# THE LAST SHOT



## by FREDERICK PALMER

**In this story Mr. Palmer, the noted war correspondent, has painted war as he has seen it on many battlefields, and between many nations. His intimate knowledge of armies and armaments has enabled him to produce a graphic picture of the greatest of all wars, and his knowledge of conditions has led him to prophesy an end of armed conflicts. No man is better qualified to write the story of the final world war than Mr. Palmer, and he has handled his subject with a master hand.**

### CHAPTER I.

#### A Speck in the Sky.

It was Marta who first saw the speck in the sky. Her outcry and her bound from her seat at the teatable brought her mother and Colonel Westerling after her onto the lawn, where they became motionless figures, screening their eyes with their hands. The newest and most wonderful thing in the world at the time was this speck appearing above the irregular horizon of the Brown range, in view of a landscape that centuries of civilization had fertilized and cultivated and formed.

At the base of the range ran a line of white stone posts, placed by international commissions of surveyors to the nicety of an inch's variation. In the very direction of the speck's flight a spur of foot-hills extended into the plain that stretched away to the Gray range, distinct at the distance of thirty miles in the bright afternoon light. Faithful to their part in refusing to climb, the white posts circled around the spur, hugging the levels.

In the lap of the spur was La Tir, the old town, and on the other side of the boundary lay South La Tir, the new town. Through both ran the dusty ribbon of a road, drawn straight across the plain and over the glistening thread of a river. On its way to the pass of the Brown range it skirted the garden of the Gallands, which rose in terraces to a seventeenth-century house overlooking the old town from its outskirts. They were such a town, such a road, such a landscape as you may see on many European frontiers. The Christian people who lived in the region were like the Christian people you know if you look for the realities of human nature under the surface differences of language and habits.

Beyond the house rose the ruins of a castle, its tower still intact. Marta always referred to the castle as the baron; for in her girlhood she had a way of personifying all inanimate things. If the castle walls were covered with hoar frost, she said that the baron was shivering; if the wind tore around the tower, she said that the baron was groaning over the democratic tendencies of the time. On such a summer afternoon as this, the baron was growing old gracefully, at peace with his enemies.

Centuries older than the speck in the sky was the baron; but the pass road was many more, countless more, centuries older than he. It had been a trail for tribes long before Roman legions won a victory in the pass, which was acclaimed an imperial triumph. To hold the pass was to hold the range. All the blood shed there would make a red river, inundating the plain.

"Beside the old baron, we are parvenus," Marta would say. "And what a parvenu the baron would have been to the Roman aristocrat!"

"Our family is old enough—none older in the province!" Mrs. Galland would reply. "Marta, how your mind does wander! I'd get a headache just contemplating the things you are able to think of in five minutes."

The first Galland had built a house on the land that his king had given him for one of the most brilliant feats of arms in the history of the pass.

Even the tower, raised to the glory of an older family whose descendants, if any survived, were unaware of their lineage, had become known as the Galland tower. The Gallands were rooted in the soil of the frontier; they were used to having war's hot breath blow past their door; they were at home in the language and customs of two peoples; theirs was a peculiar tradition, which Marta had absorbed with her first breath. Town and plain and range were the first vista of landscape that she had seen; doubtless they would be the last.

One or two afternoons a week Colonel Hedworth Westerling, commander of the regimental post of the Grays on the other side of the white posts, stretched his privilege of crossing the frontier and appeared for tea at the Gallands. It meant a pleasant half-hour breaking a long walk, a relief from garrison surroundings, and in view of the order, received that morning, this was to be a farewell call.

He had found Mrs. Galland an agreeable reflection of an aristocratic past. The daughter had what he defined vaguely as girlish piquancy. He found it amusing to try to answer her unusual questions; he liked the variety of her inventive mind, with its flashes of downright matter-of-factness.

Not until tea was served did he mention his new assignment; he was going to the general staff at the capital. Mrs. Galland murmured her congratulations in conventional fashion.

Marta's chair was drawn back from the table. She leaned forward in a favorite position of hers when she was intensely interested, with hands clasped over her knee, which her mother always found aggravatingly tomboyish. She had a mass of lustrous black hair and a mouth rather large in repose, but capable of changing curves of emotion. Her large, dark eyes, luminously deep under long lashes, if not the rest of her face, had beauty. Her head was bent, the lashes forming a line with her brow now, and her eyes had the still flame of wonder that they had when she was looking all around a thing and through it to find what it meant.

"Some day you will be chief of staff, the head of Gray army!" she suddenly exclaimed.

Westerling started as if he had been surprised in a secret. Then he flushed slightly.

"Why?" he asked with forced carelessness. "Your reasons? They're more interesting than your prophecy."

"Because you have the will to be," she said without emphasis, in the impersonal revelations of thought. "You want power. You have ambition."

He looked the picture of it, with his square jaw, his well-moulded head set close to the shoulders on a sturdy neck, his even teeth showing as his lips parted in an unconscious smile.

"Marta, Marta! She is—is so explosive," Mrs. Galland remarked apologetically to the colonel.

"I asked for her reasons. I brought it on myself—and it is not a bad compliment," he replied. Indeed, he had never received one so thrilling.

His smile, a smile well pleased with itself, remained as Mrs. Galland began to talk of other things, and its lingering satisfaction disappeared only with Marta's cry at sight of the speck in the sky over the Brown range. She was out on the lawn before the others had risen from their seats.

"An aeroplane! Hurry!" she called.

How fast the speck grew!

Naturally, the business of war, watching for every invention that might serve its ends, was the first patron of flight. Captain Arthur Lanstron, pupil of a pioneer aviator, had been warned by him and by the chief of staff of the Browns, who was looking on, to keep in a circle close to the ground. But he was doing so well

"It Must Be Bandaged—I'm Not Going to Faint."

that he thought he would try rising a little higher. The summits of the range shot under him, unfolding a variegated rug of landscape. He dipped the planes slightly, intending to follow the range's descent and again they answered to his desire. The tower loomed before him as suddenly as if it had been shot up out of the earth. He must turn, and quickly, to avoid disaster; he must turn, or he would be across the white posts in the enemy's country.

"Oh!" groaned Marta and Mrs. Galland together.

In an agony of suspense they saw the fragile creation of cloth and bamboo and metal, which had seemed as secure as an albatross riding on the lap of a steady wind, dip far over, career back in the other direction, and then the whirring noise that had grown with its flight ceased. It was no longer a thing of winged life, defying the law of gravity, but a thing dead, falling under the burden of a living weight.

"The engine has stopped!" exclaimed Westerling, any trace of emotion in his observant imperturbability that of satisfaction that the machine was the enemy's. He was thinking of the exhibition, not of the man in the machine.

Marta was thinking of the man who was about to die. She rushed down the terrace steps wildly, as if her going and her agonized prayer could avert the inevitable. The plane, descending, skimmed the garden wall and passed out of sight. She heard a thud, a crackling of braces, a ripping of cloth, but no cry.

Westerling had started after her, exclaiming, "This is a case for first aid!" while Mrs. Galland, taking the steps as fast as she could, brought up the rear. Through the gateway in the garden wall could be seen the shoulders of a young officer, a streak of red coursing down his cheek, rising from the wreck. An inarticulate sob of relief broke from Marta's throat, followed by quick gasps of breath. Captain Arthur Lanstron was looking into the startled eyes of a young girl that seemed to reflect his own emotions of the moment after having shared those he had in the air.

"I flew! I flew clear over the range, at any rate!" he said. "And I'm alive. I managed to hold her so she missed the wall and made an easy bump."

He got one foot free of the wreck and that leg was all right. She shared his elation. Then he found that the other was uninjured, just as she cried in distress:

"But your hand—oh, your hand!"

His left hand hung limp from the wrist, cut, mashed and bleeding. Its nerves numbed, he had not as yet felt any pain from the injury. Now he regarded it in a kind of awakening stare of realization of a deformity to come.

"Wool-gathering again!" he muttered to himself crossly.

Then, seeing that she had turned white, he thrust the disgusting thing behind his back and twinged with the movement. The pain was arriving.

"It must be bandaged! I have a handkerchief!" she begged. "I'm not going to faint or anything like that!"

"Only bruised—and it's the left. I am glad it was not the right," he replied. Westerling arrived and joined Marta in offers of assistance just as they heard the prolonged honk of an automobile demanding the right of way at top speed in the direction of the pass.

"Thank you, but they're coming for me," said Lanstron to Westerling as he glanced up the road.

Westerling was looking at the wreck. Lanstron, who recognized him as an officer, though in mufti, kicked a bit of the torn cloth over some apparatus to hide it. At this Westerling smiled faintly. Then Lanstron saluted as officer to officer might salute across the white posts, giving his name and receiving in return Westerling's.

They made a contrast, these two men, the colonel of the Grays, swart and sturdy, his physical vitality so evident, and the captain of the Browns, some seven or eight years the junior, bareheaded, in dishevelled fatigue uniform, his lips twitching, his slender body quivering with the pain that he could not control, while his rather bold forehead and delicate, sensitive features suggested a man of nerve and nerves who might have left experiments in a laboratory for an adventure in the air. There was a kind of challenge in their glances; the challenge of an ancient feud of their peoples; of the professional rivalry of polite duellists. Lanstron's slight figure seemed to express the weaker number of the three million soldiers of the Browns; Westerling's bulkier one, the four million five hundred thousand of the Grays.

"You had a narrow squeak and you made a very snappy recovery at the last second," said Westerling, passing a compliment across the white posts.

"That's in the line of duty for you and me, isn't it?" Lanstron replied, his voice thick with pain as he forced a smile.

There was no pose in his fortitude. He was evidently disgusted with himself over the whole business, and he turned to the group of three officers and a civilian who alighted from a big Brown army automobile as if he were prepared to have them say their worst. They seemed between the impulse of reprimanding and embracing him.

"I hope that you are not surprised at the result," said the oldest of the officers, a man of late middle age, rather affectionately and teasingly. He wore a single order on his breast, a plain iron cross, and the insignia of his rank was that of a field-marshal.

"Not now. I should be again, sir," said Lanstron, looking full at the field-marshal in the appeal of one asking for another chance. "I was wool-gathering. But I shall not wool-gather next time. I've got a reminder more urgent than a string tied around my finger."

"Yes, that hand needs immediate attention," said the doctor. He and another officer began helping Lanstron into the automobile.

"Good-by!" he called to the young girl, who was still watching him with big, sympathetic eyes. "I am coming back soon and land in the field, there, and when I do, I'll claim a bunch of flowers."

"Do! What fun!" she cried, as the car started.

"The field-marshal was Partow, their chief of staff?" Westerling asked.

"Yes," said Mrs. Galland. "I remember when he was a young infantry officer before the last war, before he had won the iron cross and become so great. He was not of an army family—a doctor's son, but very clever and skilful."

"Getting a little old for his work!" remarked Westerling. "But apparently he is keen enough to take a personal interest in anything new."

"Wasn't it thrilling and—and terrible!" Marta exclaimed.

"Yes, like war at our own door again," replied Mrs. Galland, who knew war. She had seen war raging on the pass road. "Lanstron, the young man said his name was," she resumed after a pause. "No doubt the Lanstrons of Thorbourg. An old family and many of them in the army."

"The way he refused to give in—that was fine!" said Marta.

Westerling, who had been engrossed in his own thoughts, looked up.

"Courage is the cheapest thing an army has! You can get hundreds of young officers who are glad to take a risk of that kind. The thing is," and his fingers pressed in on the palm of his hand in a pounding gesture of the forearm, "to direct and command—head work—organization!"

"If war should come again—" Marta began. Mrs. Galland nudged her. A Brown never mentioned war to an officer of the Grays; it was not at all in the accepted proprieties. But Marta rushed on: "So many would be engaged that it would be more horrible than ever."

"You cannot make omelets without breaking eggs," Westerling answered with suave finality.

"The aeroplane will take its place as an auxiliary," he went on, his mind still running on the theme of her prophecy, which the meeting with Lanstron had quickened. "But war will, as ever, be won by the bayonet that takes and holds a position. We shall have no miracle victories, no—"

There he broke off. He did not accompany Mrs. Galland and Marta back to the house, but made his adieus at the garden-gate.

"I'm sure that I shall never marry a soldier!" Marta burst out as she and her mother were ascending the steps.

### CHAPTER II.

#### Ten Years Later.

His Excellency the chief of staff of the Grays was seldom in his office. His Excellency had years, rank, prestige. The breast of his uniform sagged with the weight of his decorations. He appeared for the army at great functions; his picture was in the shop-windows. Hedworth Westerling, the new vice-chief of staff, was content with this arrangement. His years would not permit him the supreme honor. This was for a figurehead, while he had the power.

His appointment to the staff ten years ago had given him the field he wanted, the capital itself, for the play of his abilities. His vital energy, his impressive personality, his gift for courting the influences that counted, whether man's or woman's, his astute readiness in stooping to some measures that were in keeping with the times but not with army precedent, had won for him the goal of his ambition. He had passed over the heads of older men, whom many thought his betters, rather ruthlessly. Those who would serve loyally he drew around him; those who were bitter he crowded out of his way.

In the adjoining room, occupied by Westerling, the walls were hung with the silhouettes of infantrymen, such as you see at maneuvers, in different positions of firing, crouching in shallow trenches, standing in deep trenches, or lying flat on the stomach on level earth. Another silhouette, that of an infantryman running, was peppered with white points in arms and legs and parts of the body that were not vital, to show in how many places a man may be hit with a small-caliber bullet and still survive.

In this day of universal European conception, if Westerling were to win in war it would be with five millions—five hundred thousand more than when he faced a young Brown officer over the wreck of an aeroplane—including the reserves; each man running, firing, crouching, as was the figure on the wall, and trying to give more of the white points that peppered the silhouette than he received.

Now Turcas, the assistant vice-chief of staff, and Bouchard, chief of the division of intelligence, standing on either side of Westerling's desk, awaited his decisions on certain matters which they had brought to his attention. Both were older than Westerling, Turcas by ten and Bouchard by fifteen years.

Turcas had been strongly urged in inner army circles for the place that Westerling had won, but his manner and his ability to court influence were against him. A lath of a man and stiff as a lath, pale, with thin, tightly-drawn lips, quiet, steel-gray eyes, a tracery of blue veins showing on his full temples, he suggested the ascetic no less than the soldier, while his incisive brevity of speech, flavored now and then with pungent humor, without any inflection in his dry voice, was in keeping with his appearance. He arrived with the clerks in the morning and frequently remained after they were gone. As a master of detail Westerling regarded him as an invaluable assistant, with certain limitations, which were those of the pigeonhole and the treadmill.

As for Bouchard, nature had meant him to be a wheel-horse. He had never had any hope of being chief of staff. Hawk-eyed, with a great beak nose and iron-gray hair, intensely and solemnly serious, lacking a sense of humor, he would have looked at home with his big, bony hands gripping a broadsword hilt and his lank body clothed in chain armor. He had a mastiff's devotion to its master for his chief.

"Since Lanstron became chief of intelligence of the Browns information seems to have stopped," said Westerling, but not complainingly. He appreciated Bouchard's loyalty.

"Yes, they say he even burns his laundry bills, he is so careful," Bouchard replied.

"But that we ought to know," Westerling proceeded, referring very insistently to a secret of the Browns which had baffled Bouchard. "Try a woman," he went on with that terse, hard directness which reflected one of his sides. "There is nobody like a woman for that sort of thing. Spend enough to get the right woman."

Turcas and Bouchard exchanged a glance, which rose suggestively from the top of the head of the seated vice-chief of staff. Turcas smiled slightly, while Bouchard was graven as usual.

"You could hardly reach Lanstron though you spent a queen's ransom," said Bouchard in his literal fashion.

"I should say not!" Westerling exclaimed. "No doubt about Lanstron's being all there! I saw him ten years ago after his first aeroplane flight under conditions that proved it. However, he must have susceptible subordinates."

"We'll set all the machinery we have to work to find one, sir," Bouchard replied.

"Another thing, we must dismiss any idea that they are concealing either artillery or dirigibles or planes that we do not know of," continued Westerling. "That is a figment of our apprehensions. The fact that we find no truth in the rumors proves that there is none. Such things are too important to be concealed by one army from another."

"Lanstron certainly cannot carry them in his pockets," remarked Turcas. "Still, we must be sure," he added thoughtfully, more to himself than to Westerling, who had already turned his attention to a document which Turcas laid on the desk.

"The 128th Regiment has been ordered to South La Tir, but no order yet given for the 132d, whose place it takes," he explained.

"Let it remain for the present!" Westerling replied.

After they had withdrawn, the look that passed between Turcas and Bouchard was a pointed question. The 132d to remain at South La Tir! Was there something more than "newspaper talk" in this latest diplomatic crisis between the Grays and the Browns? Westerling alone was in the confidence of the premier of late. Any exchange of ideas between the two subordinates would be fruitless surmise and against the very instinct of staff secrecy, where every man knew only his work and asked about no one else's.

Westerling ran through the papers that Turcas had prepared for him. If Turcas had written them, Westerling knew that they were properly done. Having cleared his desk into the hands of his executive clerk, he looked at the clock. It had barely turned four. He picked up the final staff report of observations on the late Balkan campaign, just printed in book form, glanced at it and laid it aside. Already he knew the few lessons afforded by this war "done on the cheap," with limited equipment and over bad roads. No dirigibles had been used and few planes. It was no criterion, except in the effect of the fire of the new pattern guns, for the conflict of vast masses of highly trained men against vast masses of highly trained men, with rapid transportation over good roads, complete equipment, thorough organization, backed by generous resources, in the cataclysm of two great European powers.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

## ELECTRICITY IN RAIN DROPS

### German Scientist Has Measured the Charge—Describes Results of His Investigation.

Rain drops are almost always charged with electricity. The charge is often positive, rarely negative. Many observers have measured the charge approximately and made it from 0.000,000,000,000,000,01 to 0.000,000,000,000,001 amperes per square centimetre. Prof. F. Herath of Kiel describes in the Revue Electrique the experiments by which he has measured them.

He received the rain on a fine metallic cloth 25 metres square insulated and attached to a galvanometer in a cellar. The galvanometer registered photographically. Among the facts he proves are these:

Rains with a constantly positive charge are much more frequent than those that change to a negative. The passage from a positive to a negative charge corresponds to a momentary cessation of the shower. The quantity of positive electricity brought by the rain is fifteen times greater than that of the negative. The positive currents in a steady rainfall are about 0.000,000,000,000,000,1 amperes per square centimetre; the negative currents never exceed 0.000,000,000,000,001 amperes per square centimetre.

#### Where Some Reformers Err.

A reformer usually has big ideas. Frequently he insists on proceeding on a wholesale basis instead of running a small but active business regulating his own faults.



## BALANCE KEPT BY NATURE

### Increase of the Human Race Seems to Be Regulated by Wars and Other Devastations.

Every year, according to scientists who attempt to keep the general records, at least 80,000,000 human beings are born on this earth and 60,000,000 or 70,000,000 die. This indicates a daily birth rate of about 220,000 and a death rate of 180,000. The daily increase in population therefore is about 40,000. The total population of the globe is estimated at 1,800,000,000.

The ravages of war do little to impede the increase. Far more effective have been the upheavals of nature. The Franco-Prussian war killed about 130,000 in seven months. The death roll of the Russo-Japanese reached about 200,000. A single earthquake (1737, in India) has been estimated to have caused 300,000 deaths. The fatalities of the Messina earthquake in 1908 cannot have been far short of 100,000. A tidal wave in 1896 drowned 27,000 persons in Japan, causing a greater loss of life than the whole war with China in 1894. The earthquake in Japan in 1703 is said to have killed 200,000 people. The Lisbon earthquake in 1755 destroyed 50,000 human lives, while 40,000 were lost in the same year in earthquakes in Persia.

#### Small Matter Overlooked.

"Doctor," complained Sim Dorkins, "I cain't see nothin' through these here specs."

"They were all right for the first day or two, were they not?" asked the oculist, after a glance at the spectacles.

"Ya-as," admitted Sim. "But they kept a-gittin' wuss and wuss, till I couldn't hardly see at all."

"They will do as well as ever," said the doctor dryly, "if you will wash them."—Judge.

#### Time to Match.

"Did you go in your auto ride at lightning speed?"

"Yes, and had a thundering good time."