



"The man was signalling by flashlight."

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WANDERERS IN THE WAR.

By A. A. METHLEY.

(Continued from page 399.)

ROGER had almost made up his mind that the best thing for him to do would be to return to the village and ask Evans' advice, when suddenly the sight of a bright beam of light shining between the trees made him spring to his feet, with all his weariness and hunger forgotten. What could it be? A fire, an electric flashlight, or a lantern? At any rate, it meant that some one was near at hand, and who that some one was, whether friend or foe, it was his duty to discover without an instant's loss of time.

The boy ran forward, meaning to reach the open ground on the river-bank and thus get a better view; but before he had gone many steps, he saw something else, and stopped again, his heart beating quickly, and his eyes wide and alert. Far away on the opposite bank of the river was another light, a light that flashed, disappeared, and flashed again.

He turned quickly: there behind him, about a hundred yards away and half hidden among the trees, was a small wooden hut, and beside it stood a man in a peasant's blouse with a lantern in his hand. He lifted it and swung it above his head. The light—a strangely brilliant light—streamed out into the gathering darkness.

Roger cowered back against the trunk of a tree near which he was standing and held himself rigid and motionless, hardly daring to breathe lest his whereabouts should be discovered.

He understood now what it all meant, and the realisation sent a chill of dismay through his heart. The man was signalling by flashlight, and away there, over the river, were the Germans, his friends—the enemy—reading his message and sending back a reply.

The boy's first impulse was, naturally enough, to rush forward, grapple with the spy and tear the lantern out of his hand; but it only needed a moment's reflection to make him realise that such a course would be not only reckless and foolish, but also absolutely useless. He himself was only a boy of fifteen, while the German was a man, tall, broad-shouldered and strongly built, with years of military training behind him.

There was one question which Roger asked himself again and again as he crouched there in the shadows, and it was this: Why was the spy sending his information by flashlight and thus running the risk of discovery, when his friends were only a few miles away, and it would have been easy for him to cross the river and carry it to them in person?

After a few minutes the man lowered his lantern, darkened it, and entered the little wooden house. He shut the door behind him, and the sound of a grating bolt was heard, but before long a narrow gleam of light showed through an open window. Roger left his tree and crept forward through the brambles and grass tussocks until he reached the rough wooden wall of the building. He could see nothing at first through the crack, but the window was unglazed and a touch on the shutter swung it slightly inwards. Then, noiselessly and cautiously, he peered into a small bare room. The lantern had been set down on an upturned wooden box, and by its light everything could be seen clearly.

The furniture of the place, if furniture it could be called, was rough and primitive in the extreme, but it was evident that some one had been living and sleeping there. In one corner an armful of straw had been flung down to form a bed, and on it was spread a dark cloak or rug. There was a leather suit-case on which a revolver was lying, and a bicycle leaned against the wall. Several large cases did duty as chairs and tables, and on one was a bottle of wine and a torn sheet of newspaper containing fragments of meat and bread. A number of smaller cases, iron-bound, sealed and labelled as 'soap,' were piled together in different parts of the hut.

Roger did not notice all these details, for his eyes were fixed on the occupant of the hut, a big, powerful-looking man, who was kneeling on the ground, stooping over something which he manipulated with delicate skill and care. After a minute or two he looked up to reach for something that was on the wooden case, and then the light from the lantern streamed full on his scarred, sinister face.

It was the man whom Roger had encountered a month ago on the hill of the hollow tree, and again to-day in the recaptured French village: Captain Heinz, Fräulein's brother, the German soldier—and the German spy.

Heinz was preparing a fuse. The wooden boxes which he moved with such care were packed with some deadly explosive, and it was, doubtless, his intention to destroy the bridge, so that the French might be delayed in their coming advance.

The boy's brain was in a whirl as one wild plan after another presented itself and was rejected, and he had come to no decision when, once more, the door of the hut was pushed slowly open. Heinz came out carrying one of the iron-bound boxes in his arms.

There was a lull in the bombardment just then, and in the stillness every sound and every rustle of leaf or twig was clearly audible. Roger held his breath as the German passed him, and then, after a few minutes, stole out of his hiding-place and followed, unseen and unheard, to the river-bank. Concealing himself again, he fixed his eyes upon the dark figure, which showed clearly against the white masonry of the bridge, and watched him as he moved about among the reeds and low-growing willows under the first of the wide arches. Before long he mounted the slope again, empty-handed, and returned to the hut.

And then, suddenly, an idea—an inspiration—flashed into Roger's head. Why should not he apply the spark and destroy—not the bridge, but the hut and its deadly contents?

Roger felt in his pocket and drew out a box of matches, which Evans had given him a few days ago; then he stole nearer to the hut and examined it closely. The walls were of wood, it is true, but they were hard and thick, and it would be a work of time to set them on fire. Time was the one thing that could not be wasted in the present emergency, and therefore his first scheme—of igniting the hut from the outside—had to be abandoned.

It only remained, then, to enter the little house and find something there that would burn easily; and although this plan was full of peril—for he knew nothing of the nature of the explosive that was contained in the boxes—Roger did not hesitate. He remembered the newspaper on which the spy's frugal

meal had been spread out, and, pushing open the door, stepped over the rough wooden threshold.

It was the work of a moment to seize the paper and twist it into a torch. Then he gathered up the straw from the corner and heaped it on to the boxes of explosives. The empty wooden cases were dragged forward and added to the pile.

When everything was ready, Roger struck one of his matches and set fire to the crumpled newspaper. It flared up fiercely, the yellow light flickering on the low roof and rough walls of the little structure.

There was no time to be lost now; at any moment the explosion might come. Roger glanced round, snatched up the leather suit-case, and ran out into the open air. There, in front of him, was Heinz, coming towards the hut, and quite unsuspecting of the deadly and imminent danger which it contained.

'Go back! Go back! Fire! Fire!' Roger's warning rang out clearly on the night air, and rushing forward, he seized the German's arm.

'You mustn't go there. I have set it on fire. It will blow up in a moment!' he panted.

Heinz turned round, his scarred face livid with fury. 'You have set it on fire, you——' His voice broke, and flinging the boy violently to one side, he dashed forward with reckless courage, determined even now, at all costs, to extinguish the flames and carry out his own work of destruction.

'Come back! You must not—you shall not!' Roger was on his feet once more; and then there came a hideous crash, a flame that seemed to light up the whole world, and a searing blast that swept everything before it.

The boy flung up his hands and fell forward—blinded, deafened, and stunned—on to the grass.

CHAPTER XXI.

WHEN Roger opened his eyes again, he was still lying on the grass where he had fallen, but his head had been raised, and there was the sharp taste of spirits in his mouth. Several men were stooping over him with anxious faces, and—he thought he must be dreaming at first—one of them, who held the lamp of a motor-car in his hand, was his old friend, John Boughton.

'Where am I? What has happened? I don't remember,' he faltered. And then, as memory returned, he clutched the arm of the man nearest to him. 'The bridge, is it safe? And—and Fräulein's brother?'

The bridge is quite all right—thanks to you, I take it,' was the reply; but Roger's second question remained unanswered, and Boughton moved slightly, so that the boy should not catch sight of a motionless figure that lay on the ground a little way off.

Heinz, the German spy, had perished in the destruction of the hut, and now, hoist with his own petard, was powerless to do further mischief. The bridge was safe, and the road to the north lay open.

Roger himself was quite uninjured, although he had been stunned by the violence of the explosion. He soon recovered, and, in answer to his eager questions, learnt how Boughton had managed to reach the recaptured village in his capacity of War Correspondent soon after the arrival of the French troops, and had heard Roger's name and the news of his disappearance from Evans, with whom he had had an interview at the m. n.

At first, however, all inquiries and investigations proved useless, and it was not until quite late in the

evening that an old woman appeared, who had seen the boy pass her cottage and leave the village.

They hurried to the bridge. It was intact, although the two boxes placed in position under the arch showed that mischief had been afoot. Then the red glare of fire above the trees had led them towards the hut.

'But Val? How shall we find out now where she is?' Roger's heart sank as he heard the end of Boughton's story. The bridge was saved, but it seemed as if the success of the greater enterprise would mean the failure of his search for Val. Heinz had known where she and Fräulein were to be found, and now he was dead, and the secret had died with him.

One of the men, noticing Roger's troubled face, pointed to the leather suit-case which was lying on the ground not far away. 'Look here,' he said; 'did that belong to the German? Because, if so, it is quite likely that we might get some information from his papers. What do you say, Boughton? You are boss of this show. Shall we break that case open and see what we can find?'

Boughton nodded, and very soon the suit-case was opened, and documents of all sorts taken out. They were examined by the light of the motor-lamp, Roger watching and listening, with his face full of eager expectancy.

At last Boughton discovered a half-sheet of note-paper scribbled with a few sentences in sloping German characters. He studied it for a moment, and glanced up at Roger with a smile.

'Here we are, my son,' he said, and then read aloud a missive which had evidently been sent by Fräulein Heinz to her brother within the last few days.

'We are waiting for you here,' Fräulein wrote. 'The child is with me. I cannot understand why you have not sent me a message. I wrote and told you that we should stay at the usual place. We may not be able to stay much longer; the news is bad to-day.'

The name of the town from which the letter had been sent was written at the top of the page, but there was no other address.

In a few moments the car was racing smoothly along the road towards the village, and as the cool night breeze touched his cheek, and the dark trees and hedges flitted by, Roger felt as if the past ten days had been nothing but a dream, and that he was once more with the two French officers careering southward on the way to Paris.

(Concluded on page 410.)

WHEN THE FLOODS ROSE.

THE floods came up the farmyard path—
They'd never been so high—
And Mrs. Puss and Mrs. Hen
Were friends in misery!

They climbed on Rover's kennel roof,
And floated right away;
But Mrs. Hen's five little chicks
Thought it was only play:

For they were ducks, not chicks, you see—
A sturdy little brood!
'It's an ill wind,' said Farmer Brown,
'That blows no kind of good.'



"They floated right away."



“A tallish man in the window seemed to see through us.”

THE INDIAN SHAWLS.

WHEN Aunt Anne sent us two Indian shawls at Christmas we were not very pleased. They didn't seem to be *presents*, somehow. They were *clothes*, and

Mother and Father always got our clothes for us, so we seemed to have been deprived of a present which might have been some pleasure to us, and to have been given instead only something useful which we didn't care about.

Mother said they were wonderful shawls, and we ought to be proud of them; and so we really were, but we wouldn't admit it, though we wrote a very nice letter thanking Aunt Anne, out there in the hills in India—at least, Mother said it was quite a nice letter. It took long enough to write.

It was really Mother who suggested the use we put the shawls to later on. Marjorie threw one of the shawls over her head and shoulders, while I was writing the letter to Aunt Anne, for fun, and squatted cross-legged on the ground, and talked gibberish, pretending to be a gipsy beggar. She really looked awfully wild and strange, with her dark eyes and hair—and she's a jolly good hand at acting.

Just then Mother came into the schoolroom. 'What's this little Indian beggar-girl doing here?' she said sternly; but I saw she didn't believe it was a beggar-girl really.

Well, next Easter the Vicar's wife gave an afternoon At Home, in aid of comforts for some Indian regiment the Vicar's brother was in. There was a sort of drawing-room concert in the big hall close to the Vicarage, with tea and singing and all that. Mother and we two girls helped to decorate the room with palms and things, and Marjorie and I wrote out a lot of programmes to save expense. We wrote them very well. But, somehow, some of the programmes were different from the others. The one Mrs. Exton (the Vicar's wife) used to announce the events was one of the different ones.

'Item number five,' she read out presently—we were supposed to be 'behind the scenes,' helping to get tea ready—"An Indian Dance"—dear me, I—

But we didn't give her time to say more. Tom—that's the Vicar's eldest son: he was in it: he was home for the holidays—began to beat a drum solemnly outside—"bom! bom! bom!" and to make a kind of crooning yell, 'Wa-a-ah, wa-a-y-ah!' It was like an Indian conjuror we had once seen at Earl's Court. Marjorie and I waddled in all wrapped up in Indian shawls, and began to wriggle and bend at the knees, and prance solemnly round each other. We had browned our faces and our feet (which were bare) with furniture stain: we didn't get it off afterwards for days.

I wish we had thought it out more. There was a tallish man with a moustache in the window who looked very closely at us, and I caught his eye, and he smiled: I didn't like it. He was very sunburnt, and he seemed to see through us. So I began yelling too—"Wa-a-y-ah, wah, wa-a-y-ah!"

And then Mrs. Exton—who had been looking at the programme, and then at us, and then at the programme again, through her glasses—got up. And we both ran. I dropped the brass bowl I was carrying, and just as we got outside I tripped over the shawl and fell, tearing a great hole in it.

I was told afterwards that Colonel Exton, the tall man who had made me feel uneasy, 'saved the situation.' He came after us, and picked up the bowl, and made a little speech about Indian customs. He mentioned 'the beautiful Indian shawls such as the last performers wore in their remarkable dance,' and he took my brass bowl round and collected an awful lot of money for his regiment's comforts. So we did some good after all. But we weren't allowed to forget it for a long time, and we hated the sight of the Indian shawls for weeks to come.

E. S.

A YEAR IN A GARDEN.

XII.—DECEMBER.

THE raspberry canes were planted the first week in December for a twofold reason—for the sake of the fruit, and in order to hide in some degree the big vegetable bed from the house windows, so the best method of planting was in groups of three. The groups formed triangles. Sufficient space was left between the groups for gathering the fruit, and it was evident that the row would make a fairly substantial screen during the summer months. The gooseberries put in last year had been so successful that the children planted another two dozen. A footway of six feet was left between the raspberries and the first row of gooseberries, and when it was all neatly finished quite a delightful little avenue was formed. A few days later all the plants were carefully earthed up, so that they would be quite safe when the frost came.

It was when the children were planting the last gooseberry bushes that they turned up with their spades some curious-looking caterpillars in cocoons made of fine earth. A long hunt was necessary through Billy's gardening and natural history books before he could identify them, not as caterpillars of moths or butterflies, but of the destructive saw-fly.

Towards the end of the month a song-thrush came into the garden, perched on a high bough of a fir-tree, and sang a few notes; they were queer little notes, as if he were not sure of either his voice or his song, and after a few trials he flew away as if disheartened. He had really forgotten how to sing, and for the next few weeks he would be practising a little more each fine day, preparing for the great bird chorus in early spring.

All the birds that built nests in the garden were especially looked after, and seeds and scraps of all sorts were spread out on the food-table on the lawn for the fly-catchers, robins, wrens, blue tits and great tits. Nesting-boxes were also prepared for them very early every spring. The tits had hollowed larch logs, the hole being made so small that sparrows could not get in. A very much appreciated box, made in the shape of a little house, the roof of which lifted up, and which had holes in the walls for windows, always hung under the arch leading to the flower garden. This was regularly filled with all sorts of scraps, and robins and tits were always perched on the roof or hopping in and out of the windows.

SMILING VALLEY.

By HAROLD BINDLOSS.

(Continued from page 395.)

JAKE went back to the helm, while Dawson hauled the mainsheet until the end of the jerking boom hung just above the quarter. The sloop drove her bows into a sea that foamed across the deck and blinded the boys with spray, scraped past the steamer's tall fore-castle, and plunged into the dark. The moon had gone behind a cloud, and they could hardly see the combers that rolled up like tumbling white-topped walls. One could not run away from them now; they must meet the curling top obliquely and trust to luck and a pull at the tiller for getting across without being swamped.

Sometimes she buried her bowsprit and half the jib, and then, as she lifted before the next plunge, spray and water blew from the sail in bucketfuls. Sometimes the sea boiled across her deck as far as the mast, and yeasty foam ran in a flood over the coaming ledge. Dawson tried to pump, but the lurching threw him about, and he missed half his strokes. The worst was, they could not sail her easy, slacking sheet or jockeying with the helm when a roller rose ahead. They must drive her hard, because if she went slowly, she would go sideways too, and this meant they would not get round the reefs.

Now and then Dawson glanced at the straining mainsail as he heard the wire shrouds to windward ring. She carried too much canvas, but she would not beat to windward with less. They must hold on, and he tried to brace himself by thinking about the valley, where the blue lake reflected the snow peaks, in the North. Their help was worth something, and the steamer's owners ought to pay.

By-and-by they hove her round on the other tack, and some time afterwards, when the moon was coming through, Dawson thought he heard a noise to leeward. It was a hoarse rumble, like the roar of a train, but indistinct, because the wind blew the sound away. He knew it was surf, and set his lips when a bright beam ran across the water. Not far off, on the lee bow, there was an ominous white line, and behind this, vague, dark rocks and a shadowy clump of wind-bent trees. Dawson looked at his comrade, whose face was very grim.

'I'm scared to go through the tide-rip that's running outside, so we can't put her on the other tack,' said Jake. 'Got to stand on and risk it. It's touch and go!'

Dawson glanced to windward, and saw a white turmoil where the tide ran hard. The sloop could not cross that foaming belt, but the slack between the race and the reef was narrow. If they could keep the latter on the lee bow, she would go round; if the rocks drew ahead, so that one saw them across the bowsprit shrouds, she would go ashore, and he knew she would not last long then.

For a few minutes he watched, while his heart beat and his mouth got dry, and then began to pump. Doing nothing was nervous work, and there was too much water on board. After a time, he looked back to leeward. The rocks were not much nearer, but he could not see well because the sail was in the way.

Then Jake touched him. 'Let her have a few inches more sheet.'

Dawson felt keen relief as he let the wet rope run round a cleat. The order implied that Jake need not sail her so near the wind.

After a few minutes, Jake spoke again. 'Give her a foot. Slack the jib.'

Dawson obeyed and drew a deep breath as he looked about. The rocks were not on the lee bow; they had moved aft and were now on the quarter. This indicated that they were passing astern; the sloop had weathered them and was going round the point.

'You can square away,' said Jake. 'We'll make it a broad reach.'

They let the sheets run until the dripping jib swelled like a small balloon and the main boom swung far out across the water. There was a sudden comforting change in the motion, for the violent plunges and heavy shocks one feels when a small craft lurches across

a head-sea had stopped. She swung forward with swift and easy leaps; one got a sense of flying, and Dawson thought she went over the water like a bird. For all that, caution was needed. She was pressed by sail, since speed was needed, and the white combers came up on her beam. There was a risk that they might roll her over or an extra big one crash on board. The water she had shipped made an alarming noise and for a time Dawson pumped hard. Then they saw another dark clump of pines and Jake gave him the helm.

'My arms feel as if they were coming off,' he said. 'Let her go as she's heading now while I look at the chart and get the compass.'

He crawled into the cabin and presently came back with a box that he put on a locker near Dawson's knees. There was a light inside and one could see the compass through a hole. For all that, it was not easy to steer the course Jake had worked. The compass-card span as the sloop rolled about; Dawson could hardly see where it pointed, or keep the stroke that represented the boat's head on the proper mark.

After an hour or so, Jake went back into the cabin and returned with a lump of bread and a can of coffee. Dawson bit off large pieces, clenching the lump with one hand, and drank as best he could. He felt braced afterwards and held on until they saw a light in the distance, and he gave the helm to Jake, who had taken the light's bearing.

Daybreak was not far off, although the moon was bright, when they ran past the tall pines behind the Narrows at Vancouver. The water was smooth inside, the broad Inlet opened up, with the masts of vessels rising against the sky and big electric lights shining among the dark buildings along the shore.

'We've made it!' Jake exclaimed. 'It might have been better if we'd asked the captain how much he would pay. I thought about it while we were talking, but I could hardly hear him, and, anyhow, the thing seemed kind of mean. Now I don't know how we stand, but the owners ought to put up a good sum for our sending the tug.'

'Luff a bit,' said Dawson. 'I see her anchor light and think she has steam up.'

They lowered sail a few minutes afterwards and ran alongside the tug. The watch called the skipper, who took them to his room and unrolled a chart when he heard their tale.

'You reckon you left the steamer here?' he said, when Jake put his finger on the chart. 'Were they able to shove her ahead?'

'Not much,' said Jake. 'The broken propeller wouldn't hold her on her course. She was coming up and falling off, though they had a small staysail set.'

'Then I'd better get a move on quick. Had you an understanding with the captain about your pay?'

Jake said they had not, and the skipper nodded. 'Very well; I'll try to fix the thing so that you'll stand in. If not, we'll get after the owners. You certainly deserve your share.'

He sent for his fireman when they went on deck and in a few minutes the boys got over the side. They cast off and let the sloop drift towards the wharf, while when they dropped anchor the tug was steaming for the Narrows at full speed with a white wave at her bows. Then they went to sleep, and making sail next morning when the wind fell light, started for home.

(Concluded on page 410.)



"The skipper took them to his room and unrolled a chart."