

The Kingdom of The Blind

By E. PHILLIPS OPPENHEIM.

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SYNOPSIS:

The story, written in 1916, begins with Lady Anselman's luncheon-party at the Ritz Hotel, London. Among the guests are Lord Romsey, a Cabinet Minister; Surgeon-Major Thomson, Chief Inspector of Field Hospitals; his fiancée, Geraldine Conyers; her brother, a naval lieutenant, and his fiancée Olive Moreton; Captain Ronald Granet, nephew of the hostess, home with a wounded arm. As Thomson and Geraldine leave the hotel they are overtaken by Lieut. Conyers waving a telegram.

CHAPTER III.—(Cont'd.)

"You've got your ship?" Thomson inquired.

"I've got what I wanted," the young man answered enthusiastically. "I've got a destroyer, one of the new type—forty knots an hour, a dear little row of four-inch guns, and my God! something else, I hope, that'll teach those murderers a lesson," he added, shaking his fist towards the placard.

Geraldine laid her hand upon her brother's arm.

"When do you join, Ralph?"

"To-morrow night at Portsmouth," he replied. "I'm afraid we shall be several days before we are at work. It's the 'Scorpion' they're giving me, Gerald—or the mystery ship, as they call it in the navy."

"Why?" she asked.

His rather boyish face, curiously like his sister's, was suddenly transformed.

"Because we've got a rod in pickle for those cursed pirates—"

"Conyers!" Thomson interrupted.

The young man paused in his sentence. Thomson was looking towards him with a slight frown upon his forehead.

"Don't think I'm a fearful old woman," he said. "I know we are all rather fed up with these tales of spies and that sort of thing, but do you think it's wise to even open your lips about a certain matter?"

"What the dickens do you know about it?" Conyers demanded.

"Nothing," Thomson assured him hastily, "nothing at all. I am only going by what you said yourself. If there is any device on the 'Scorpion' for dealing with these infernal craft, I'd never breathe a word about it, if I were you. I'd put out to sea with a seal upon my lips, even before Geraldine here and Miss Moreton."

The young man's cheeks were a little flushed.

"Perhaps you're right," he admitted. "I was a little over-excited. To get the 'Scorpion' was more, even than I had dared to hope for. Still, before the girls it didn't seem to matter very much. There are no spies, anyhow, hiding in the trees of Berkeley Street," he added, glancing about them.

Thomson held up his finger and stopped a taxicab.

"You won't be annoyed with me, will you?" he said to Conyers. "If you'd heard half the stories I had of the things we have given away quite innocently—"

"That's all right," the young man interrupted, "only you mustn't think I'm a gas-bag just because I said a word or two here before Gerry and Olive and you, old fellow."

"Must you go, Hugh?" Geraldine asked.

"I am so sorry," he replied, "but I must. I really have rather an important appointment this afternoon."

"An appointment!" she grumbled.

"You are in London for so short a time and you seem to be keeping appointments all the while. I shan't let you go unless you tell me what it's about."

"I have to inspect a new pattern of camp bedstead," he explained calmly.

"If I may, I will telephone directly I am free and see if you are at liberty."

She shrugged her shoulders but gave him a pleasant little nod as he stepped into the taxi.

"Sober old stick, Thomson," her brother observed, as they started off.

"I didn't like his pulling me up like that but I expect he was right."

"I don't see what business it was of his and I think it was rather horrid of him," Olive declared. "As though Gerry or I mattered!"

"A chap like Thomson hasn't very much discretion, you see," Ralph Conyers remarked. "You'll have to wake him up a bit, Gerry, if you mean to get any fun out of life."

There was just the faintest look of trouble in Geraldine's face. She remained perfectly loyal, however.

"Some of us take life more seriously than others," she sighed. "Hugh is

one of them. When one remembers all the terrible things he must have seen, though, it is very hard to find fault with him."

They turned into the Square and paused before Olive's turning.

"You're coming down with me, Ralph, and you, too, Geraldine?" she invited.

Conyers shook his head regretfully.

"I'm due at the Admiralty at four to receive my final instructions," he said. "I must move along at once."

The smile suddenly faded from his lips. He seemed to be listening to the calling of the newsboys down the street.

"I don't know what my instructions are going to be," he continued, dropping his voice a little, "but I'm sick of making war the way our chaps are doing it. If I'm lucky enough to get one of these murderous submarines, I can promise you one thing—there'll be no survivors."

For a moment or two they neither of them spoke. From out of the windows of the house before which they were standing came the music of a popular waltz. Olive turned away with a little shiver.

"You think I'm brutal, dear," Conyers went on, as he patted her hand. "Remember I've seen men killed—that's what makes the difference, Olive. Yes, I am different! We are all different, we who've tackled the job. Thomson's different. Your young man at luncheon, Geraldine—what's his name?—Granet—he's different. There's something big and serious grown up inside us, and the brute is looking out. It has to be. I'll come in later, Olive. Tell the mater I shall be home to dinner, Geraldine. The governor's waiting down at the Admiralty for me. Good-bye, girls!"

He waved his hand and strode down towards the corner of the Square. Both girls watched him for a few moments. His shoulders were as square as ever but something had gone from the springiness of his gait. There was nothing left of the sailor's jaunty swagger.

"They are all like that," Geraldine whispered, "when they've been face to face with the real thing. And we are only women, Olive."

CHAPTER IV.

Surgeon-Major Thomson had apparently forgotten his appointment to view camp bedsteads, for, a few minutes after he had left Geraldine and her brother, his taxicab set him down before a sombre-looking house in Adelphi Terrace. He passed through the open doorway, up two flights of stairs, drew a key of somewhat peculiar shape from his pocket and opened a door in front of him. He found himself in a very small hall, from which there was no egress save through yet another door, through which he passed and stepped into a large but singularly bare-looking apartment. Three great safes were ranged along one side of the wall, piles of newspapers and maps were strewn all over a long table, and a huge Ordnance map of the French and Belgian frontiers stood upon an easel. The only occupant of the apartment was a man who was sitting before a typewriter in front of the window. He turned his head and rose at Thomson's entrance, a rather short, keen-looking young man, his face slightly pitted with smallpox, his mouth hard and firm, his eyes deep-set and bright.

"Anything happened, Ambrose?"

"A dispatch, sir," was the brief reply.

"From the War Office?"

"No, sir, it came direct."

Thomson drew the thin sheet of paper from its envelope and swept a space for himself at the corner of the table. Then he unlocked one of the safes and drew out from an inner drawer a parchment book bound in brown vellum. He spread out the dispatch and read it carefully. It had been handed in at a town near the Belgian frontier about eight hours before.

Fifty thousand camp bedsteads are urgently required for neighborhood of La Guir. Please do your best for us, the matter is urgent. Double mattress if possible. London.

For a matter of ten minutes Thomson was busy with his pencil and the code-book. When he had finished, he studied thoughtfully the message which he had transcribed:

Plans for attack on La Guir communicated. Attack foiled. Believe Smith in London.

"Anything important, sir?" the young man at the typewriter asked.

Thomson nodded but made no immediate reply. He first of all carefully destroyed the message which he had received, and the transcription, and watched the fragments of paper burn into ashes. Then he replaced the code-book in the safe, which he carefully locked, and strolled towards the window. He stood for several minutes looking out towards the Thames.

"The same thing has happened again at La Guir," he said at last.

"Any clue?"

"None. They say that he is in London now."

The two men looked at one another

TENTS

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for a moment in grave silence. Ambrose leaned back in his chair and frowned heavily.

"Through our lines, through Boulogne, across the Channel, through Dover Station, out of Charing-Cross, through our own men and the best that Scotland Yard could do for us. In London, eh?"

Thomson's face twitched convulsively. His teeth had come together with a little snap.

"You needn't play at being headquarters, Ambrose," he said hoarsely. "I know it seems like a miracle but there's a reason for that."

"What is it?" Ambrose asked.

"Only a few weeks after the war began," Thomson continued thoughtfully, "two French generals, four or five colonels, and over twenty junior and non-commissioned officers were court-martialled for espionage. The French have been on the lookout for that sort of thing. We haven't. There isn't one of these men who are sitting in judgment upon us to-day, Ambrose, who would listen to me for a single moment if I were to take the bull by the horns and say that the traitor we seek is one of ourselves."

"You're right," Ambrose murmured, "but do you believe it?"

"I do," Thomson asserted. "It isn't only the fact of the attacks themselves miscarrying, but it's the knowledge on the other side of exactly how best to meet that attack. It's the exact knowledge they have as to our dispositions, our most secret and sudden change of tactics. We've suffered enough, Ambrose, in this country from civil spies—the Government is to blame for that. But there are plenty of people who go blustering about, declaring that two of our Cabinet Ministers ought to be hung, who'd turn round and give you the lie if you hinted for a moment that the same sort of thing in a far worse degree was going on amongst men who are wearing the King's uniform."

"It's ugly," Ambrose muttered, "damned ugly!" thoughtfully. "Every secret connected with our present and future plans—practically passes through my hands, yet no one watches me. Whisper a word at the War Office that perhaps it would be as well—just for a week, say—to test a few of my reports, and they'd laugh at you with the air of superior beings listening to the chatter of a fool. Yet what is there impossible about it? I may have some secret vice—avarice, perhaps. Germany would give me the price of a kingdom for all that I could tell them. Yet because I am an English officer I am above all suspicion. It's magnificent, Ambrose, but it's damnably foolish."

The young man watched his chief for several moments. Thomson was standing before the window, the cold spring light falling full upon his face, with its nervous lines and strongly-cut, immobile features. He felt a curious disposition to speak, a queer sort of desire to wait on the chance of hearing more.

"A single kink in my brain," Thomson continued, "a secret weakness, perhaps even a dash of lunacy, and I might be quite reasonably the master-spy of the world. I was in Berlin six weeks ago, Ambrose. There wasn't a soul who ever knew it. I made no report, on purpose."

"Perhaps they knew and said nothing," Ambrose suggested softly.

There was a moment's silence. Thomson seemed to be considering the idea with strange intensity. Then he shook his head.

"I think not," he decided. "When the history of this war is written, Ambrose, with flamboyant phrases and copious rhetoric, there will be unwritten chapters, more dramatic, having really more direct effect upon the final issues than even the great battles which have seemed the dominant factors. Sit tight here, Ambrose, and wait. I may be going over to Boulogne at any hour."

Thomson pushed on one side the curtains which concealed an inner room, and passed through. In a quarter of an hour he reappeared, dressed in uniform. His tone, his bearing, his whole manner were changed. He walked with a springier step, he carried a little cane and he was whistling softly to himself.

"I am going to one or two places in the Tottenham Court Road, by appointment," he announced, "to inspect some new patterns of camp bedsteads. You can tell them, if they ring up from Whitehall, that I'll report myself later in the evening."

Curiously enough, the other man, too, had changed as though in sympathetic deference to his superior officer. He had become simply the obedient and assiduous secretary.

"Very good, sir," he said smoothly. "I'll do my best to finish these specifications before you return."

(To be continued.)

The Power of Music.

Music is frequently employed to restore lost power of speech and memory, it having been found by experiment that the neurasthenic and paralyzed are often able to sing, while they cannot speak.

Canada's wool crop in 1920 was 21,000,000 pounds, with 3,720,000 head of sheep as part of the live stock.

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Pitfalls For Foreigners

Sir Ian Hamilton tells a good story of when he was the only foreigner with the Japanese General Staff in the Russo-Japanese War. A geisha, whose name in English would have been Miss Sparrow, sang to the company, and he proceeded to compliment her on her skill.

Proud of the little Japanese he knew, he tried to say to her in the florid Eastern style that he would like to keep her always with him in a cage that she might sing to him. He told her so—or thought he did—and she went away quite crestfallen.

What he had really said to the girl was: "My good sparrow, I wish you would shut yourself up in a box!"

During the war the following advertisement appeared in the "Times": "Jack F. C.—If you are not in khaki by the 20th I shall cut you dead.—Ethel M."

The Berlin correspondent of the "Cologne Gazette" was so greatly struck by this terrible threat coming from an English maiden that he telegraphed it to his paper as an example of the brutal method of English recruiting. But he managed to translate it into: "If you are not in khaki by the 20th I shall back you to death!"

That is the result of trying to translate the peculiar idiom of one language into another, and it is not the only instance. There is the old story of the Frenchman who said he had "a cow in his boy," when he meant a cough on his chest.

During the war a well-known French general, who was trying to pay a well-deserved compliment to the British Army, made just as bad a blunder. He compared the Army with a vast machine. He said the privates were the wheels, and that the officers were the cogs who put the wheels in motion as long as they were "well oiled." He

little knew that to be well oiled, in slang English, means nothing more or less than to be intoxicated.

Missionaries have found the translation of hymns into barbaric languages a very ticklish task. "Go, Labor On" in the dialect of the Congo became to them, "Go Blunder On"; but it did not interfere in the least with the gusto with which the blacks sang it.

Physical and spiritual ideas are a good deal mixed up in the case of the cannibal islands, and food and life are interchangeable terms, meaning exactly the same thing. So when the missionary set about the task of translating the hymn which says "Sing them over again to me, wonderful words of life," he thought the natives sang it with particular appreciation. He learned later that they were really singing "Wonderful words of stomach."

Another missionary found that the closing hymn: "Lord, dismiss us with Thy blessing" was sung very charily, with a little chirping voice, whereas any other hymn they sang with might and main. He found presently that his translation meant to them, "Lord, kick us out softly, softly."

Once the great Sir Walter Scott made a wilful and very witty mis-translation of a Latin sentence or motto which appeared over the gateway of an old baronial mansion which had been taken over by the Edinburgh Law Society as their headquarters. The motto carved in stone was, "OLIM MARTE, NUNC ARTE," which means "Once by war, now by skill."

When George IV. visited the city Sir Walter acted as showman. The king observed the motto and inquired its meaning. Sir Walter said: "It means, your Majesty, 'Once robbers, now thieves.'"

The Rust Record.

The greatest waster in the whole world is rust. It costs Britain alone \$160,000,000 yearly!

When the oxygen of most air combines with the sensitive surface of a metal it produces an oxide. This is rust and nothing else.

Aluminium is the only metal that will not rust. Gold is generally taken to be a rustless metal, and it is true that it will not combine with oxygen of itself—without air, that is. Given the aid, it will rust.

Ornamental steel—that with a purple or lilac color—is the worst rust-er, because the color tinge has been produced by part-oxidation, and the process begun artificially is continued naturally.

Dry air will cause rust, but the metal has to be at a high temperature. A poker which has been made red-hot will rust when it cools. Grate-bars do the same. The flakes that come from red-hot iron when it is hammered are but rust.

The best preventive of rust is fat-oil varnish (one part) mixed with rectified spirits of turpentine (five parts), and applied with a sponge. The highest steel polish on mathematical instruments remains absolutely unaffected if this solution is applied.

Tinware is rendered practically immune from the rust fiend if, when new, the ware is smeared with pure lard and baked in a hot oven.

Germany is said to be exporting goods into England marked "Made in Birmingham."

Natural Conclusion.

Harkins, who had taken his children to a country place during the holidays, was proceeding across the fields with Louis, the youngest, when the latter saw a cow for the first time.

"What is that?" asked the child.

"That's a cow, my son."

"And what are those things on her head?"

"Horns."

And the two then moved on. Presently the cow moed, whereat Louis was surprised.

"Which-horn did she blow, father?" he asked.

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