The Conflict

FROM NOTES AND OBSERVATIONS
Compiled by Wm.R.Mackrill.

F PRECEDING CHAPTERS.

ams, American business duate of West Point, is in opening of the great war nce and Germany. He en- balloon reconnoissance for narrowly escapes capture troops; and is wrecked in of the Chateau Lagunay, He is nursed by Aimee, daughter, with whom he e. The Germans advance e Chateau for headquarters. a German Colonel, after- rge of the Chateau, insults is attacked by Adams, the stopped by the Kaiser, with ms is personally acquainted s the German Hussars, un ncenberg, an old friend, and quainted with Fleischmann, sergeant, who later proves to in need. The army moves meet the French. Adams, and Fleischmann lead an efeating a French column. to camp, Adams is informed e has assisted in the escape ch spy, Latour, taking him her carriage. Griesman and e in pursuit. With Fleisch- ams impresses a German war e and rushes to Aimee's aid.

CHAPTER V.

ot familiar with the road over were traveling, and could not be reckless with its many etter that I arrive a few min- than not at all. Yet the pace automobile made seemed fu- Fleischmann, for presently I heavy voice in my ear:

und Himmel! It is too fast."

is no danger," I shouted back. the machine as you know rse."

tly he spoke again:

hall be arrested at the chateau. ill telephone from headquar-

as a disagreeable thought. a suspicion arise at camp as to ntion, the rear guard at the would be ordered by wire to s. But Fleischmann rose to the , as he did so often in times of Once more I heard his voice at

k up and I will break the wire." nced upward where, at the side road, two strands of wire were ted on iron poles or on conven- es. I had seen the signal corps k and knew the system. The wire, of heavy copper, was the line, extending back across the into Lorraine, and thence, by shed lines, south into the Vosges ains, where it connected with the f the Crown Prince, operating on outheastern border. The other or iron, was a "local," running rom the chateau to the headquar- n the Aisne River.

as a daring act—deliberately to this line of communication. Yet ere well into the affair now and see it through.

ackened speed and Fleischmann from the car. The wires were fastened to a tall poplar. He ned" up the tree, and, taking hold "local" with both hands, swung pon it. The slender strand broke at the insulator and Fleischmann came down on hands and feet, like a cat. A moment later we were off again, at full speed.

But forty minutes had passed when I saw, far away to the southeast, a flutter of white high in the trees. It was the balloon case—the remnants of La Jaune—and I knew we were near the end of our run.

The infantry guard at the gate recognized my uniform and saluted as we swept through the gates. At the porte-cochere I set the brake, leaped from the car and rushed into the chateau, my sword clanking ominously behind me.

There was no change in the appearance of the rooms, save that they were deserted. The tables were still littered with papers. Blankets lay upon the cots just as they had been thrown back when the sleepers arose. It seemed a dead place; yet with a great hope in my heart that I might find Aimee there I passed quietly through the carpeted parlors and on to the small family dining-room beyond, which had been reserved for the Emperor's private apartment.

I threw back the heavy curtain at the doorway. A man stood within. He had risen suddenly to his feet from a chair by a small table on which lay papers and maps left by the Emperor. He wore the uniform of a Prussian private of cavalry—dark blue with red facings, and a small, close-fitting shako with red pompon. But what struck me was his attitude of terrified surprise, the whiteness of his face, the stare of his small eyes. He thrust into his inner pocket a packet of papers that were in his hand; his features relaxed in a faint, sickly smile, and he saluted.

"Monsieur startled me," he said, in bourgeois French. "I am arranging these papers which have been left behind."

Disguised as he was, and with that guilty look, I still knew that somewhere, and recently, I had seen him in utterly different surroundings. But there was no time for thought. "Where is your Colonel—Griesman?" I asked.

"He is not here. He has gone—north, since daylight, after the spy."

I turned back and met Fleischmann. "Mademoiselle is not here," he said, "nor is Griesman. We must follow them."

At the outer door I spoke to a guard who sat on a stone bench sunning himself: "Who is the man within?"

"He is Colonel Griesman's interpreter," he replied.

"His name?"

"Jacques Grevoir."

"Ah, a Frenchman?"

"No, a Belgian."

I hurried down the steps. Fleischmann was already in the car. "To the north," he said, as I took my seat. And to the north we went on the wing.

Grevoir—Jacques Grevoir. The name, the face, haunted me. Then I remembered. Jacques, the servile garçon, at the club! Why I had seen him only the night before I left Paris. And what did he here? Griesman's interpreter, eh?

Before I could pursue the peculiar situation further we reached a fork of the road and stopped in a quandary. Fleischmann left the car to examine for tracks. There was no dearth of these, but they covered either road, showing that horsemen had gone in both directions.

Fleischmann hastened to a small farm house near by, and returned leading a sorry-looking plough horse.

"'Tis no great affair compared with your iron steed," he said, with a grim smile; "but I will manage. You keep ahead and I will turn to the left. The roads run parallel for some miles. If you do not find her, cut across and join me. If I do not, I will join you." He swung to the saddle and rode off at a smart gait.

At a small village I obtained information that a party, in three carriages, had passed at sunrise, followed a few hours later by a small body of cavalry. So I pushed on, growing reckless in my chase and running many risks on the narrow, winding road.

At last I came upon them at the little village of Vartoux. Eight horses were picketed near a well. Close by six troopers were lounging on the grass beneath a great tree, for the afternoon was warm in spite of the lateness of the season. Beyond them stood a carriage. I recognized the vehicle as Aimee's, and hardly waiting for the machine to stop, rushed toward it. There was no one inside. I turned to the soldiers.

"Where is your Colonel?"

One of them saluted, with scant respect, and pointed to a low, stone inn, twenty rods up the road. Thither I hastened, my heart beating fast with anger and hope and fear.

The room was long with low ceilings and somewhat dark. On one side stretched a row of small tables, at one of which sat Griesman and his orderly, busily talking. The innkeeper came forward with a smile of welcome. I waved him aside and turned to Griesman, who looked up with a sneer.

"Ah, Herr Adams, so you have come for the lady?"

"I have come for Mademoiselle Lagunay," I replied. "I wish to see her at once."

He broke out into a mocking laugh, in which the others joined. "Well, so you shall, so you shall see her, presently, perhaps. But you must know that she is a prisoner of war—my prisoner."

"She is to be released," I said, hotly. "I heard from the Emperor your report. It is said that she aided the spy, Latour, to escape. You will prove it or release her."

Griesman took the time deliberately to draw from his pocket a cigar and to light it before he spoke. He knew that I was burning with impatience and anger. Leaning back and speaking through a cloud of smoke he made my heart leap with delight.

"There is nothing in the charge, so far as it relates to mademoiselle, for which I am glad, since my regard for her is very—tender, I may say."

He paused to take in the full effect of this thrust. I was gritting my teeth, hardly able to keep myself within bounds. Yet I would hear him to the end.

"I will tell you briefly, that you may report the facts to His Majesty. As you know, Latour was to be shot at sunrise yesterday morning. We decided to wait a day, hoping to extract from him valuable information. Mademoiselle and her party, in three carriages, left yesterday morning before dawn. Latour, who was confined in one of the cellars, must have bribed one of the servants, and somehow slipped past the guard and entered the forward carriage, where he hid beneath a bundle of rugs. The guard discovered at breakfast time that Latour was gone, but, in fear of punishment, omitted to report until this morning, giving the spy twenty-four hours in which to get away. Unfortunately for your friends, mademoiselle decided to stop en route for a visit with an acquaintance, and we had no difficulty in overtaking them. Of course, the spy is gone; but we drew a confession from the servants, and had the extreme pleasure of shooting them instead of Latour. Those are the facts, and you will pardon my suggestion that you return immediately and communicate them to the Emperor."

"I return at my own pleasure," I replied. "My orders do not come from you. I request you to show me to Mademoiselle Lagunay."

I really believe that Griesman underrated me as a fighter. How should he have known my training?

So, without fear, and, as a cat dallies with a mouse, thinking to give me another playful bite, he ascended to the last degree of insult.

"I have told you that mademoiselle is my prisoner. As such she may not see you. She is also my companion, and as such she does not wish to see you. Why, monsieur, it was but an hour ago that she sat upon my lap, all smiles and blushes and——"

I sprang at him with an oath. My sword came from its scabbard with an angry hiss. Had I followed my first impulse his craven skull had been split that instant. But I merely smacked his face with the flat of the blade. "Say it again, if you dare. You lie, dog."

Both men jumped to their feet. The Colonel had his sabre in the air when his orderly rushed between us. "Remember the Emperor's orders," he cried. "You will lose your commission. Let him go. He is helpless."

But Griesman, traitor though he proved to be, was no coward. Thoroughly enraged by my challenge he threw the man aside and came at me with all his two hundred pounds weight. I stepped back a little to get room, and caught his blade on my guard. He swore beneath his breath and struck again with terrific force. Again I stopped him.

"A little less brawn and more skill, baby," I said, derisively. "You will be wearied."

We carried the regulation German cavalry sabre, rather heavy and slightly curved. It was built on the American model, and as I met his savage lunges I began to feel at home. I fell naturally into the old position of defense. The muscles of wrist and arm came easily into play. In memory I saw the great tan-bark circle of the academy where we had our daily drills. I was again in the ring, defending my title of the best swordsman of the class. And so, without tremor or apprehension, I stood there and fought, for Aimee's sake and for my own life, parrying his mighty strokes with little difficulty, though the shock as I caught his heavy blade told on my arm, so long unused to sword play. I made no effort to strike. So swift was his attack and so vicious that I preferred the defensive, well knowing that eventually he would tire. At intervals I taunted him, using all the German terms of scorn and contumely that I could call to mind. His anger was terrible. Great beads of sweat formed on his brow and rolled down his cheeks. His eyes protruded, his mouth opened, his breath came faster. We moved around the room, advancing, retreating, sidestepping, neither obtaining any advantage, though I was certain that my play was superior to his.

The innkeeper fled in terror at the first clash, and we had the big room to ourselves. The orderly stood to one side, encouraging his Colonel. Now and then we rested momentarily, watching each other like hawks; then up and at it again, back and forth, cut and slash, thrust and parry, until it seemed to me that all my life long I had been doing this thing, and that I should continue until the end of time.

At last my anger rose again. I twisted his sword to one side and pricked him beneath the arm. "That for a hint," I cried. "I shall press less lightly the next time. Put down your sword and deliver the lady to me or you shall die, traitor."

The word struck home. For answer he cursed me, and came in with a great sweeping stroke that would have cut me in two had it reached its mark. But I stooped, caught his blade near my hilt, and with a strong upward lift and throw put him off his guard. And, though it was unwise, considering my uncertain status with the Emperor, I was too far gone with hate and with desperation to recede. My sword came down with a heavy, drawing stroke. It grazed the side of his head, slicing off an ear. It bit deep into the muscles of his thick, corded neck. It struck the collar bone, shattered it, and turned inward. And as he staggered back and fell, carrying down table and chair, his blood spurted to the low ceiling and I knew that my work was well done.

The orderly rushed to the door shouting for help. Weary and trembling though I was, I knelt by Griesman's side, and, thrusting my hand into the inner pocket of his coat, drew out a flat pocketbook and a bundle of letters. As I rose to my feet the six troopers burst into the room with drawn sabres. I was not ready for a fight at such odds, but I appeared to be in for it. At the back of the room a narrow, enclosed stairway led to the upper story. A heavy door barred the entrance, the lower step jutting into the room. It was the only place for a stand, and I made for it on the run, the troopers after me.

Bracing my back against the door I awaited their rush. The first I split down through the skull, and his brains splattered over the men behind, whereat they retreated, staring sullenly at their dead comrade. They were heavily built, and powerful, with smooth-shaven, determined faces. I knew that I could not hold out against them. But that they might not even suspect my fear I shouted at them in derision:

"Come on, come on, cowards."

Another made at me, sparring cautiously. I caught the point of his sabre with my own and sent it whirling over his head. But my arm was tired. My sabre turned in my grip and I could but smash him in the face with the flat of my blade. He fell back upon the others with a shriek of pain.

I was weak from my tremendous exertions. A great weariness came over me, and for a moment my head swam. How could I hope to continue the uneven struggle! The troopers whispered among themselves and then advanced slowly, spreading out to disconcert me. I gripped my sword and set my teeth for a final effort. Aimee's name was on my lips. I felt that it was the end. At that instant the front door was smashed in, and, God be thanked! Fleischmann's great bulk loomed up before us. I shouted to him and he rushed forward, bellowing like an angry bull.

That he was unarmed made no difference to this stout-hearted giant. That I was in peril was the main thought. The troopers turned with uplifted sabres toward this unexpected menace. I groaned at thought of what might be, and gathered myself to help in the attack. But Fleischmann seized one of the heavy oaken chairs, whirled it above his head, and, with a great oath, let it fly into their midst. There was a confused mixture of legs and arms and sabres. They went down like nine pins, and, as they scrambled to their feet, cursing in rage and pain, he came in like a whirlwind, and, with his huge fists, beat them to the floor. One arose with ready sabre, a challenge on his lips. But it was his last word. Fleischmann caught him by the neck, shook him as he would a rat, and sent him whirling against the stone wall. He struck it head-on with a crack like that of a pistol shot, and fell limp, with a broken neck. The others lay where they had fallen, unconscious.

I descended from my narrow refuge and took my brave friend by the hand. "You have saved my life," I said. "I shall not forget."

Outside there was a clatter of hoofs. Through the open door we saw the terrified orderly gallop past, bound south. I knew that he would spread the alarm and that we must get away as soon as possible.

I found Aimee in an upper room, with her maid, as I had expected. I called to her and she came to me with a sob. "Oh, my Jaime, my lion-hearted, take me away from that beast," she cried, and fell fainting in my arms.

A few minutes later we climbed into our big car. Aimee, weak and pale, but inexpressibly happy, was curled up in one of the rear seats, wrapped in rugs and blankets. Fleischmann and I were by no means comfortable in mind, for there was the Kaiser's terrible anger to be faced the next day. Yet I felt that with the documents in my pockets I could turn the tables; and, since mademoiselle was innocent of offense, things were not so bad after all. So we swept on through the moonlight toward Bethel. We did not know that even then the Emperor had learned, by telephone from the orderly, of Griesman's death; and that a detail had been sent to arrest me and, upon resistance, to shoot me on the spot.

(To be continued next week.)

"HE STAGGERED BACK AND FELL."

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MRS. CAROLINE F. CORBIN.

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