

Le Queux William

The Secrets of Potsdam



William Le Queux

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The Secrets of Potsdam / A Startling Exposure of the Inner Life of the Courts of the Kaiser and Crown-Prince

*"Veneux Nadon,
"par Moret-sur-Loing
"(Seine-et-Marne).
"February 10th, 1917.*

"My dear Le Queux,

"I have just finished reading the proofs of your book describing my life as an official at the Imperial Court at Potsdam, and the two or three small errors you made I have duly corrected.

"The gross scandals and wily intrigues which I have related to you were, many of them, known to yourself, for, as the intimate friend of Luisa, the Ex-Crown-Princess of Saxony, you were, before the war, closely associated with many of those at Court whose names appear in the pages of this book.

"The revelations which I have made, and which you have recorded here, are but a tithe of the disclosures which I could make, and if your British public desire more, I shall be pleased to furnish you with other and even more startling details which you may also put into print.

"My service as personal-adjutant to the German Crown-Prince is, happily, at an end, and now, with the treachery of Germany against civilization glaringly revealed, I feel, in my retirement, no compunction in exposing all I know concerning the secrets of the Kaiser and his profligate son.

"With most cordial greetings from

"Your sincere friend,

"Ernst von Heltzendorff."

SECRET NUMBER ONE

THE TRAGEDY OF THE LEUTENBERGS

You will recollect our first meeting on that sunny afternoon when, in the stuffy, nauseating atmosphere of perspiration and a hundred Parisian perfumes, we sat next each other at the first roulette table on the right as you enter the rooms at Monte Carlo?

Ah! how vivid it is still before my eyes, the jingle of gold and the monotonous cries of the croupiers.

Ah! my dear friend! In those pre-war days the Riviera – that sea-lapped Paradise, with its clear, open sky and sapphire Mediterranean, grey-green olives and tall flowering aloes, its gorgeous blossoms, and its merry, dark-eyed populace who lived with no thought of the morrow – was, indeed, the playground of Europe.

And, let me whisper it, I think I may venture to declare that few of its annual habitués enjoyed the life more than your dear old ink-stained self.

What brought us together, you, an English novelist, and I a – well, how shall I describe myself? One of your enemies – eh? No, dear old fellow. Let us sink all our international differences. May I say that I, Count Ernst von Heltzendorff, of Schloss Heltzendorff, on the Mosel, late personal-adjutant to His Imperial Highness the Crown-Prince, an official attached to that precious young scoundrel's immediate person, call you my dear friend?

True, our nations are, alas! at war – the war which the Kaiser and his son long sought, but which, as you well know, I have long ago detested.

I have repudiated that set of pirates and assassins of whom I was, alas! born, and among whom I moved until I learned of the vile plot afoot against the peace of Europe and the chastity of its female inhabitants.

On August 5th, 1914, I shook the dust of Berlin from my feet, crossed the French frontier, and have since resided in the comfortable old-fashioned country house which you assisted me to purchase on the border of the lovely forest of Fontainebleau.

And now, you have asked me to reveal to you some of the secrets of Potsdam – secrets known to me by reason of my official position before the war.

You are persuading me to disclose some facts concerning the public and private life of the Emperor, of my Imperial master the Crown-Prince, known in his intimate circle as "Willie," and of the handsome but long-suffering Cecil Duchess of Mecklenbourg, who married him ten years ago and became known as "Cilli." Phew! Poor woman! she has experienced ten years of misery, domestic unhappiness, by which she has become prematurely aged, deep-eyed, her countenance at times when we talked wearing an almost tragic look.

No wonder, indeed, that there is a heavy and, alas! broken heart within the beautiful Marble Palace at Potsdam, that splendid residence where you once visited me and were afterwards commanded to a reception held by His Imperial Highness.

I risk much, I know, in taking up my pen to tell the truth and to make these exposures to you, but I do so because I think it only just that your British nation should know the true character of the Emperor and of the unscrupulous and ubiquitous "Willie," the defiant young Blackguard of Europe, who is the idol of the swaggering German Army, and upon whom they pin their hopes.

It is true that the Commander of the Death's Head Hussars – the "Commander" who has since the war sanctioned the cold-blooded murder of women and children, the shooting of prisoners, rapine, incendiarism, and every other devil's work that his horde of assassins could commit – once declared that "the day will come when Social Democrats will come to Court."

True, he has been known to be present at the golden wedding festivities of a poor cobbler in Potsdam; that he has picked up in his yellow ninety-horse-power car – with its black imp as a mascot – a poor tramp and taken him to the hospital; and that he possesses the charming manner of his much-worshipped grandfather, the Emperor Frederick. But he is as clever and cunning as his criminal father, Wilhelm-der-Plötzliche (William the Sudden) or Der Einzige (The Only), as the Kaiser is called by the people of the Palace. He shows with double cunning but one side of his character to the misguided German people, the Prussian Junker party, and the Tom-Dick-and-Harry of the Empire who have been made cannon-fodder and whose bones lie rotting in Flanders and on the Aisne.

Ah, my dear friend, what a strange life was that of the German Court before the war – a life of mummery, of gay uniforms, tinsel, gilded decorations, black hearts posing as virtuous, and loose people of both sexes evilly scandalizing their neighbours and pulling strings which caused their puppets to dance to the War-Lord's tune.

I once lifted the veil slightly to you when you stayed at the Palast Hotel in Potsdam and came to us at the Marble Palace, and I suppose it is for that reason that you ask me to jot down, for the benefit of your readers in Great Britain and her Dominions, a few facts concerning the plots of the Kaiser and his son – the idol of Germany, the Kronprinz "Willie."

What did you think of him when I presented you?

I know how, later on that same night, you remarked upon his height, his narrow chest, and his corset-waist, and how strangely his animal eyes set slant-wise in his thin, aquiline face, goggle eyes, which dilate so strangely when speaking with you, and which yet seem to penetrate your innermost thoughts.

I agreed with you when you declared that there was nothing outwardly of the typical Hohenzollern in the Imperial Rake. True, one seeks in vain for traces of martial virility. Though his face is so often wreathed in boyish smiles, yet his heart is as hard as that of the true Hohenzollern, while his pretended love of sport is only a clever ruse in order to retain the popularity which, by dint of artful pretence, he has undoubtedly secured. Indeed, it was because of the All-Highest One's jealousy of his reckless yet crafty son's growing popularity that we were one day all suddenly packed off to Danzig to be immured for two long years in that most dreary and provincial of all garrisons.

Of the peccadilloes of the elegant young blackguard of Europe – who became a fully-fledged colonel in the German Army at the age of thirty-one – I need say but little. His life has been crammed with disgraceful incidents, most of them hushed up at the Kaiser's command, though several of them – especially certain occurrences in the Engadine in the winter of 1912 – reached the ears of the Crown-Princess, who, one memorable day, unable to stand her husband's callous treatment, threatened seriously to leave him.

Indeed, it was only by the Kaiser's autocratic order that "Cilli" remained at the Marmor Palace. She had actually made every preparation to leave, a fact which I, having learned it, was compelled to report to the Crown-Prince. We were at the Palace in the Zeughaus-Platz, in Berlin, at the time, and an hour after I had returned from Potsdam I chanced to enter the Crown-Prince's study. The door was a self-locking one, and I had a key. On turning my key I drew back, for His Majesty the Emperor, a fine figure in the picturesque cavalry uniform of the Königsjäger – who had just come from a review, and had no doubt heard of the threatened Royal scandal – was standing astride in the room.

"I compel it!" cried the Emperor, pale with rage, his eyes flashing as he spoke. "She shall remain! Go to her at once – make your peace with her in any way you can – and appear to-night with her at the theatre."

"But I fear it is impossible. I – "

"Have you not heard me?" interrupted the Emperor, disregarding his son's protests. And as I discreetly withdrew I heard the Kaiser add: "Cannot you, of our House of Hohenzollern, see that we cannot afford to allow Cilli to leave us? The present state of the public mind is not encouraging, much as I regret it. Remember Frederick August's position when that madcap Luisa of Tuscany ran away with the French tutor Giron. Now return to Marmor without delay and do as I bid."

"I know Cilli. She will not be appeased. Of that I am convinced," declared the young man.

"It is my will – the will of the Emperor," were the last words I heard, spoken in that hard, intense voice I knew so well. "Tell your wife so. And do not see that black-haired Englishwoman again. I had a full report from the Engadine a fortnight ago, and this *contretemps* is only what I have expected. It is disgraceful! When will you learn reason?"

Ten minutes later I was seated beside the Crown-Prince in the car on our way to Potsdam.

On the road, driving recklessly as I sat by his side, he laughed lightly as he turned to me, saying:

"What an infernal worry women really are – aren't they, Heltzendorff – more especially if one is an Imperial Prince! Even though one is a Hohenzollern one cannot escape trouble!"

How the conjugal relations were resumed I know not. All I know is that I attended their Imperial Highnesses to the Lessing Theatre, where, in the Royal box, the Kaiser – ever eager to stifle the shortcomings of the Hohenzollerns – sat with us, though according to his engagements he should have been on his way to Düsseldorf for a great review on the morrow. But such public display allayed all rumour of his son's domestic infelicity, and both Emperor and Kronprinz smiled benignly upon the people.

Early next day the Crown-Prince summoned me, in confidence, and an hour later I left on a secret mission to a certain lady whom I may call Miss Lilian Greyford – as it is not fair in certain cases in these exposures to mention actual names – daughter of an English county gentleman, who was staying at the "Kulm" at St. Moritz.

Twenty-four hours afterwards I managed to see the winter-sports young lady alone in the hotel, and gave her a verbal message, together with a little package from His Imperial Highness, which, when she opened it, I found contained a souvenir in the shape of an artistic emerald pendant. With it were some scribbled lines. The girl – she was not much more than twenty – read them eagerly, and burst into a torrent of tears.

Ah! my dear Le Queux, as you yourself know from your own observations, there are as many broken hearts beating beneath the corsets of ladies-in-waiting and maids-of-honour, as there are among that frantic feminine crowd striving to enter the magic circle of the Royal entourage or the women of the workaday world who pass up Unter-den-Linden on a Sunday.

Phew! What a world of fevered artificiality revolves around a throne!

Very soon after this incident – namely, in the early days of 1912 – I found myself, as the personal-adjutant of His Imperial Highness the Crown-Prince, involved in a very strange, even inexplicable, affair.

How shall I explain it? Well, the drama opened in the Emperor's Palace in Berlin on New Year's night, 1912, when, as usual, a Grand Court reception was held.

The scene was one which we who revolve around the throne know so well. Court gowns, nodding plumes, gay uniforms, and glittering decorations – a vicious, tinselled, gossip-loving little world which with devilish intent sows seeds of dark suspicion or struggles for the Kaiser's favour.

In the famous White Salon, with its ceiling gaudily emblazoned with the arms of the Hohenzollerns as Burgraves, Electors, Kings, Emperors, and what-not, its walls of coloured marble and gilded bronze, and its fine statues of the Prussian rulers, we had all assembled and were waiting the entrance of the Emperor.

Kiderlen-Waechter – the Foreign Secretary – was standing near me, chatting with Von Jagow, slim, dark-haired and spruce. The latter, who was serving as German Ambassador in Rome,

happened to be in Berlin on leave, and the pair were laughing merrily with a handsome black-haired woman whom I recognized as the Baroness Bertieri, wife of the Italian Ambassador.

Philip Eulenburg, one of the Emperor's personal friends (by the way, author, with Von Moltke, of the Kaiser's much-advertised "Song to Ægir" – a fact not generally known), approached me and began to chat, recalling a side-splitting incident that had occurred a few days before at Kiel, whither I had been with the Crown-Prince to open a new bridge. Oh, those infernal statues and bridges!

Of a sudden the tap of the Chamberlain's stick was heard thrice, the gold-and-white doors instantly fell open, and the Emperor, his decorations gleaming beneath the myriad lights, smilingly entered with his waddling consort, the Crown-Prince, and their brilliant suite.

All of us bowed low in homage, but as we did so I saw the shrewd eyes of the All-Highest One, which nothing escapes, fixed upon a woman who stood close to my elbow. As he fixed his fierce gaze upon her I saw, knowing that glance as I did, that it spoke volumes. Hitherto I had not noticed the lady, for she was probably one of those unimportant persons who are commanded to a Grand Court, wives and daughters of military nobodies, of whom we at the Palace never took the trouble to inquire so long as their gilt command-cards, issued by the Grand Chamberlain, were in proper order.

That slight contraction of the Emperor's eyebrows caused me to ponder deeply, for, knowing him so intimately, I saw that he was intensely annoyed.

For what reason? I was much mystified.

Naturally I turned to glance at the woman whose presence had so irritated him. She was fair-haired, blue-eyed, *petite* and pretty. Her age was about twenty-five, and she was extremely good-looking. Beside her stood a big, fair-haired giant in the uniform of a captain of the First Regiment of the Hussars of the Guard, of which the Crown-Prince was Colonel-in-Chief.

Within a quarter of an hour I discovered that the officer was Count Georg von Leutenberg, and that his pretty wife, whom he had married two years before, was the eldest daughter of an English financier who had been created a Baron by your rule-of-thumb politicians.

"Pretty woman, eh?" lisped Eulenburg in my ear, for he had noticed her, and he was assuredly the best judge of a pretty face in all Berlin.

Next day, just before noon, on entering the Crown-Prince's private cabinet, I found "Willie" in the uniform of the 2nd Grenadiers, apparently awaiting me in that cosy apartment, which is crammed with effigies, statuettes, and relics of the great Napoleon, whom he worships just as the War Lord reveres his famous ancestor Frederick the Great.

"Sit down, Heltzendorff," said his Elegant Highness, waving his white, well-manicured hand to a chair near by, and puffing at his cigarette. "It is really pleasant to have an hour's rest!" he laughed, for he seemed in merry mood that day. "Look here! As you know, after the little affair with the Crown-Princess I trust to your absolute discretion. Do you happen to know Count Georg von Leutenberg, of the Hussars of the Guard?"

"By sight only," was my reply. Mention of that name caused me to wonder.

"He is a very good fellow, I understand. Do you know his wife – a pretty little Englishwoman?"

"Unfortunately, I have not that pleasure."

"Neither have I, Heltzendorff," laughed the Prince, with a queer look in those slant-set eyes which appear so strangely goggly sometimes. "But I soon shall know her, I expect. In that direction I want your assistance."

"I am yours for your Highness to command," I replied, puzzled to know what was in progress. After a few seconds of silence the Crown-Prince suddenly exclaimed:

"So good is the report of Von Leutenberg that has reached the Emperor that – though he is as yet in ignorance of the fact – he has been promoted to the rank of major, and ordered upon a foreign mission – as military attaché in London. He will leave Berlin to-night to take up his new post."

"And the Countess?"

"By a secret report I happen to have here it is shown that they are a most devoted pair," he said, glancing at a sheet of buff paper upon which was typed a report, one which I recognized as emanating from the secret bureau at the Polizei-Prasidium, in Alexander Platz. "They live in the Lennestrasse, No. 44, facing the Tiergarten. Note the address."

Then his Highness paused, and, rising, crossed to the big writing-table set in the window, and there examined another report. Afterwards, glancing at the pretty buhl clock opposite, he suddenly said:

"The Count should call here now. I have sent informing him of the Emperor's goodwill, and ordering him to report here to take leave of me as his Colonel-in-Chief."

Scarcely had he spoken when Count von Leutenberg was announced by a flunkey in pink silk stockings, and a moment later the tall officer clicked his heels together and saluted smartly on the threshold.

"I thought you would be pleased at your well-merited promotion," said his Highness in quite a genial tone. "The Emperor wishes you to leave for London by the ten o'clock express for Flushing to-night, so as to report to his Excellency the Ambassador before he departs on leave. Hence the urgency. The Countess, of course, will remain in Berlin. You will, naturally, wish for time to make your arrangements in London and dispose of your house here."

"I think she will wish to accompany me, your Imperial Highness," replied the fond husband. "London is her home."

"Ah! That is absurd!" laughed "Willie." "Why, you who have been married two whole years are surely not still upon your honeymoon?" and his close-set eyes glinted strangely. "You will be far too busy on taking up your new appointment to see much of her. No. Let her remain comfortably at home in Berlin until you are quite settled. Then I will see that Kiderlen grants you leave to return to put your house in order."

From the Count's manner I could see that he was very much puzzled at his sudden promotion.

Indeed, on entering he had stammered out his surprise at being singled out for such high distinction.

Von Leutenberg's hesitation was the Crown-Prince's opportunity.

"Good!" went on his Highness in his imperious, impetuous way. "You will leave for London to-night, and the Countess will remain until you have settled. I congratulate you most heartily upon your well-deserved advancement, which I consider is an honour conferred by the Emperor upon my regiment. I know, too, that you will act to the honour of the Fatherland abroad."

And with those words the major was dismissed.

"A charming man!" remarked the Prince, after the door had closed. "He has only been brought to my notice quite recently. An enthusiastic officer, he will be of great use to us at Carlton House Terrace. There is much yet to be done there, my dear Heltzendorff. Fortunately we have put our friends the English comfortably to sleep. It has cost us money, but money talks in London, just as it does in Berlin."

And he drew a long, ecstatic breath at the mere thought of the great international plot in progress – of the staggering blow to be struck against France, and the march upon Paris with those men who were his boon companions – Von Kluck, Von Hindenburg and Von der Goltz.

"Heltzendorff," he exclaimed a few moments later, after he had reflected deeply between the whiffs of his cigarette. "Heltzendorff, I wish you to become acquainted with the Countess von Leutenberg, and you must afterwards introduce me. I have a fixed and distinct reason. I could obtain the assistance of others, but I trust you only."

"But I do not know the lady," I protested, for I had no desire whatsoever to become implicated in any double-dealing.

"Hohenstein knows her well. I will see that he introduces you," replied the Kaiser's son, with that strange look again in his eyes. "She's uncommonly pretty, so mind you don't fall in love with her!" he laughed, holding up his finger reprovably. "I've heard, too, that Count Georg is a highly jealous person, but, fortunately, he will be very busy writing secret reports at Carlton House Terrace. So go and see Hohenstein at once, and get him to introduce you to the pretty little Englishwoman. But, remember, not a word of this conversation is to be breathed to a single soul."

What did it all mean? Why had the Emperor singled out for advancement the husband of that woman, the sight of whom had so greatly annoyed him? I confess that I became more than ever puzzled over the curious affair.

Within a week, however, thanks to the introduction of that old roué, Hohenstein, I had dined at Count von Leutenberg's pretty house in the Lennestrasse in a fine room, the long windows of which commanded a delightful view over the Tiergarten and the Siegesallee.

The Countess, extremely charming and refined, having the misfortune of being English, had not been taken up warmly by Berlin society. She was, I found, a most delightful hostess. The party included Laroque, the elegant First Secretary of the French Embassy, and his Parisian wife, together with Baron Hoffmann, the burly, round-faced Minister of the Interior, and Doctor Paulsen, Under-Secretary at the Colonial Office, against whom you will remember there were allegations of atrocities committed upon the natives in German East Africa. Hohenstein was, however, not there, as he had been suddenly dispatched by the Emperor upon a mission to Corfu.

At table the talk ran upon Leutenberg's sudden promotion, whereupon the Minister Hoffmann declared:

"His Majesty only gives reward when it is due. When he discerns talent he is never mistaken."

A week later the Crown-Prince had returned from a surprise visit the Kaiser had made to Stettin. The Emperor had played his old game of rousing the garrison in the middle of the night, and then laughing at the ludicrous figures cut by his pompous Generals and Colonels rushing about in their night attire eager to greet their Sovereign.

I was in the Prince's private room arranging the details of a military programme at Potsdam on the following day when he suddenly entered and exclaimed:

"Well, Heltzendorff, and how are you proceeding in the Lennestrasse, eh?" and he looked at me with those crafty eyes of his. "I hear you were at the house last night."

I started. Was I being watched? It was quite true that I had called on the previous evening, and, finding the Countess alone, had sat in her pretty drawing-room enjoying a long and delightful chat with her.

"Yes. I called there," I admitted. "The Count is returning from London next week to take his wife back with him."

The Crown-Prince smiled mysteriously, and critically examined the curious snake ring which he always wears upon the little finger of his left hand.

"We need not anticipate that, I think. Kiderlen will not grant him leave. He is far better in Carlton House Terrace than in the Lennestrasse."

"I hardly follow your Highness," I remarked, much mystified at his words.

"H'm. Probably not, my dear Count," he laughed. "I do not intend that you should."

And with that mysterious remark he turned to meet Count von Zeppelin, the round-faced, snow-haired, somewhat florid inventor, who was one of his Highness's most intimate friends, and who had at that moment entered unannounced. Zeppelin was a character in Berlin. He sought no friends, no advertisement, and shunned notoriety.

"Ha, my dear Ferdinand!" cried the Prince, shaking the hand of the man who so suddenly became world-famous at the age of seventy. "You have travelled from Stuttgart to see me – unwell as you are! It is an honour. But the matter is one of greatest urgency, as I have already written to you. I want to show you the correspondence and seek your advice," and the Prince invited his

white-haired friend to the big, carved arm-chair beside his writing-table. Then, turning to me, he said: "Will you see Von Glasenapp for me, and hand him those orders for Posen? He must leave to-night. The General Court-Martial at Stendal I have fixed for the 25th. I shall be with the Emperor this afternoon. Report here at seven to-night – understand?"

Thus was I dismissed, while His Imperial Highness and Count Zeppelin sat together in secret counsel.

At ten minutes to seven that evening I unlocked the Crown-Prince's room with the key I carried, the other two keys being in the hands of the Crown-Princess and her husband. I had placed upon the table a bundle of reports which had just been brought round from the Ministry of War, and required that scribbly signature, "Wilhelm Kronprinz," when I noticed three private letters that had evidently been placed aside. The envelopes were addressed in a thin, angular, female hand, and bore an English address. I noted it. The name on each was that of a lady residing in Aylesbury Avenue, Hampstead, London. The letters bore German stamps. In keen curiosity, I took one and examined it, wondering whether it could be the correspondence which the Crown-Prince had been so eager to show Count von Zeppelin in secret.

I drew the letter from the envelope and scanned it rapidly.

What I read caused me to hold my breath. The signature to the letters was "Enid von Leutenberg."

Those letters of hers had, it was plain, been seized in the post on their way to London. The Countess either had a traitor in her household or secret watch was being kept by the Secret Service upon her correspondence.

All three of those letters I read – letters which opened my eyes and broadened my mind. Then, taking up my bundle of reports, I crept away from the room, carefully re-latching the door. I intended that his Highness should return, discover the letters left there inadvertently, and put them away ere my arrival, in which case he would never suspect that I had any knowledge of their contents.

With the papers in my hand I passed along the many carpeted corridors to the south wing of the Palace, where I found Treternitz, Marshal of the Prince's Court, in his room.

The Crown-Prince imitated his father's sharp punctuality, therefore I knew that he would be there at seven or soon afterwards.

Treternitz was always full of scandal concerning those who lived in the higher circles of Berlin, and it was to one of these stories of Court scandal concerning one of the ladies-in-waiting which I listened while I smoked one of his excellent Russian cigarettes.

Then, glancing at the clock, I rose suddenly and left him, returning again to the private room.

I found his Highness there, and as I entered I noticed that he had hidden those remarkable letters which he had in secret shown to Count Zeppelin.

A fortnight went past. The Kaiser, with his mad love of constant travel, had been rushing up and down the Empire – to Krupp's at Essen, to the trials of a newly-invented howitzer, thence to an inspection at Kassel, and afterwards to unveil monuments at Cologne and at Erfurt. The Crown-Prince and Princess had accompanied him, the Kaiserin being indisposed, and I, of course, had been included in "Willie's" suite.

The week had been a strenuous one of train-travel, luncheons, tiring dinners, receptions, dancing, and general junketings, and I was glad enough to get back to my bachelor rooms – those rooms in the Krausenstrasse that you knew so well before the bursting of the war-cloud. To dance attendance upon an Imperial Crown-Prince, as well as upon an autocratic Emperor, becomes after a time a wearisome business, however gay and cosmopolitan a man may be.

I had only been at home a few hours when a telephone message summoned me at five o'clock to the Crown-Prince's Palace.

His Imperial Highness, who had, I knew, been lunching with the Emperor at the Königliches Schloss across the bridge, seemed unusually serious and thoughtful. Perhaps the Emperor had again shown his anger at his peccadilloes, as he did so frequently.

"Count," he said, after a few seconds of silence, during which I noted that upon his table lay a private letter from the German Ambassador in London. "You will recall my conversation regarding the Countess von Leutenberg – eh?"

"Perfectly," was my reply.

"I told you that I should require you to introduce me," he said. "Well, I want you to do so this evening. She has taken a box at the Königliche Opera to-night, where they are to play *Falstaff*. I shall be there, and you will be with me. Then you will introduce me to your pretty friend. Understand?" And he grinned.

That night, in accordance with my instructions, I sat in the Emperor's box with the Crown-Prince, Tresternitz, and two personal-adjutants, and, recognizing the Countess von Leutenberg in a box opposite, accompanied by an elderly lady, I took the Crown-Prince round, and there presented her to him, greatly to her surprise and undisguised delight.

The Prince and the Countess chatted together, while I sat with her elderly companion. Then, when we had withdrawn, my Imperial Master exclaimed:

"Ah! my dear Heltzendorff. Why, she is one of the prettiest women in all Berlin! Surely it is unfortunate – most unfortunate."

What was unfortunate? I was further puzzled by that last sentence, yet I dare not ask any explanation, and we went back to our own box.

After our return to the Palace the Crown-Prince, who was standing in one of the corridors talking with the slim, fair-haired Baroness von Wedel, one of his wife's ladies-in-waiting, left her and beckoned me into an adjoining room.

"I wish you, Heltzendorff, to call upon the Countess von Leutenberg at nine o'clock to-morrow evening. She will expect you."

I looked at his Highness, much puzzled. How did he know that the pretty Countess would expect me?

But he gave me no time to reply, merely turning upon his heel, and striding down the corridor to the private apartments.

Punctually at nine o'clock that wintry evening I called at the Lennestrasse, but Josef, the elderly manservant, informed me that his mistress was engaged, adding that His Imperial Highness the Crown-Prince had paid a surprise call.

"The Crown-Prince here!" I gasped, astounded.

"Yes, Count. And, further, my mistress is in high glee, for my master returned this morning quite unexpectedly from London. He has been out at the Ministry for Foreign Affairs all the evening, and I expect him home at any moment. The Crown-Prince ordered me to ask you to await him here."

Count von Leutenberg in Berlin! What did it mean? He was absurdly jealous, I recollected. He might return at any moment and find the Crown-Prince alone in the Countess's drawing-room. If so, the situation might certainly be a most unpleasant one.

Hardly had the thought crossed my mind when I heard the Count enter, his spurs clinking and his sabre rattling as he strode up the stairs.

I crept forth, listening breathlessly.

A few seconds later I heard the Count's voice raised in anger and high, bitter words. Next moment I sprang up the stairs and, dashing into the room, found the pretty Countess standing near the window, white and rigid as a statue, while the two men in uniform faced each other. Von Leutenberg's countenance was distorted with rage as he abused the Crown-Prince, and openly charged him with having brought about his exile to London.

His Highness made no reply, but only smiled sarcastically and shrugged his narrow shoulders. So enraged the other became at this latter gesture that, with a sudden movement, he drew his sword.

The Countess shrieked and swooned as I sprang forward and stayed her husband's hand.

It was a dramatic moment. The Count instantly realized the enormity of his crime, and his hand dropped.

"Enough!" cried the Crown-Prince, waving his adversary aside. Then, turning to me, he said in a calm, hard voice:

"Heltzendorff, you are witness that this man has drawn his sword upon the heir to the Throne."

And with those haughty words he bowed stiffly and strode out of the room.

Two hours later I was commanded to the Kaiser's presence, and found him in counsel with his son.

The Emperor, who wore the uniform of the Guards, looked pale and troubled, yet in his eyes there was a keen, determined look. As I passed the sentries and entered the lofty study, with its upholstery and walls of pale green damask – that room from which the Empire and the whole world have so often been addressed – the Kaiser broke off short in his conversation.

Turning to me as he still sat at his littered table, he said in that quick, impetuous way of his:

"Count Heltzendorff, the Crown-Prince has informed me of what has occurred this evening in the Lennestrasse. I wish you to convey this at once to Count von Leutenberg and to give it into his own hand. There is no reply."

And His Majesty handed me a rather bulky envelope addressed in his own bold handwriting, and bearing his own private cipher impressed in black wax.

Thus commanded, I bowed, withdrew, and took a taxicab straight to the Lennestrasse, being ushered by Josef into the presence of husband and wife in that same room I had quitted a couple of hours before.

I handed the Count the packet the Emperor had given me, and with trembling fingers he tore it open.

From within he drew three letters, those same letters which his wife had written to London, and which had been intercepted by the Secret Service – the letters which I had read in his Highness's room.

As he scanned the lines which the Emperor had penned his face blanched. A loud cry of dismay escaped his wife as she recognized her own letters, and she snatched the note from her husband's hand and also read it.

The light died instantly from her beautiful countenance. Then, turning to me, she said in a hoarse, hopeless tone:

"Thank you, Count von Heltzendorff. Tell His Majesty the Emperor that his command shall be – yes, it shall be obeyed."

Those last words she spoke in a deep, hoarse whisper, a strange, wild look of desperation in her blue eyes.

An hour later I reported again at the Imperial Palace, was granted audience of the Emperor, and gave him the verbal reply.

His Majesty uttered no word, merely nodding his head slowly in approval.

Next afternoon a painful sensation was caused throughout Berlin when the *Abendpost* published the news that Count von Leutenberg, the man so recently promoted by the Emperor, and his pretty wife had both been found dead in their room. During the night they had evidently burned some papers, for the tinder was found in the stove, and having agreed to die together, they being so much attached during life, they had both taken prussic acid in some wine, the bottle and half-emptied glasses being still upon the table.

The romantic affair, the truth of which I here reveal for the first time, was regarded by all Berlin as an inexplicable tragedy. The public are still unaware of how those intercepted letters contained serious warnings to the British Government of the Emperor's hostile intentions towards Britain, and the probable date of the outbreak of war. Indeed, they recounted a private conversation which the Countess had overheard between the Kaiser and Count Zeppelin, repeating certain opprobrious epithets which the All-Highest had bestowed upon one or two British statesmen, and she also pointed out the great danger of a pending rupture between the two Powers, as well as explaining some details regarding the improved Zeppelins in course of construction secretly on Lake Constance, and certain scandals regarding the private life of the Crown-Prince.

It was for the latter reason that the heir, aided by the War-Lord, took his revenge in a manner so crafty, so subtle, and so typical of the innate cunning of the Hohenzollerns.

Thus the well-meant warnings of one of your good, honest Englishwomen never reached the unsuspecting address to which they were sent, and thus did "Willie" – who, as I afterwards discovered, devised that subtle vengeance – act as the Emperor's catspaw.

SECRET NUMBER TWO

THE CROWN-PRINCE'S REVENGE

The Trautmann affair was one which caused a wild sensation at Potsdam in the autumn of 1912.

In the Emperor's immediate entourage there was a great deal of gossip, most of it ill-natured and cruel, for most ladies-in-waiting possess serpents' tongues. Their tongues are as sharp as their features, and though there may be a few pretty maids-of-honour, yet the majority of women at Court are, as you know, my dear Le Queux, mostly plain and uninteresting.

I became implicated in the unsavoury Trautmann affair, in a somewhat curious manner.

A few months after the Leutenberg tragedy I chanced to be lunching at the "Esplanade" in Berlin, chatting with Laroque, of the French Embassy. Our hostess was Frau Breitenbach, a wealthy Jewess – a woman who came from Dortmund – and who was spending money like water in order to wriggle into Berlin society. As personal-adjutant of the Crown-Prince I was, of course, one of the principal guests, and I suspected that she was angling for a card of invitation to the next ball at the Marmor Palace.

Who introduced me to the portly, black-haired, rather handsome woman I quite forget. Probably it was some nobody who received a commission upon the introduction – for at the Berlin Court introductions are bought and sold just as the succulent sausage is sold over the counter.

In the big white-and-gold *salle-à-manger* of the "Esplanade," which, as you know, is one of the finest in Europe, Frau Breitenbach was lunching with sixteen guests at one big round table, her daughter Elise, a very smartly dressed girl of nineteen, seated opposite to her. It was a merry party, including as it did some of the most renowned persons in the Empire, among them being the Imperial Chancellor, Bethmann-Hollweg, of the long, grave face and pointed beard, and that grand seigneur who was a favourite at Court, the multi-millionaire Serene Highness Prince Maximilian Egon zu Fürstenberg. Of the latter it may be said that no man rivalled his influence with the Emperor. What he said was law in Germany.

Fürstenberg was head of the famous "Prince's Trust," now dissolved, but at that time, with its capital of a hundred million pounds, it was a great force in the German commercial world. Indeed, such a boon companion was he of the Kaiser's that an august but purely decorative and ceremonial place was actually invented for him as Colonel-Marshal of the Prussian Court, an excuse to wear a gay uniform and gorgeous decorations as befitted a man who, possessing twenty millions sterling, was an important asset to the Emperor in his deep-laid scheme for world-power.

Another Prince of the "Trust" was fat old Kraft zu Hohenlohe Oehringen, but as he had only a paltry ten millions he did not rank so high in the War-Lord's favour.

Fürstenberg, seated next to the estimable Jewess, was chatting affably with her. Her husband was in America upon some big steel transaction, but her pretty daughter Elise sat laughing merrily with a young, square-headed lieutenant of the Death's Head Hussars.

That merry luncheon party was the prologue of a very curious drama.

I was discussing the occult with a middle-aged lady on my right, a sister of Herr Alfred Ballin, the shipping king. In society discussions upon the occult are always illuminating, and as we chatted I noticed that far across the crowded room, at a table set in a window, there sat alone a dark-haired, sallow, good-looking young civilian, who, immaculate in a grey suit, was eating his lunch in a rather bored manner, yet his eyes were fixed straight upon the handsome, dark-haired young girl, Elise Breitenbach, as though she exercised over him some strange fascination.

Half a dozen times I glanced across, and on each occasion saw that the young man had no eyes for the notables around the table, his gaze being fixed upon the daughter of the great financier, whose interests, especially in America, were so widespread and profitable.

Somehow – why I cannot even now decide – I felt a distinct belief that the young civilian's face was familiar to me. It was not the first time I had seen him, yet I could not recall the circumstances in which we had met. I examined my memory, but could not recollect where I had before seen him, yet I felt convinced that it was in circumstances of a somewhat mysterious kind.

Two nights later I had dined with the Breitenbachs at their fine house in the Alsenstrasse. The only guest beside myself was the thin-faced, loud-speaking old Countess von Bassewitz, and after dinner, served in a gorgeous dining-room which everywhere betrayed the florid taste of the parvenu, Frau Breitenbach took the Countess aside to talk, while I wandered with her daughter into the winter garden, with its high palms and gorgeous exotics, that overlooked the gardens of the Austrian Embassy.

When we were seated in cane chairs, and the man had brought us coffee, the pretty Elise commenced to question me about life at the Crown-Prince's Court, expressing much curiosity concerning the private life of His Imperial Highness.

Such questions came often from the lips of young girls in society, and I knew how to answer them with both humour and politeness.

"How intensely interesting it must be to be personal-adjutant to the Crown-Prince! Mother is dying to get a command to one of the receptions at Potsdam," the girl said. "Only to-day she was wondering – well, whether you could possibly use your influence in that direction?"

In an instant I saw why I had been invited to dinners and luncheons so often, and why I had been left alone with the sweet-faced, dark-eyed girl.

I reflected a moment. Then I said:

"I do not think that will be very difficult. I will see what can be done. But I hope that if I am successful you will accompany your mother," I added courteously, as I lit a cigarette.

"It is really most kind of you," the girl declared, springing up with delight, for the mere thought of going to Court seemed to give her intense pleasure. Yet all women, young and old, are alike in that respect. The struggle to set foot near the throne is, as you yourself have seen, always an unseemly one, and, alas! the cause of many heart-burnings.

When I looked in at Tresternitz's room in the Palace next morning, I scribbled down the name of mother and daughter for cards.

"Who are they?" grunted the old marshal, removing a big cigar from his puffy lips.

"People I know – they're all right, and the girl is very good-looking."

"Good. We can do with a little beauty here nowadays. We've had an infernally ugly lot at the balls lately," declared the man, who was the greatest gossip at Court, and who thereupon commenced to tell me a scandalous story regarding one of the ladies-in-waiting to the Kaiserin who had disappeared from the New Palace, and was believed to be living in Scotland.

"The Emperor is furious," he added. "But he doesn't know the real truth, and never will, I expect."

A week later the Crown-Prince and Princess gave a grand ball at the Marmor Palace at Potsdam, and the Emperor himself attended.

Frau Breitenbach, gorgeously attired, made her bow before the All-Highest, and her daughter did the same.

That night I saw that the Kaiser was in no good mood. He seldom was at the Court functions. Indeed, half an hour before his arrival the Crown-Prince had told me, in confidence, of his father's annoyance at the failure of some diplomatic negotiations with Britain.

The Emperor, in his brilliant uniform, with the Order of the Black Eagle, of which he was *chef-souverain*, and the diamond stars of many foreign Orders, presented a truly Imperial figure,

his shrewd, unrelenting gaze everywhere, his upturned moustache accentuated, his voice unusually sharp and commanding.

I spoke with Elise, and afterwards, when I danced with her I saw how impressed she was by the glitter and glamour of the Potsdam Court circle, and by the fact that she was in the presence of the All-Highest One, without whose gracious nod nothing could hope to prosper in the Fatherland, and without whose approval no public work could be undertaken in Berlin. Those statesmen, admirals and generals present might plan, but he alone willed. His approval or his frown was as a decree of Providence, and his autocratic will greater than that of his "brother," Nicholas of Russia.

I remember how, one day in the Militär-Kabinett, an old buffer at Court whom we called "Hans" Hohenlohe – he was one of the hundred and sixty odd members of the aristocratic family of Hohenlohe which swarm the Fatherland, mostly penurious, by-the-way, salary-grabbers, all elbowing each other to secure the Kaiser's favour – made a very true remark which has ever remained in my memory. It was very soon after Herr von Libenau, the Imperial Master of Ceremony, had been arrested owing to a scandal at Court, though perfectly innocent. My friend "Hans" Hohenlohe said in a low, confidential whisper at a shooting party, after the French Ambassador had wished us a merry *bon jour* and passed out:

"My dear friend Heltzendorff, you, like myself, know that war is inevitable. It must come soon! The reason is to be found in the madness of the Emperor, which has spread among our military party and among the people, till most of them are no more sane than himself. Hypnotized by good fortune, we have become demented with an overweening vanity and a philosophy which must end in our undoing. The Emperor's incessant drum-beating, sabre-rattling, and blasphemous appeals to the Almighty have brought our German nation to that state which, since the world began, has ever gone before destruction."

No truer words were ever spoken of modern Germany.

They recurred to me as, while waltzing with the pretty daughter of the Dortmund parvenu, I noticed the Emperor standing aside, chatting with old Von Zeppelin, who every now and then patted his silvery hair, a habit of his when in conversation. With the pair stood Ernst Auguste, the young Duke of Brunswick, who in the following year married the Emperor's daughter, the rather petulant and go-ahead Victoria Louise. The Prince, who wore the uniform of the Prussian Guard, was laughing heartily over some remark of old Zeppelin's as, with my partner, I passed quite close to them.

The dainty Elise was, I found, quite an entertaining little person. Old Tresternitz had already whispered his opinion of her.

"Undoubtedly the prettiest girl at Court," he had declared, with a twinkle in his grey eyes.

From words the pretty Elise let drop that night as she hung upon my arm I wondered whether she was really as ingenuous as she pretended. And yet Frau Breitenbach was one of dozens of others who strove to enter the Court circle, flapping their wings vainly to try and cross the wide gulf which separated the "high life" in Berlin from "Court life."

The rooms were stifling, therefore I took my pretty dancing partner along a corridor and through several deserted apartments into the east wing of the Palace, showing her some of the Crown-Princess's private rooms, until at length we stepped through a French window on to the long terrace before the lake, the Heilige-See.

There we were alone. The white moon was reflected upon the waters, and after the heat of the ball-room the balmy air was delightful.

Against the marble balustrade beside the water I stood chatting with her. All was silent save for the tramp of soldiers passing near, for the guard was at that hour changing. As became a courtier, I chaffed and laughed with her, my intention being to learn more concerning her.

But she was, I found, an extremely discreet and clever little person, a fact which further increased the mystery.

One night about two months later I had an appointment with Max Reinhardt at the Deutsches Theater, in Berlin, to arrange a Royal visit there, and after the performance I went back to the Palace, prior to retiring to my rooms in the Krausenstrasse. The guards saluted as I crossed the dark courtyard, and having passed through the corridors to the private apartments I entered with my key the Crown-Prince's locked study.

To my surprise, I found "Willie" seated there with the Emperor in earnest discussion.

With apology, I bowed instantly and withdrew, whereupon the Kaiser exclaimed:

"Come in, Heltzendorff. I want you."

Then he cast a quick, mysterious glance at the young man, who had thrown himself in lazy attitude into a long cane lounge chair. It was as though His Majesty was hesitating to speak with me, or asking his son's permission to do so.

"Tell me, Heltzendorff," exclaimed His Majesty suddenly, "do you know this person?" and he placed before my astonished gaze a very artistic cabinet photograph of the pretty Elise.

"Yes," I answered frankly, quite taken aback. "It is Fräulein Breitenbach."

"And what do you know of her?" inquired His Majesty sharply. "You introduced her and her mother to Court, I believe."

I saw that the Emperor had discovered something which annoyed him. What could it be?

At once I was compelled to admit that I had set down their names for invitation, and, further, I explained all that I knew about them.

"You are certain you know nothing more?" asked the Emperor, his brows contracted and his eyes fixed steadily upon mine. "Understand that no blame attaches to you."

I assured him that I had revealed all that I knew concerning them.

"Hold no further communication with either mother or daughter," His Majesty said. "Leave for Paris by the eight o'clock train to-morrow morning, and go to Baron von Steinmetz, the chief of our confidential service in France."

Then, turning to the Crown-Prince, he said: "You have his address."

"Yes," said the younger man. "He is passing as Monsieur Felix Reumont, and is living at 114 bis, Avenue de Neuilly, close to the Pont."

I scribbled the name and address upon the back of an envelope, whereupon His Majesty said:

"Carry my verbal orders to Steinmetz, and tell him to act upon the orders I sent him by courier yesterday. And you will assist him. He will explain matters fully when you arrive."

Then, crossing to the Crown-Prince's writing-table, His Majesty took a large envelope, into which, with the same hand, he dexterously placed the photograph with several papers, and sealed them with the Crown-Prince's seal. At the moment the Crown-Princess entered, said some words to her husband in a low voice, and went out again.

"Give this to Von Steinmetz from me," His Majesty said after she had gone.

I bowed as I took it from His Majesty's hand, my curiosity now greatly excited regarding Frau Breitenbach and her pretty daughter. What, I wondered, was in the wind?

"And, Heltzendorff, please report to me," remarked the Heir, still lounging lazily in the chair, his white, well-manicured hands clasped behind his head. "Where shall you stay?"

"At the Hôtel Chatham. I always stay there in preference to the larger hotels."

"And not a bad judge," laughed His Majesty merrily. "I remember when I used to go to Paris incognito one could dine at the 'Chatham' most excellently – old-fashioned, but very good. Vian's, across the road, is also good."

The Kaiser knows Paris well, though he has never visited the French capital openly.

Bowing, I took leave of my Imperial master, and next morning at eight o'clock, set out upon my mysterious mission.

I found the Baron von Steinmetz living in a good-sized house in the leafy Avenue de Neuilly, not far from the bridge. One of the cleverest and most astute officials that Germany possessed, and a

man high in the Kaiser's favour, he had, in the name of Felix Reumont, purchased, with Government funds of course, a cinema theatre in the Rue Lafayette, and ostensibly upon the proceeds of that establishment lived comfortably out at Neuilly.

At eleven o'clock in the morning his valet, evidently a German, showed me in.

"I quite understand, my dear Heltzendorff," he said, as in his cosy little den he took from the Emperor's packet the picture of Fräulein Elise and stood gazing at it thoughtfully. "It is quite plain why you should have been sent by His Majesty."

"Why. I don't understand. But His Majesty told me that you would explain. The young lady and her mother are friends of mine."

"Exactly. That's just it!" exclaimed the round-faced, rather florid man whom I had once met before. "You apparently know but little of them – eh? – or you would not call them your friends!"

Those mysterious words surprised me, but I was the more astounded when he continued:

"You of course know of those disgraceful anonymous letters which have been continually arriving at Court – of the Emperor's fury concerning them."

I replied in the affirmative, for, as a matter of fact, for the past three months the whole Court had been flooded with most abusive and disgraceful correspondence concerning the camarilla that had again sprung up around the Kaiser. The Emperor, the Empress, the Crown-Prince and Princess, Prince Eitel, Sophie Caroline, Prince Henry of Prussia and others had received letters, most of them in typewriting, containing the most intimate details of scandals concerning men and women around the Emperor.

Fully a dozen of these letters addressed to the Crown-Prince he had handed to me – letters denouncing in some cases perfectly innocent people, destroying the reputations of honest men and women, and abusing the Heir to the Throne in an outrageous manner.

On at least three occasions "Willie" had shown me letters addressed to the Kaiser himself, and intercepted by the Kaiserin, who, in consequence of this flood of anonymous epistles that had produced such a terrible sensation at Potsdam, had ordered that all such letters found in the Imperial post-bag should be handed at once to her.

The great War-Lord's feelings had been sorely wounded by the vitriolic shafts, and his vanity much injured by the boldness of the unknown letter-writer who had dared to speak his mind concerning the Eulenburg scandals, which Maximilian Harden had some time before exposed in the *Zukunft*.

All Berlin was gossiping about the scandal of the letters and the horrible innuendoes contained in them. The *Allerhöchste Person*, though boiling over with anger, blissfully believed that outside the Palaces nothing was known of the contents of the correspondence. But the Emperor, in his vanity, never accurately gauges the mind of his people.

"The identity of the writer is the point that is engaging my attention," the Baron said, as, seating himself at his big, carved-oak writing-table, he opened a drawer and drew forth a bundle of quite a hundred letters, adding: "All these that you see here have been addressed either to the Emperor or the Empress," and he handed me one or two, which on scanning I saw contained some outrageous statements, allegations which would make the hair of the All-Highest One bristle with rage.

"Well!" I exclaimed, aghast, looking up at the Baron after I had read an abusive letter, which in cold, even lines of typewriting commenced with the words: "You, a withered crook in spectacular uniform better fitted for the stage of the Metropol Theatre, should, instead of invoking the aid of Providence, clear out your own Augean stable. Its smell is nauseous to the nostrils of decent people. Surely you should blush to have feasted in the castle of Liebenberg with the poet, Prince Philip, and your degenerate companions, Hohenau, Johannes Lynar, and your dearly beloved Kuno!"

And the abusive missive proceeded to denounce two of my friends, ladies-in-waiting at the Neues Palais, and to make some blackguardly allegations concerning the idol. Von Hindenburg.

"Well," I exclaimed, "that certainly is a very interesting specimen of anonymous correspondence."

"Yes, it is!" exclaimed the Baron. "In Berlin every inquiry has been made to trace its author. Schunke, head of the detective police, was charged by the Emperor to investigate. He did so, and both he and Klewitz failed utterly. Now it has been given into my hands."

"Have you discovered any clue to the writer?" I asked anxiously, knowing full well what a storm of indignation those letters had produced in our own circle.

Presently, when I sat with the Baron at his table, he switched on an intense electric light, even though it was day-time, and then spread out some of the letters above a small, square mirror.

"You see they are on various kinds of note-paper, bearing all kinds of watermarks, of French, English, and German manufacture. Some we have here are upon English paper, because it is heavy and thick. Again, three different makes of typewriter have been used – one a newly-invented importation from America. The written letters are, you will see, mostly in a man's hand."

"Yes, I see all that," I said. "But what have you discovered concerning their author? The letter I received bore a French stamp and the postmark of Angers."

He placed before me quite a dozen envelopes addressed to the Emperor and Empress, all bearing the postmark of that town in the Maine-et-Loire. Others had been posted in Leipzig, Wilhelmshaven, Tours, Antwerp, Berlin-Wilmersdorf, and other places.

"The investigation is exceedingly difficult, I can assure you," he said. "I have had the assistance of some of the best scientific brains of our Empire in making comparisons and analyses. Indeed, Professor Harbge is with me from Berlin."

As he uttered those words the Professor himself, an elderly, spectacled man in grey tweeds, entered the room. I knew him and greeted him.

"We have been studying the writing-papers," the Professor said presently, as he turned over the letters, some of which were upon commercial typewriting paper, some on cheap thin paper from fashionable "blocks," and others upon various tinted paper of certain mills, as their watermarks showed. The papers were various, but the scurrilous hand was the clever and evasive one of some person who certainly knew the innermost secrets of the German Court.

"Sixteen different varieties of paper have been received at the Neues and Marmor Palaces," the Baron remarked. "Well, I have worked for two months, night and day, upon the inquiry, for, as you know, the tentacles of our Teuton octopus are everywhere. I have discovered that eleven of these varieties of paper can be purchased at a certain small stationer's shop, Lancry's, in the Boulevard Haussmann, close to the 'Printemps.' One paper especially is sold nowhere else in Paris. It is this."

And he held over a mirror a letter upon a small sheet of note-paper bearing the watermark of a bull's head.

"That paper was made at a mill in the south of Devonshire, in England, destroyed by fire five years ago. Paper of that make cannot be obtained anywhere else in France," he declared.

I at once realized how much patience must have been expended upon the inquiry, and said:

"Then you have actually fixed the shop where the writer purchased his paper?"

"Yes," he replied. "And we know that the newly-invented typewriter, a specimen one, was sold by the Maison Audibert, in Marseilles. The purchaser of the typewriter in Marseilles purchases his paper and envelopes at Lancry's, in the Boulevard Haussmann."

"Splendid!" I said enthusiastically, for it was clear that the Baron, with the thousand-and-one secret agents at his beck and call, had been able, with the Professor's aid, to fix the source of the stationery. "But," I added, "what is wanted from me?" Why, I wondered, had His Majesty sent the Baron that photograph of Elise Breitenbach?

"I want you to go with me to the central door of the 'Printemps' at four o'clock this afternoon, and we will watch Lancry's shop across the way," the Baron replied.

This we did, and from four till six o'clock we stood, amid the bustle of foot passengers, watching the small stationer's on the opposite side of the boulevard, yet without result.

Next day and the next I accompanied the prosperous cinema proprietor upon his daily vigil, but in vain, until his reluctance to tell me the reason why I had been sent to Paris annoyed me considerably.

On the fifth afternoon, just before five o'clock, while we were strolling together, smoking and chatting, the Baron's eyes being fixed upon the door of the small single-fronted shop, I saw him suddenly start, and then make pretence of utter indifference.

"Look!" he whispered beneath his breath.

I glanced across and saw a young man just about to enter the shop.

The figure was unfamiliar, but, catching sight of his face, I held my breath. I had seen that sallow, deep-eyed countenance before.

It was the young man who, two months previously, had sat eating his luncheon alone at the "Esplanade," apparently fascinated by the beauty of little Elise Breitenbach!

"Well," exclaimed the Baron. "I see you recognize him – eh? He is probably going to buy more paper for his scurrilous screeds."

"Yes. But who is he? What is his name?" I asked anxiously. "I have seen him before, but have no exact knowledge of him."

The Baron did not reply until we were back again in the cosy room in Neuilly. Then, opening his cigar-box, he said:

"That young man, the author of the outrageous insults to His Majesty, is known as Franz Seeliger, but he is the disgraced, ne'er-do-well son of General von Trautmann, Captain-General of the Palace Guard."

"The son of old Von Trautmann!" I gasped in utter amazement. "Does the father know?"

The Baron grinned and shrugged his shoulders.

Then after I had related to him the incident at the "Esplanade," he said:

"That is of greatest interest. Will you return to Berlin and report to the Emperor what you have seen here? His Majesty has given me that instruction."

Much mystified, I was also highly excited that the actual writer of those abominable letters had been traced and identified. The Baron told me of the long weeks of patient inquiry and careful watching; of how the young fellow had been followed to Angers and other towns in France where the letters were posted, and of his frequent visits to Berlin. He had entered a crack regiment, but had been dismissed the Army for forgery and undergone two years' imprisonment. Afterwards he had fallen in with a gang of clever international hotel thieves, and become what is known as a *rat d'hôtel*. Now, because of a personal grievance against the Emperor, who had ordered his prosecution, he seemed to have by some secret means ferreted out every bit of scandal at Potsdam, exaggerated it, invented amazing additions, and in secret sown it broadcast.

His hand would have left no trace if he had not been so indiscreet as to buy his paper from that one shop close to the Rue de Provence, where he had rooms.

On the third night following I stood in the Emperor's private room at Potsdam and made my report, explaining all that I knew and what I had witnessed in Paris.

"That man knows a very great deal – but how does he know?" snapped the Emperor, who had just returned from Berlin, and was in civilian attire, a garb quite unusual to him. He had no doubt been somewhere incognito – visiting a friend perhaps. "See Schunke early to-morrow," he ordered, "and tell him to discover the link between this young blackguard and your friends the Breitenbachs, and report to me."

I was about to protest that the Breitenbachs were not my friends, but next instant drew my breath, for I saw that the great War-Lord, even though he wore a blue serge suit, was filled with suppressed anger.

"This mystery must be cleared up!" he declared in a hard voice, reflecting no doubt upon the terrible abuse which the writer had heaped upon him, all the allegations, by-the-way, having contained a certain substratum of truth.

Next morning I sat with the bald-headed and astute Schunke at the headquarters of the detective police in Berlin, and there discussed the affair fully, explaining the result of my journey to Paris and what I had seen, and giving him the order from the Kaiser.

"But, Count, if this woman Breitenbach and her pretty daughter are your friends you will be able to visit them and glean something," he said.

"I have distinct orders from the Emperor not to visit them while the inquiry is in process," I replied.

Schunke grunted in dissatisfaction, stroked his iron-grey beard, but made no further comment.

We walked out together, and I left him at the door of the Etat-major of the Army in the Königsplatz.

Later that same morning I returned to the Marmor Palace to report to the Crown-Prince, but found that His Highness was absent upon an official visit of inspection at Stuttgart. The Marshal of the Court, Tresternitz, having given me the information, laughed, and added:

"Officially, according to to-day's newspapers, His Highness is in Stuttgart, but unofficially I know that he is at the Palace Hotel, in Brussels, where there is a short-skirted variety attraction singing at the Eden Theatre. So, my dear Heltzendorff, you can return to the Krausenstrasse for a day or two."

I went back to Berlin, the Crown-Princess being away at Wiesbaden, and from day to day awaited "Willie's" return.

In the meantime I several times saw the great detective, Schunke, and found that he was in constant communication with Baron Steinmetz in Paris. The pair were evidently leaving no stone unturned to elucidate the mystery of those annoying letters, which were still falling as so many bombs into the centre of the Kaiser's Court.

Suddenly, one Sunday night, all Berlin was electrified at the news that General von Trautmann, Captain-General of the Palace Guard – whom, truth to tell, the Crown-Prince had long secretly hated because he had once dared to utter some word of reproach – had been arrested, and sent to a fortress at the Emperor's order.

An hour after the arrest His Majesty's personal-adjutant commanded me by telephone to attend at the Berlin Schloss. When we were alone the Kaiser turned to me suddenly, and said:

"Count von Heltzendorff, you will say nothing of your recent visit to Paris, or of the authorship of those anonymous letters – you understand? You know absolutely nothing."

Then, being summarily dismissed by a wave of the Imperial hand, I retired, more mystified than ever. Why should my mouth be thus closed? I dared not call at the Alsenstrasse to make my own inquiries, yet I knew that the police had made theirs.

When I returned to my rooms that evening Schunke rang me up on the telephone with the news that my friends the Breitenbachs had closed their house and left early that morning for Brussels.

"Where is Seeliger?" I inquired in great surprise.

"In Brussels. The Breitenbachs have gone there to join him, now that the truth is out and his father is under arrest."

The Emperor's fury was that of a lunatic. It knew no bounds. His mind, poisoned against the poor old General, he had fixed upon him as the person responsible for that disgraceful correspondence which for so many weeks had kept the Court in constant turmoil and anxiety. Though His Majesty was aware of the actual writer of the letters, he would not listen to reason,

and openly declared that he would make an example of the silver-haired old Captain-General of the Guard, who, after all, was perfectly innocent of the deeds committed by his vagabond son.

A prosecution was ordered, and three weeks later it took place *in camera*, the Baron, Schunke and a number of detectives being ordered to give evidence. So damning, indeed, was their testimony that the Judge passed the extreme sentence of twenty years' imprisonment.

And I, who knew and held proofs of the truth, dared not protest!

Where was the General's son – the real culprit and author of the letters? I made inquiry of Schunke, of the Baron, and of others who had, at the order of the All-Highest, conspired to ruin poor Von Trautmann. All, however, declared ignorance, and yet, curiously enough, the fine house in the Alsenstrasse still remained empty.

Later, I discovered that the Crown-Prince had been the prime mover in the vile conspiracy to send the elderly Captain-General to prison and to the grave, for of this his words to me one day – a year afterwards – were sufficient proof:

"It is a good job, Heltzendorff, that the Emperor rid himself at last of that canting old pest, Von Trautmann. He is now in a living tomb, and should have been there four years ago!" and he laughed.

I made no response. Instead, I thought of the quiet, innocent old courtier languishing in prison because he had somehow incurred the ill-will of the Emperor's son, and I confess that I ground my teeth at my own inability to expose the disgraceful truth.

About six months after the secret trial of the unfortunate General I had accompanied the Crown-Prince on a visit to the Quirinal, and one afternoon while strolling along the Corso, in Rome, suddenly came face to face with the dainty little figure of Fräulein Elise Breitenbach.

In delight I took her into Ronzi's, the noted confectioner's at the corner of the Piazza Colonna, and there, at one of the little tables, she explained to me how she and her mother, having become acquainted with Franz Seeliger – not knowing him to be the General's son – they suddenly fell under the suspicion of the Berlin Secret Police, and, though much puzzled, did not again come to Court.

Some weeks later mother and daughter chanced to be in Paris, and one day called at Seeliger's rooms in the Rue de Provence, but he was out. They, however, were shown into his room to wait, and there saw upon his table an abusive and scurrilous typewritten letter in German addressed to the Emperor. Then it suddenly dawned upon them that the affable young man might be the actual author of those infamous letters. It was this visit which, no doubt, revealed to the Baron the young man's hiding-place. Both mother and daughter, however, kept their own counsel, met Seeliger next day, and watched, subsequently learning, to their surprise, that he was the son of General von Trautmann, and, further, that he had as a friend one of the personal valets of the Emperor, from whom, no doubt, he obtained his inside information about persons at Court.

"When his poor father was sentenced we knew that the young man was living in Brussels, and at once went there in order to induce him to come forward, make confession, and so save the General from disgrace," said the pretty girl seated before me. "On arrival we saw him alone, and told him what we had discovered in the Rue de Provence, whereupon he admitted to us that he had written all the letters, and announced that he intended to return to Berlin next day and give himself up to the police in order to secure his father's release."

"And why did he not do so?" I asked eagerly.

"Because next morning he was found dead in his bed in the hotel."

"Ah, suicide."

"No," was her half-whispered reply. "He had been strangled by an unknown hand – deliberately murdered, as the Brussels police declared. They were, of course, much mystified, for they did not know, as we know, that neither the young man's presence nor his confession were desired in Berlin."

Fearing the Emperor's wrath, the Breitenbachs, like myself, dare not reveal what they knew – the truth, which is here set down for the first time – and, alas! poor General von Trautmann died in prison at Mulheim last year.

SECRET NUMBER THREE

HOW THE KAISER PERSECUTED A PRINCESS

The truth of the dastardly plot which caused the downfall of the unfortunate and much-maligned Imperial Princess Luisa Antoinette Marie, Archduchess of Austria, and wife of Friedrich-August, now the reigning King of Saxony, has never yet been revealed.

I know, my dear Le Queux, that you had a good deal to do with the "skittish Princess," as she was called, and her affairs after she had left the Court of Saxony and went to live near you in the Via Benedetto da Foiano, in Florence. You were her friend, and you were afterwards present at her secret marriage in London. Therefore, what I here reveal concerning a disgraceful conspiracy by which a clever, accomplished, and generous Princess of the blood Royal was hounded out of Germany will, I think, be of peculiar interest to yourself and to those readers for whom you are setting down my reminiscences.

As you know, before being appointed to my recent position in the Crown-Prince "Willie's" household, I was personal-adjutant to His Majesty the Emperor, and in that capacity accompanied Der Einzige (the One) on his constant travels. Always hungry for popular applause, the Emperor was ever on the move with that morbid restlessness of which he is possessed, and which drove him from city to city, hunting, yachting, unveiling statues, opening public buildings, paying ceremonial visits, or, when all excuses for travel became exhausted, he presented new colours to some regiment in some far-off garrison.

Indeed, within that one year, 1902, I accompanied "William-the-Sudden" and his host of adjutants, military and civil secretaries, valets, chasseurs and flunkies, to twenty-eight different cities in Germany and Scandinavia, where he stopped and held Court. Some cities we visited several times, being unwelcome always because of the endless trouble, anxiety and expense caused to the municipal authorities and military casinos.

I, of course, knew the charming Imperial Highness the Crown-Princess Luisa of Saxony, as she often came on visits to the Kaiserin, but I had never spoken much with her until at Easter the Emperor went to visit Dresden. He took with him, among other people, one of his untitled boon companions, Judicial Councillor Löhlein, a stout, flabby-faced hanger-on, who at the time possessed great influence over him. Indeed, he was really the Emperor's financial agent. This man had, some time ago, very fortunately for the Emperor, opened his eyes to the way in which Kunze had manipulated the amazing Schloss Freiheit Lottery, and had been able to point out to the All-Highest One what a storm of ridicule, indignation and defiance must arise in Berlin if he attempted to carry out his huge reconstruction and building scheme.

I was present in the Emperor's room at Potsdam when old Löhlein, with whom sat Herr von Wedell, openly declared to the Emperor that if he prosecuted his pet building scheme great indignation must arise, not only in the capital, but in Hanover, Wiesbaden, and Kassel.

The Kaiser knitted his brows and listened attentively to both of his advisers. I well remember how, next day, the Press, in order to allay the public dissatisfaction, declared that the huge building projects of the Emperor never existed. They had been purely imaginary ideas put forward by a syndicate of speculative builders and taken up by the newspapers.

Without doubt the podgy, fair-haired man in gold-rimmed spectacles, the Judicial Councillor Löhlein, by crushing the Kaiser's mad scheme gained considerable popularity in a certain circle. He was, however, a man of exceptional craft and cunning, and during the eight years or so he remained the intimate friend of the Emperor he must have, by advising and looking after the Imperial investments, especially in America, amassed a great fortune.

On the occasion of our Easter visit to the Saxon Court – a Court which, to say the least, was a most dull and uninteresting one – we all went, as is the custom there, to the shoot at the Vogelschiessen, a large wooden bird made up of pieces which fall out when hit in a vital part. The bird target is set up at the Easter fair held close to Dresden, and on that afternoon the whole Court annually go to try their skill at marksmanship. We were a merry party. The Emperor went with the old King and Queen of Saxony, being accompanied by the Crown-Prince Friedrich-August and the Crown-Princess Luisa, merry, laughing, full of spirits, and unusually good-looking for a Royalty.

The Saxon Royal Family all shot, and, thanks to her father's tuition, the Crown-Princess knocked a piece out of the bird at the first shot, which sent the public wild with enthusiasm.

Luisa was the most popular woman in Saxony, and deservedly so, for hers had been a love match. Her father, Ferdinand IV., Grand Duke of Tuscany, had, at the suggestion of the Emperor Francis Joseph, endeavoured to arrange a match between the Princess and the man now known as "foxy" Ferdinand of Bulgaria. With that object a grand *dîner de cérémonie* was held one night at the Imperial Castle of Salzburg, and at that dinner Luisa, suspecting the conspiracy, publicly insulted the Ruler of Bulgaria, which for ever put an end to the paternal plans.

After her marriage to the Saxon Crown-Prince the Kaiser, in one of his whimsical moods, became greatly attached to her because of her frankness, her love of outdoor life, and her high educational attainments, hence we often had her visiting at Potsdam or at the Berlin Schloss. She was known to be one of the few feminine Royalties in whom the Kaiser took the slightest interest.

After our return from the public shooting to the Royal Palace in Dresden, a banquet was, of course, held in honour of the Emperor in that great hall where, on the walls, the four estates are represented by scenes from the history of the Emperor Henry I.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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