man afraid of a blow, he looked down again on London. There were fires at many points and a horrible smell of chemicals in the air. Just below there was a great gap cut across Victoria Street which he knew should not be there. Then he became aware of a faint sound in the hanging silence—a gentle pap-pap-pap. Far away he saw a number of small dots on the horizon and realised that these were the raiders returning. The long, running fight was still continuing.

He became aware that somebody had touched him, and turned to look into the white, distorted face of Billy. He seemed like a man who had gazed on unutterable horrors.

"My God, Hunter, my God!" he quavered. "Oh, those swine!"

They remained for some time in silence, looking out on the flames and the gaping areas of ruin.

"They're gone," said Hunter at last. He felt himself breathe for the first time.

"Yes. They're gone."

They still stood, immobile, looking out stupidly on the scene spread below them. They heard a voice behind:

"Oh, sir! oh, sir!"

One of Billy's soldiers was slowly rising from a crouching position. He was little more than a youth—a fresh-coloured boy. But now he was as white as paper, and looked as though he were going to faint.

"That's all right," said Hunter, taking hold of him gently, and feeling his own vitality come back

to him as he thus tried to help another. "That's all right. They're gone now."

Billy bent down to the other soldier. He was still sitting with his knees drawn up and his head, clasped tightly in his hands, bent down on to them.

"Come on, son, get up," said Billy, shaking him gently. "It's all over." The man rolled over on to his side, away from him, still retaining his stiff, convulsive attitude.

"Christ, Hunter, this man's dead!" exclaimed Billy hoarsely, hurriedly rising.

He leaned against the wall, looking as if he himself were about to faint.

"I say, old man, I say," he murmured. "I've seen all sorts of things in my time, but this is different. I feel all broke up."

The first crash of an exploding bomb on London was a signal for which the British Air Command had been waiting. On its impact orders were immediately sent to the waiting bombers in the British aerodromes. Flight after flight, accompanied by their fighting planes, rose up, made rendezvous, and sailed off in three compact squadrons of nearly one hundred and fifty heavy bombers, straight across the North Sea and Holland for Berlin. There were heavy losses by the way, but the British fighting planes showed that in individual dash and offensive power they still possessed the same ascendancy over the Germans as they had shown in the war. Over a hundred bombing planes arrived over the German capital, and by late afternoon Berlin was bombarded from the air for the first time in its history; was, indeed,

in the throes of the most appalling aerial bombardment ever known. What Berlin had so often and so gleefully promised should be London's fate was now its own. The British planes that turned and fought their way back again, over country that was already strewn with the wreckage of both sides, left behind them a city smashed and riven and stunned beyond belief. The flames that leapt upwards to the skies were but the soft afterglow of the fierce agony that had been endured during that awful downpouring of death and destruction.

CHAPTER XXIX

ENGLAND HITS BACK

HUNTER never really remembered their long descent of the staircase in the campanile. Looking back on it all, his recollections of the time following the bombardment began with Billy and himself and the soldier standing again at the street level and, rather unsteadily, beginning their walk to Westminster Bridge. He remembered that he had left the launch there, and had given no instructions as to how long it should wait. His chief idea now was to leave Westminster behind and get back to the office. Nor had Billy the slightest desire for further activity.

Entering Victoria Street, they found themselves faced by a huge crater, which went to depths they could not determine, it being already deep in water from a shattered main. The huge bomb or aerial torpedo that had fallen there had exploded, in that narrow cañon of tall buildings, with appalling force, and the big blocks of offices on either side looked as though they might have been made of matchwood, and had been trodden on by some giant form.

They had to take to side streets to get round the obstacle, and found themselves looking at the remains, not far from the District Station, of what had been one of the largest blocks of offices in London. It must have been struck squarely in the centre, and was

now a mere conical heap of piled rubbish and masonry. Smoke was curling up from it lazily, from a smouldering fire within.

The Central Hall, where Hunter had talked to Colonel Ebury and his officers that morning, was also shattered—almost beyond recognition. Hunter felt a glow of gratitude for the fact that all these riven buildings had been empty at the time. Practically all Westminster, indeed, had been empty. It was the one bright side to that tragic day.

Near the entrance to Parliament Square they had to climb over huge blocks of masonry hurled from the Abbey. They did not pause to look at the piteous sight of the smashed and gaping interior. The hospital had mercifully escaped a direct hit, although there was not an inch of glass left whole in it, and there were wide fissures in the walls, and blocks of masonry that hung perilously.

Here for the first time they saw living people again, and were grateful for the sight. Soldier orderlies were carrying out patients in their beds from the dangerous parts of the building, and putting them down outside. There were wounded men lying there, waxen-faced and as if in a trance from the terror of what they had been through while lying helpless, and nurses flitting about among them—a thing that made Billy exclaim. They were the first words that had been spoken since they reached the earth again:

"*My*, just look at those women!"

No glowing words of praise or admiration could have been half so eloquent.

Several bombs had dropped in Parliament Square,

and the area with its deep craters and heaped-up mounds of debris looked desolate beyond all expression. Lincoln's statue and most of the others had disappeared. A wide swathe was cut through the Houses of Parliament, through which the river could be seen. The whole region looked as though it had been visited by the most violent earthquake or volcanic upheaval.

A long range of buildings at the end of Parliament Street was blazing furiously and before it fire engines were stationed. The firemen were searching about among the littered and broken roadway for the water connection.

Whitehall was a ruin, along which a few soldiers were picking their way. Boulders of masonry obstructed their path everywhere. The site of the Cenotaph was a chasm. The plain, unpretentious stone memorial that commemorated the sacrifice of a million British dead in the German War was now scattered among the litter that strewed the roadway as far as the eye could see—blasted into nothingness by the same race to whose ruthless ambition it would have been a reproach for all time.

Hunter decided to go to the War Office and see how things had fared there.

The stretch along which they now walked was torn and demolished to an amazing degree. He noticed that the banqueting-hall of Inigo Jones had escaped a direct explosion. But the window out of which Charles I stepped for execution was, like all the others, blown out, and Hunter found himself thinking how little that misguided monarch had done to deserve his summary fate as compared with

the wholesale devilries, practised behind the screen of high-sounding phrases, of the vile men whose powers ravaged the modern world, and for whom there seemed to be reserved no justice or vengeance.

They found the War Office still standing, but largely in ruins. At the south-east corner an aerial torpedo must have missed it by only a few feet, and all that wing had been bodily torn out. There was a party of soldiers, with some policemen, venturing into the ruins, and a dozen or more bodies had already been carried out and laid down where the roadway was least in eruption.

In the corridors they met occasional white-faced people who seemed to be moving mechanically. The corridor along which they had to pass to gain the room of the Minister for War overlooked the courtyard. It had been securely sheltered from the force of the explosion by the demolished wing, but portions of the wall had been blown in, and they walked on broken glass and rubble.

The door to the Minister's room was split and ajar. Hunter pushed it open, and as he did so half regretted his unannounced entry. Sir Charles was looking at a large map on the wall with an officer whom Hunter at once recognised as Air-Marshal Hayling.

Sir Charles looked up as they walked in, and his expression seemed to say that he was in no mood for interruption from anybody.

"I'm awfully sorry to disturb you, Sir Charles," said Hunter, quick to sense his mood, "but the fact is—well, I wanted to see how things were with you."

"As you see, more or less all right," returned the Minister, relaxing his expression. "Fortunately

we were here and not in Sir John's room, otherwise —well, we shouldn't have been here."

His tone was grave enough, but there was an obvious desire on his part, now that the visitation had passed, not to make too much of it. He was thinking of the immediate future, and not of the immediate past.

Presentations were made, and the Chief of the Air Force, with a notable absence of jealousy at learning something vital from an "outsider," said some very fervent and cordial things to Hunter about the document found on Zadoff. And then to Hunter's fierce joy he told him what was in store shortly for Berlin.

"They're somewhere about here now," he said, turning to the map and indicating a point well over the North Sea. "They've had no opposition yet, although I expect they'll soon be in the thick of it. But you may trust to most of them getting to Berlin. And then—well, we've just seen what it means. Only they'll get it worse."

"They bombed an empty city," put in Sir Charles, "and we shall get a full one. That's the chief difference—except that we shall have more planes over than they did. . . . Well, they've asked for it."

"And so we're now definitely at war with Germany," said Hunter.

The two chiefs looked at each other, and the Air-Marshal stroked his moustache reflectively.

"That remains to be seen," he said after a pause. "That's as Germany pleases. If we are at war it will be chiefly an air war, and we shall do as well at that as she can. Perhaps she'll think better of it about five o'clock this evening. They'll be there

somewhere about four to half-past. . . . If Germany feels like carrying on a war of this kind, she'll have to have it."

"But people couldn't stand it. No city could go often through this sort of thing and remain sane."

"True. That's the conclusion I hope they'll come to in Berlin. But what we've done is the only way to make them see both sides of the question."

As they talked, Hunter came to the conclusion that the two military chiefs were acting very much on their own initiative. Perhaps it was as well. The record of the Cabinet for the past year or so had not been one to inspire any great confidence as to what they would do in a crisis. There could be no parleying with a power which rained death without warning on London.

But it was surely the strangest international situation that had ever arisen in history. England and Germany were in a state of war—or half-war. And yet no communication of any kind had been exchanged between the two Governments. The continuance or otherwise of the conflict depended on what Germany would think after she had been subjected to the terror which she felt should be reserved only for others. And it was quite possible that the whole situation might be relegated to the past without any communication passing. It was an amazing sidelight on the pass to which the world had been brought by the wholesale stimulation of anarchy.

Hunter felt more himself again as they left the shattered War Office and made their way to Westminster Bridge.

"The fact is, Billy, we were both rattled—badly rattled. The sight of those two getting on with their job has pulled me together a bit. I was feeling anyhow when we went into that room. But just a touch of the famous British official stare in Sir Charles's eye began the cure. . . . All the same, I feel sorry for them both."

"How so? They seemed all right to me. And that air feller talked sound sense."

"But they're in the dark, Billy. They didn't unchain this appalling thing that's happened. But they're keeping the ball rolling. They're right in doing that. There can be no question of presenting the other cheek to such brutes, although we have some in the Cabinet and lots in Parliament who'd do that until further orders, and think they were doing something noble and intelligent. . . . But those two are up against an absolutely novel situation —and an immensely grave one. If the Germans don't decide this afternoon that they've had a bellyful —if their self-righteous anger at being treated as they've treated us makes them decide to go on with the bombardments—well, think where we are immediately. It will be no particular joy to us to wipe out Berlin, and drive insane all those who are not killed. But the Germans *would* like to do that to London. And half a dozen raids like this one, spread all over London, would do it. Civilised man simply can't stand such punishment. And then where are we? Berlin is in ruins, but so is London. Many thousands will be dead and hundreds of thousands —even millions—will be driven out into the countryside. With the aerial arm developed to this pitch

the collection of millions of people into the small space of a big city becomes a fatal weakness. And when the capitals have been dealt with, the turn of the other cities comes. While they're blowing Manchester to pieces we are laying waste to Hamburg. . . . A few hundred machines and a few thousand men are wrecking the existence of whole nations. . . . That's what it would come to in no time. And those two, of course, realise it just as clearly. They don't know what is coming next. Everything depends on what Berlin thinks this evening. That's what Sir Charles and the Air-Marshal are thinking of now. I wouldn't care to have their load of responsibility for the next few days—or hours."

"Well, let's hope Berlin will be so scared stiff that they won't want to look forward to any more of it. I'm betting one dose will be enough. We know what it's like. I was in one or two of the London air raids way back in the war, but they were mere whispering echoes compared to this. And the fact that Berlin's never been bombed at all won't help them any in what's shortly coming to them. They'll wonder what's struck them, all right."

They found the launch waiting, and the man in charge explained that when the bombardment began he had rushed off down the river and reported at the office, where he had been told to return as soon as it was over.

Both of them felt thoroughly worn out as they sat on the cushioned seats. Charing Cross Bridge once left behind, there was nothing to show of the terrific ordeal through which Westminster had just passed. . . . It seemed as though it all might never have

been, so quiet and peaceful was the trip down the river.

But the sight of a company of soldiers marching along the Embankment recalled the real facts of the situation.

" I'd almost forgotten, Billy, that there's a revolution on all over England," said Hunter.

CHAPTER XXX

BERLIN'S HALF-HOUR

IN the evening a series of wireless telephone messages came through from the Berlin correspondent of the *Echo*.

They described a city which had been through torment beyond imagining. For half an hour the pitiless rain of huge projectiles had fallen on Berlin, blotting out whole areas and causing incalculable damage and heavy loss of life. Early in the afternoon one of the newspapers, against all instructions, had published the news of the attack on London. The announcement had caused much exultation and some foreboding. There were many who felt only joy in the idea of London's ordeal. Memories of the war were revived in all their intensity. It seemed a just and righteous thing that London should suffer the agony of bombardment from the skies. But there were many others who received the news with foreboding. It was hardly likely that such an extreme step would not be followed by some sort of answer. And the power and range of the latest aeroplanes were well understood by everybody. The German Press had long been insisting—with its usual boastfulness—on what the German aerial fleet could do in the way of destruction. . . . There were people sane enough to realise that British aeroplanes could also destroy, and that Berlin was now in easy reach of England.

The prevailing excitement and satisfaction—both at the aerial attack on London and the lurid stories of the swift progress of the Red forces generally—was therefore tempered by a good deal of uneasiness and apprehension. The streets were full, and there were large crowds reading the latest news on the bulletin boards of the newspaper offices. . . . And then like lightning the news went round that the English were approaching, fighting their way across Germany, and long before even a sound was heard to herald their coming something like panic seized the German capital.

There was a rush to the railway station, and to every kind of conveyance that would carry people out into the open country. Many thousands of people did so escape, and far greater numbers started to walk. As the movement increased, so did the panic. With that quaint logic which characterises them the Berliners felt that there was something radically wrong in all this. They could not see—because London had been bombarded—why Berlin should be bombarded in return. It had for long been accepted that in times of international stress one of the chief functions of England's capital was to be a passive target for German bombs. There had been nothing in their experience to teach them that London might strike back. . . . And now that aeroplanes carried such dreadful cargoes it was terrible to contemplate!

This rising exasperation, added to the panic, reduced Berlin in a short half-hour to a condition of hysteria. London had at least been spared all knowledge of what was coming. But Berlin had to stand with shrinking nerves and wait for the blow.

The people cursed the British aeroplanes. They cursed the idea of aeroplanes of any kind, even German aeroplanes. And finally, and most heartily, they cursed their insane Government for having been crass enough to stir up a rival hornets' nest, and so bring about this terrifying state of things.

For a brief interval this mad, frenzied movement suddenly to empty Berlin of its millions continued —an interval during which thieves, quite unheeded, reaped a rich harvest in the fashionable quarters. But the time was all too short. With every railway station packed and thousands more clamouring outside for admittance; with every main road filled from side to side with vehicles streaming towards the outskirts; with women clutching babies and millionaires cursing because their swift limousines could only crawl through the press, the terror Berlin had so often in the past bestowed upon other cities was at last overhead.

They came looming and roaring up from the western horizon, with the German fighting planes sticking close but hardly staying their passage. There were some people in Berlin brave enough to stand at points of vantage and look at the approaching terror. But then forthwith lurid hell descended upon the capital, and for so long as it lasted the people were blasted out of all power to do anything but crouch where they were at the moment the storm broke, and pray to be delivered from this withering, roaring tempest.

There was no mercy this time, just as Berlin had so often given none. There was no thought of "military objectives." It was the savage *riposte* of a nation in sore straits, fighting for its life.

The Government quarter of the capital was blotted out, and with it many of the men who had decided that England should be attacked at her moment of greatest trial. And elsewhere great areas of the city were wrecked, and the bulk of their inhabitants destroyed. A torpedo fell on a packed railway station, where crowds had been clamouring to escape, and there was no more of the railway station or the people within or without it. Never in the history of war had vengeance been so swift and terrible.

"It is now ten o'clock," said the concluding message of the *Echo* correspondent, "and there is no light in the city except that from the many fires, some of which are dying away and some of which are spreading, unchecked and almost unheeded. So far, there is no sign that the multitudes who left the city, both before and after the bombardment, are returning, the general fear being that the visit will be repeated at any moment. At the present time the countryside round Berlin is crowded with refugees, who prefer to sleep out in the open rather than return to the stricken city. The few people one sees in the streets seem dazed and broken, though for the most part the only people abroad are looters and thieves, who are doing much what they please, in spite of the patrols of soldiers and policemen. . . . To-night Berlin is a dead city, which in one short half-hour has had the life and soul bombed out of it."

CHAPTER XXXI

A ONE-DAY WAR

IT proved to be a one-day war with Germany.

The next day all London waited in the greatest suspense, expecting a further visit. Its experience of air raids during the Great War served it in good stead now. There was very great anxiety, but no real panic. London, it was generally argued, had been through such visitations before, and would weather them again, if need be.

But this stoic attitude was largely the result of ignorance of the real situation. The whole Westminster district was strictly barred to everybody, except to such police and troops as had to go there. The public generally were not able to see the devastating effects of the huge bombs. Here and there, it is true, bombs had dropped in other parts of London, in several cases with dreadful effect. But these points also had been surrounded by troops, and carefully kept from the gaze of the public.

No lists were issued, but although Westminster had been nearly empty it was known that the casualties had been very heavy. And London felt a fierce and frank joy that the casualties in Berlin must have been immeasurably greater.

But there was one feeling among London's millions which dominated all others. London was fiercely angry. It was equally angry with the enemy from without and the enemy within.

The outbreak of the Red armies had come so suddenly—when at last it did come—that London at first had been unable to grasp the full enormity of what was happening. It had come as the climax to a long period of worry and strain, and it had been largely expected and discounted in advance. The complete disruption caused by the battle for Westminster had hardly had time to take full effect on the huge organism before the attack came from Germany. There were millions of people living in the outskirts of London who, even with the dire events which were taking place in the centre, could not appreciate the fact that at last the ultimate disaster was upon the country, and that this was but the immediate prelude to the bloody-minded slavery and savagery which had been imposed, after the Russian model, on nearly the whole of Europe. They still felt that England would remain England, and could not realise that house-to-house visits by armed ruffians, wholesale executions, the rape of women, industrial conscription, the savage rule of godless foreign *commissars*, and all the other normal horrors of Bolshevism must inevitably follow any Red success at Westminster.

Something like a really adequate realisation of what was happening in their midst came with the morning following the attacks on Westminster, when such newspapers as were available, and particularly the *Echo*, presented in all their enormity and horror the scenes of civil strife, the savage killing and the great destruction which were the accompaniments of the Red bid for power.

And just when the vast, lazy mass of Londoners

had really awakened to the fact that there was "heavy civil war" in Westminster and all over the country, came the further shock of the attack from the air.

London's temper passed at a bound from consternation to anger. It was the crystallisation point. Here was something to rally round—the introduction of a foreign aggression into what most of the people were still misguided enough to regard as purely domestic affairs. And London's anger, slow enough to be roused, was now directed impartially, in a sudden spate of violence, against the Germans and against the Reds, their allies.

The immediate consequence was a rush to offer service, against both internal and external enemies, which recalled the early days of recruiting for the war in 1914.

Men of all ages and classes clamoured to join the League, to have arms given them, to be given a chance to strike a blow against foes at home as a preparatory to dealing with any menace from abroad. In all the outer districts the centres of the League were besieged, and at the outer line of barricades now established by the Government the crowds surged round the steel-helmeted soldiers guarding the way into central London, and beseeched to be put into touch with Authority and made use of.

For the time being little could be done with this mass of eager material. Authority had its hands full in reorganising the public services and in consolidating what it had won back from anarchy. There were the water, gas, electric light, telephone and transport services to be assured, and the process

of disrupting these had been a much simpler one than starting them again. The first lorry convoys that went out into the country to re-organise the milk supply, for instance, found their way barred by armed bands, many of them remnants of the Red forces in London, and several days passed before this menace was entirely swept aside.

Moreover, the Authorities had to reckon with the possibility of a second visitation from the German aerial fleet—one which could be counted on to be infinitely worse than the first. With this menace overhanging there was a decided advantage in the situation as it stood, by which a far greater area was now almost entirely cleared of inhabitants. The few civilians inside the military cordon who had not the very best reasons for remaining there were sent out of it.

It was not until the evening of the day following the air duel between the two capitals that news came from Berlin that something very nearly approaching a revolution had happened there, and that the populace had made it very plain to what remained of the Government that there must be no "reprisal" for England's answer to Germany's attack. Berlin had very definitely come to the conclusion that the joy of bombing London did not compensate for the agony of being bombed.

From that moment there could be no doubt how the situation in London would turn. The Red leaders, finding it quite impossible to get their forces together again in anything like a compact organisation, had scattered to various parts of the country. There was still a great deal of disorder in London, but there could now be only one end to it, and that a quick

one. The forces of law and order soon heavily outnumbered the scattered Red contingents. The ranks of the League were within a few days multiplied several times over. As the situation in London gradually stabilised, and it became more and more certain that the armed loyalist civilians could deal with it, most of the Regular and Territorial troops were sent with all speed by road and by sea to districts where the Red forces were still in the ascendant —notably South Wales and the region of Glasgow. All that remained to be done to bring London back to tranquillity was the suppression of the strong contingents of looting and marauding Reds, who; in the East End generally and in many of the outer districts, were "living on the country"—that is, plundering shops and houses, and terrorising all they came across. But although the rounding up of these bodies was a difficult and dangerous business, there could only be one end to it.

Moreover, those engaged in suppressing the final stages of the revolt in London were animated by a feeling of anger and a keen desire to have done with the mad wickedness of it once and for all. The *moral* of the loyalists was up to boiling-point. London, with all its business activities at a complete standstill, its food supplies at the point of exhaustion, its hospitals packed with wounded, and Westminster in ruins, was in no mood to stand further nonsense.

There were many savage scenes in these final stages of suppression. The numbers of the Reds dwindled quickly because—quite apart from losses—many of the milder spirits among them, and still others who

realised how much they had been misled, hid or threw away their rifles and returned to their homes. Those remaining were the most dangerous and blood-thirsty element—the final distillation of the hell-broth of Bolshevism. And as the milder, home-bred variety drifted away the foreign element in what was left became more and more pronounced. This fact gave an extra ardour to the breaking-down process of the loyalists, and there were many combats in which the question of taking prisoners was hardly thought of.

Within a few days the methods of this suppression, which at first had been haphazard and ill-defined, developed into a compact, organised system which gave the Reds little chance of pursuing Balkan tactics in London's wilderness of brick and mortar. Motor-cars, taxi-cabs and motor-buses were impressed into service for the Leaguers, and a telephone call from any district, whether by day or night, was the signal for a flying column of angry loyalists to descend on the spot and mete out quick justice. That classic example of armed and desperate ruffianism, the affair of Sydney Street, was reproduced on a score of occasions, but there was no hesitation in dealing ruthlessly with such examples. Every effort was made to spare life—that is, the lives of the loyalists—and in all cases where houses had been turned into forts which could not have been subdued without considerable loss of life, a leaf was taken out of the Reds' own book. Trench mortars with incendiary bombs were brought into play, and where the defenders refused to bolt for it the flames had the last word in the argument. It was then the turn of the fire-

brigade. In some cases, where practicable, such strongholds were also reduced by tanks.

So gradually, day by day, London was restored to order. Business people and shopkeepers who could show reason for being there were admitted through the military cordon to the central districts, although there was a strict order that everybody had to be out again by six o'clock in the evening. A restricted service of trains was started on the tube railways and some omnibuses and taxis, detached as the situation allowed from military service, began to reappear on the streets. Here and there in the outer rings theatres and cinema-halls reopened. The shopping districts were cleared of the debris left by the wholesale looting, and behind boarded windows shopkeepers began to count their losses and set out again for sale what was left to them.

London, if not yet entirely cured of the devastating fever which had laid her low, was well on the way to convalescence. The capital had given the lead, and the effect of her example was swiftly reflected in the Provinces.

CHAPTER XXXII

THE LID ON THE CAULDRON

HUNTER had thrown himself heart and soul into the work of organising and expanding the League to deal with the new situation. With Colonel Bateman he travelled ceaselessly up and down London; organising, linking up, inspiring and generally putting into the movement, now that it was being thoroughly tested, all the enthusiasm he had given it throughout its growth. From being a more or less passive spectator of events he became one of the chief figures in their development during this second phase.

The story of his own adventures had been told in the *Echo*—it was too "live" a newspaper to overlook such copy—and Hunter's name, well known before, was now one to conjure with. Hunter at first had been averse to publishing the story of what happened in his flat, and of the events at Olympia, with Zadoff and the rest. But Melrose had insisted. For one who had preached for months past that the only way to conquer Bolshevism was to meet violence with more violence—Melrose said—it was absurd that the exploits of one who had practised so well what he preached should not be given to the public. And Hunter, admitting the point, had given in, merely stipulating that not he but somebody else should describe his adventures.

The command of the "Iron Division" had been given to Major Shotley, and the men, already regarded as a *corps d'élite*, had been made part of the cordon governing the central region—although a hundred men had been left to guard the *Echo* office as a precaution against any sudden attempt at further mischief. And in Colonel Bateman as a co-organiser Hunter found an invaluable aid. The Colonel had had his share both of the close-quarter work of trench warfare in France and the wider operations of the Eastern campaigns, and was amazingly fertile in suggestion and resource.

It was largely owing to Hunter's strong insistence on one point to the Minister for War that the large mass of material immediately available for fighting was so quickly absorbed and put to use. Even at that time of crisis, when every hour was vital, there had been a strong official movement from Whitehall in favour of drawing as many of the recruits as possible into the Regular or Territorial forces and turning them out, complete from cap to boots, in the accepted uniform of the soldier.

Hunter had insisted that such a leisurely procedure might immediately dam up the flow of would-be recruits pressing forward; that all the men desired was a rifle and cartridge-pouches, and that it did not matter what clothes they wore—the more mixed and democratic the better. Most of them had served during the war, and knew all it was necessary to know about drill. Let them be sworn in by batches, given arms, and the many ex-officers and ex-non-coms. already in the League would be responsible for the rest. What was wanted was an immedi-

ate army of citizens, looking like citizens, and prepared to give in the present crisis convincing proofs of being good citizens, which they could not better show than by helping to crush the Red forces at the earliest possible moment.

All along there had been strong official opposition to the League. The Territorial Forces had never regained their old pre-war strength, and as Hunter—and most other people—well knew, this was partly because of the general feeling against wearing uniform, and once more submitting to the exactions of military discipline, which still existed as a legacy of the Great War. But to join the ranks, without any fuss or preliminary, of a citizen guard, and to fight in a good cause while still preserving their own individualities, was a thing that appealed strongly to many thousands of men who had no desire again to put on a khaki uniform. This movement was in full tide, and Hunter fought against the slightest check being given to it.

He was successful. What the League had done, and was still doing, all over the country was too strong an argument to be resisted. Officialdom, with its desire for things to be done according to pattern, and its extraordinary jealousies, was confounded. But Hunter would never have carried his point had it not been for his personal influence with the War Minister.

That decision once taken, arms and equipment had been drawn upon from all available points, and hour by hour the forces of law and order had grown. The recruits were formed into local battalions, which were added to the strength of the existing League

formations. There was no difficulty in finding officers, and the "Iron Division" furnished many. The amount of drill given to the new battalions depended largely on the whim of the company commanders. But in no case did it amount to much. As the old words of command were heard again the rest came instinctively. For a few days only the scenes in London's open spaces—in Hyde Park, Temple Gardens and the rest of them—recalled those days of 1914 and 1915 when the manhood of London prepared itself for what was then regarded as the greatest and holiest crusade of all time.

Hunter was sitting in his room in the *Echo* building. For five days he had been ceaselessly engaged on the work of the League, and had every reason to feel satisfied with the way in which things were shaping. There were now strong forces of citizen soldiers in every part of London. Only in a few widely scattered districts had there, during that day, been outbreaks, but as each one declared itself it had been promptly and drastically "dealt with." There could be no doubt that in London the Red movement was on its last legs.

He was reading wireless messages on the situation from the *Echo* correspondents all over the Provinces. These varied very much in character, but there was a very decided tendency towards better news. The collapse of the movement in London had done much both to dishearten the Reds and to encourage their opponents. The aeroplane service of the *Echo* had scattered newspapers far and wide in districts which otherwise would have been quite without news of

what was happening. The *Echo* brought out to the full the complete defeat of the Reds in London, and exhorted all who possibly could to take up arms against the Terror. The moral effect of news delivered in such fashion had been very great. It was a form of propaganda which had produced an immediate effect. From town and country men who could not, for all sorts of reasons, enrol themselves in the League in their own districts had walked to London, and asked to be "taken on" there.

Another movement had declared itself which did not take Hunter by surprise—which he had always maintained would show itself sooner or later. It was that in the less virulently revolutionary industrial districts many Reds had, against a promise of immunity, given themselves up with their rifles and, in some cases, even turned against their former brothers-in-arms. Their reasons in all such cases were much the same. They protested that they had seen enough of killing. Many of them had revolted against the ferocity and bestiality of the foreigners in their ranks. The sheer ruffianism—not to mention their personal habits—of these imported firebrands had come as a shock of surprise to many a British workman who had been cajoled into thinking that his paramount duty was to abolish Capitalism and wipe out the *bourgeoisie*, but who had recoiled at the savage and filthy conduct of his foreign "brothers of the proletariat." To hear of what should be done in a revolution from paid agitators, foreign and otherwise, was one thing. To see these things brutally put into practice was another.

In many of his articles Hunter had maintained that the inherent decency of the average Briton would not stomach the excesses of his foreign comrades once revolution, as preached by Moscow, was introduced into England. Bolshevism, Hunter had insisted, needed for its success a bottom slime of sheer cruelty and filth which simply did not exist in the English character. Hunter was tremendously pleased to see that his predictions were being borne out by the march of events.

In a majority of industrial towns, big and little, the League had more or less held its own from the beginning, even though disorders had by no means stopped. In a number of large centres, of which Manchester was one, the situation had hung in the balance, but was now definitely inclining in the right direction. In Liverpool, where there were large supplies of ruffianism to be drawn upon, affairs would have gone very badly for the League, but after several days' heavy fighting the Navy had landed large forces there which had more than redressed the balance.

Glasgow was definitely in the hands of the Reds, and a Communist Council was controlling the city. It was the most definite Red success, but its reign could only be a very short one, as large bodies of troops were being sent there by sea. The mining district of South Wales was also definitely Red. Here bluejackets and troops had been landed, and the fighting was not so much in the towns as in the villages and country districts of the coal valleys, where a guerilla war on a considerable scale was now proceeding. Here the Government forces were being signally assisted by aeroplanes, which had broken up concentrations

of the Reds and inflicted heavy losses on them.

All round, it was only a matter of time before the Red Forces were thoroughly beaten. The point was how many good lives would be sacrificed, how much destruction and suffering would be caused, before this could come to pass? The transport services of the whole country were now completely disorganised. In many towns there was a complete lack of flour, and no bread had been baked for days. In most cases, too, the contents of the provision shops had been looted or destroyed in the early stages of the trouble. Even though the Reds were losing, their power to inflict harm and misery still remained. Industrially the whole country was at a complete standstill. Millions of people were already finding it a matter of the greatest difficulty to obtain enough food to keep body and soul together. Each town or city was a law unto itself. Communications with the outside world hardly existed, and in any case there was no help to be expected. Every place had too many troubles of its own to be able to think of helping neighbouring communities. England was a collection of islands of disorder and misery—a very archipelago of anarchy.

Hunter's telephone bell tinkled as he read through the messages from all over the country, and Melrose's voice asked him to come down and see something interesting.

"This has just arrived from Langton at the House," said Melrose, as Hunter entered. "It seems to me to be more than usually important."

Hunter took the message and read it through hurriedly.

"By Jove, yes!" he exclaimed, and began to go through it again more carefully.

It was a statement made in the House by the Prime Minister that, under the state of Martial Law now prevailing, an Order was about to be issued from the War Office under which all British members of the Red Forces who immediately surrendered themselves with their arms to the nearest military or League headquarters, would find their surrender accepted, and would be allowed to return to their homes on giving their word not to engage in any further disorder. This offer would be open for forty-eight hours after the issue of the Order, after which such British followers of the Red Forces as remained under arms would be treated with every severity.

This amnesty did not apply to the leaders of the movement, a list of whose names would be issued with the Order. In their case a full enquiry would be made into their degree of responsibility for the disaster and suffering that had overtaken the country, and they would be dealt with according to their deserts.

With regard to all foreign followers of the Red Forces, whether in the rank and file or among the leaders of the movement, full powers were to be given to all local military commanders, whether of the Regulars or Territorials or the League, to deal with such individuals in whatever manner they thought most likely to aid in the complete and immediate pacification of the country, and the crushing of all Terrorist resistance. The conduct of each military commander in this matter would be guided by his knowledge of affairs in his own locality, and

the degree to which he felt such foreign followers of the Red Forces were responsible for the prevailing state of lawlessness. In this regard, military commanders would take special notice of such individual or collective acts of cruelty or wanton savagery, whether against honour or life or property, as could be proved against all foreign members of the Red Forces.

Finally, the powers given under the Order to military commanders in their dealings with the foreign elements were absolute and complete, and any decisions they might take under it would not afterwards be questioned by any authority or tribunal.

"Well, what do you think of it?" asked Melrose, when Hunter had carefully gone through it a second time.

"It's a masterpiece—a stroke of genius. See how neatly it divides them up into three classes. It will bring in all the waverers—the men who are realising they have been led by the nose, or are getting tired of it from any other reason—tired of bloodshed, for instance. As to the British leaders—well, it leaves them guessing. They won't know whether to go on fighting until the bitter end, or whether to give themselves up and risk it. And that's a very uncomfy feeling for any man to have. One can imagine them talking it over among themselves, and wondering what to do. . . . And as to the Russian and Hun element and all the rest of the horrible crowd . . ."

He broke off and looked grimly at Melrose, then went on:

"Why, it amounts to nothing less than an order

for their wholesale execution, when they're caught. It means that the foreign element in this country will shortly disappear from circulation. . . . By God, the Government's actually governing! The idea is to get rid of them quickly, while feelings are running high, and not let passions run down, so that after these swine had been a month or so in prison waiting trial the cranks would get up a political agitation, and ask for them to be gently deported, with first-class passages. Somebody has learnt a lesson from the Peace Conference, and remembered how the criminals escape once an armistice has been signed and the talking begins. . . . And that last sentence, protecting the men who'll have to do the dirty work. . . . Oh, it's a real document, this one. There's some kick in it. It will do more to wipe up the situation than anything else could, just at this stage. . . . I'll bet Sir Charles is the real force behind this idea."

"Well, you've analysed it pretty completely, Hunter, and that's exactly how it all struck me. By to-morrow morning we'll have a million copies of that spread all over the country. And I want two columns of your very best to back it up. . . . And one particular point I've thought of . . . Appeal to the women—the wives of the British Reds. Point out to them that for forty-eight hours from to-morrow their men can save themselves and their families. After that, any husband who's found with a Red rifle in his hands—well, you know how to put it. . . . I think that with the proper amount of drive behind it this means the final lid on the Red cauldron."

CHAPTER XXXIII

THE BREAKFAST-EATING UNION

IT was two days later that Hunter received a telephone call from Charing Cross Hospital.

"There is a Mr. Derryman, an American, in here," a voice said, "and he says he wants very badly to see you if you can come down any time this evening."

Hunter found out immediately that Billy had been wounded, but was in no danger. He went down as soon as he could, and found Billy sitting up in bed, in a small ward with about a dozen patients in it. Most of these proved to be wounded officers of the League, none of them very dangerous cases, all having been hit by rifle or machine-gun bullets.

As for Billy, he had been symmetrically put out of action by a bullet through the left arm and another through the right leg. Though in no danger, he was most definitely *hors de combat* for some time to come.

"What's this mean, Billy?" said Hunter cheerily. "I thought that on principle you never allowed yourself to get hit, whatever else happened."

Billy grinned a little wearily.

"The little tin god of the movies must have been napping, old son. Anyhow, he was careless enough to let these come my way, and what's more, the camera

got it badly in the neck too. That consoles me some. I'd hate to think the old box was fit for duty with me lying here."

Hunter asked how it happened.

"I was sitting in the Sa-voy getting along tolerably well with quite a good imitation of a cocktail, when noos came that there was a good deal doing up Hampstead way. To tell you the truth, I nearly didn't go. I was feeling pretty tired, and it was pretty good where I was, and I thought I'd got enough battle and sudden death in stock, anyway. But I was never one to turn the frozen mit to the call of duty. I managed to get a taxi-cab and went out to see what was doing.

"And I must allow it was fairly interesting, even after what we've seen. There was a big red-brick house—pretty well a country mansion—right on the edge of Hampstead Heath, and a few score Reds were going through it when your lads got wind of the affair and surrounded the place. It was a pretty sight enough—shots out of the windows, snipers hiding behind trees and all the rest of it. The only grumble I had was that it looked exactly like a fake movie stunt. It had all the look of a put-up job, and I was waiting every moment to hear the producer-feller shouting out orders through his megaphone.

"Well, I got busy all right, feeling a trifle bored. I believe I was yawning as I turned the handle—I couldn't get out of my head the idea that it was a bum affair, with a lot of supers burning blank cartridge. Perhaps that's what annoyed the little cherub up aloft who's always looked after me fine up to

now. Anyhow, there was an extra burst of blank cartridge at one of the windows, and I suddenly realised that me and the camera had fallen down in each other's arms. We lay there a little bit, and then some kind feller pulled us out of it, and they took and patched me up in a schoolroom sort of place. They didn't bother about the camera. Then at my earnest request they brought me down as near the centre as possible, and here I am. That was three days ago, as near as I can reckon, and it's been pretty melancholy lying here with nothing doing. . . . And now, what's the noos? How's things going? When's it all going to be mopped up?"

Hunter had the best news to give. He was in a very optimistic mood, and gave the patient the full benefit of it. He explained how the Order from the War Office had given the greatest results. All over the country the Reds had come in almost wholesale, deposited their arms and departed, thoroughly glad to get off so lightly. In many places the Order alone had practically broken up the last resistance. The British Reds had thoroughly well realised that they were playing a losing game. This, and their reaction of disgust at what was happening, had produced a wave of defection from the Red ranks. In some cases whole bodies of the Reds had thrown up the sponge, and arresting all the foreigners among them had brought them along as a present to the local authority. . . . With regard to these latter there had been some very drastic examples of the way in which Bolshevism should be suppressed. Hunter gave a few details of some of the cases that

had been reported by the *Echo* correspondents.

Billy listened attentively to all Hunter had to say. At the end of it he was silent for some time, staring ahead of him, a far-away look in his eyes. Hunter felt that his little effort at cheering up the patient had not been so successful as it might have been. It was not like Billy to be so slow in responding

"It's good, Hunter," he said at last, "damn good. How pleased we'd have been a few days ago to know that it was going to be so good and come so soon. . . . But it's not enough."

"Why, what's the matter, Billy? You can't expect a movement like this to be cleared up completely inside a week. Things are going on . . ."

"I know, I know. I get you. But it's not enough. While I've been lying here in bed I've been thinking. I guess that air raid started it. And I can't remember ever having been in bed before. I'm feeling different about things. I'm feeling serious.

"You've gotten through this present trouble of yours—at least it looks as though you're going to, pretty soon. But what's that guarantee? Nothing. What's the next trouble going to be? God knows. But it'll be something or other, and probably it won't be long in coming. And who says you're going to come through that all right? The old British Empire may have as many lives as a cat, but a good many of 'em have been used up. There's no insurance company would jump at it as a risk.

"Something's got to be done about it, old friend. Your old world has got its teeth shaken loose. It's got pyorrhœa, and it wants some first-class American

dentistry right now. There's only one thing'll save the situation for all of us, and that's the Union. The Breakfast-Eating Union's got to stand up on its hind legs and proclaim to the rest of the world, which don't matter a damn, anyway, that in future it's one and indivisible when any trouble's about, and that any dagoes from Russia or Germany or elsewhere who come up against it are going to get the biggest jolt in recorded history. D'you get me ? "

" My dear Billy, if it's Anglo-American friendship you mean, I'm with you. We're all with you. The trouble is that everybody on your side doesn't. . . ."

" That's true. There are a lot of guys in my country who are out to make all the trouble they can between us. You don't seem to have the same breed over here—at any rate, I haven't struck 'em to any great extent. But none of our bad crowd belong to the Union, anyhow. They're mostly dagoes to a man, of one sort or another. We've got to cut 'em out, and get together. I tell you, Hunter, I've seen pretty well most everything up and down Europe in the way of horrors, and it hasn't moved my old withers as much as it might have done, perhaps. But seeing Old England with the lid right off has affected me different. I feel as though I've got a stake in the country. After all, we speak pretty well the same language. . . . Hell, I tried to move my left arm. I'm getting a bit of a dago myself. I've been so long among them that I can't speak without waving my hands."

Hunter didn't laugh at this, although he wanted to. Billy was in such deadly earnest. With the exception of that moment on the campanile following

the air raid, Hunter had never seen him in such a mood.

"Well, seeing that we're agreed, Billy, what do you propose to do about it?"

"What am I going to do? I'm going to work for the Union—that and nothing else. I'm through with horrors and troubles. I was more or less thinking of it when you caught me in communion with old Abe Lincoln the other day, just before the Huns came. And that aerial attack settled it.

"As long as that sort of thing can happen in the world, it ain't worth living in. The only hope is for the real white people to get together and stop it. We've got to make the whole world call us Uncle, and say it in English. We've got to start that Union in due and proper form, and as soon as I can hop out of this bed I'm going back home to get busy. I've got selections in my film repertoire of pretty nearly everywhere in the British Empire, and I've also got the finest collection of horrors, as perpetrated by the dagoes of Europe, in existence. And I'm going to go bumming up and down the United States showing up one set of pictures against the other and giving 'em a thousand reasons why we've got to get together. You made your League, and it's come out top. I'm going to make mine. What do you say? I tell you, the Breakfast-Eating Union's a stunt that'll get the right people going all right in America. I think I can get 'em to shove behind me. What do you say? Am I talking sense, or is it my temperature that's up on the band-wagon and not me?"

"You're talking sense, Billy, sound sense. It's

a game we're very anxious to begin on, only it takes two sides to play it. We've been ready and willing for a long time past. The moment you get your team in shape we'll play all right."

"Right, Hunter, old son. I know that. Just let me get out of this bed and you'll see me get busy. . . . Anyhow, I feel much better now I've got that off my chest. I feel as happy as a bigamist who's confessed his crimes to his seventh and latest victim. I knew a change had come over me when those guys got me up at Hampstead. 'Billy,' I said to myself, as I fell down with the dear old camera on top of me, 'Billy, this means there's a change coming to you. It may be a dark lady, or it may not, but something's sure going to happen.' And it has. I'm a changed man, Hunter. I'm sure at the penitent form. If I can do any good to this wicked old world I'm going to do it. And I've found my vocation. Me for the Breakfast-Eating Union all the time. . . . There's nurse got her eagle eye on me. She's a love, but she talks down to me as though I were a baby—me who's seen every damn thing there is to see in Europe. Good night, old man. Come in and see me when you can."

"I will, Billy, and we'll talk some more about the Union. And perhaps one of these days we'll see you as American Ambassador at the Court of St. James's."

"Right. That's a job that would suit me fine, Hunter—when you've rebuilt it."

Hunter walked back up the Strand. It was a beautifully fine and calm evening, with the last soft after-

glow of twilight making London seem magical. The street was utterly deserted as he walked along it, thinking over Billy's confession of faith. He was right. England was coming through this ordeal, as she had come through so many others, but it had shaken her to the depths. It would take a long, long time to put right all the harm that had been done. And the world was still full of danger. Civilisation had saved itself this time, but who could say where the next shock would come from, or what its end would be? And he found himself murmuring:

> "Who stands if Freedom fall?
> Who dies if England lives?"

The world had sore need of Billy's Breakfast-Eating Union. It might be called that, or it might not, but whatever its name, civilisation wanted it.

He was awakened out of his musings by a loud and harsh shout of "Halt there!"

At the corner of Wellington Street he had, without noticing it, run into a strong patrol of Leaguers. The men had just turned round the corner of Wellington Street from the direction of Waterloo Bridge. The officer in charge, a young man with the "pips" of a lieutenant on his old war-worn tunic, asked Hunter very bluntly who he was and what he was doing abroad in the forbidden centre of London at this time of night.

Hunter, without a word, produced papers, and the young officer's attitude changed amazingly.

"Didn't expect to hold *you* up, sir." He was

very deferential. "How are things going in the country? I expect you know the latest news."

Hunter told him the latest developments. The clearing out of the Communist Council in Glasgow was one of them. Regular troops had arrived there, and the situation was well in hand again.

"That's splendid, sir. That's really the beginning of the end, then. . . . I felt that, bad as they were, things would come out all right, somehow."

"Yes, but it's been a very narrow squeak."

"It has, sir. And we all know who has been largely responsible for saving things."

Hunter was about to move off when the lieutenant spoke again.

"One moment, sir."

Before Hunter could divine his intention the young man had stepped back, and in a voice that echoed startlingly in the silent Strand, he roared out:

"Company . . . r-right turn! Pr-resent arms!"

The rifles came to the *present* with a rattle of arms, and facing quickly round, the young officer stood stiffly at the salute before his men.

Hunter was overwhelmed. He took off his hat, but after that stood for a moment transfixed. In its simple, spontaneous way it was the greatest tribute he had ever had.

Then he seized the hand of the lieutenant and shook it warmly.

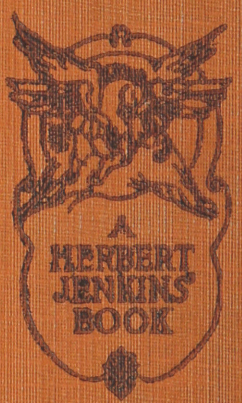
"Thank you very much. Good night."

"Good night, sir, and thank *you*."

Hunter replaced his hat and hurried away, feeling glad that nobody else was near to witness the startling incident. . . . But his heart glowed within him.

And the firm tread of the receding patrol seemed a message of comfort and security, an assurance of the health and sanity that still dwelt in the heart and mind of England.

FINIS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