

A MAKER OF HISTORY

By E. PHILLIPS OPPENHEIM,
Author of "The Master Summoner," "A Prince of Sinners," "Mysterious Mr. Sablin," "Anna the Adventuress," Etc.

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(Continued from Page Three.)

I honestly believe that Miss Poynton is safe, whatever may have happened to her brother, and I believe that you will serve her best by your temporary absence."

Duncombe stood for a moment wrapped in thought. The last few months had aged him strangely. The strenuous days and nights of anxious thought had left their mark in deep lines upon his face. He looked out of the window of Spencer's room, and his eyes saw little of the busy street below. He was alone once more with this strange, terrified girl upon the hillside with the wind in their faces and making wild havoc in her hair. He was with her in different mood in the little room behind his library, when the natural joy of her young life had for the moment reassured itself. He was with her at their parting. He saw the half fearful regret with which she had left his care and accepted the invitation of the marquise. Stirring times these had been for a man of his quiet temperament, whom matters of sentiment and romance had passed lightly by and whose passions had never before been touched by the finger of fire. And now he was going back to an empty life—a life at least empty of joy save the hope of seeing her again. For good or for evil, the great thing had found its way into his life. His days of calm animal enjoyment were over. Sorrow or joy were to be his. He had passed into the shadows of the complex life. He remembered where he was at last and turned to Spencer.

"About yourself, Spencer," he said. "Have you seen a doctor?"

"Yes, I am not seriously ill," his friend answered. "The worst is over now. And, Duncombe, it's hard for you to go, I know; but, look here, I believe that you will be back in a month, and taking Miss Poynton to lunch chez Ritz. I never felt so sure of it as I do today."

Duncombe remembered the answer to his note and found it hard to share his friend's cheerfulness.

CHAPTER XXXII.

DUNCOMBE laid down his cue and strolled toward the sideboard, where his guest was already mixing himself a whisky and soda.

"By the bye, Runtun," he said, "have you seen anything of our friend De Rothe since that little affair at your place?"

Lord Runtun shook his head. "Not once," he answered. "He behaved very decently about it on the whole; treated it quite lightly, but he wouldn't let me go near the police. It was a long way the most unpleasant thing that ever happened in my house."

"Never any further light upon it, I suppose?" Duncombe asked.

Lord Runtun shook his head.

"None. Of course we could have traced them both without a doubt if we had put it in the hands of the police, but De Rothe wouldn't hear of it. He tried to treat it lightly, but I know that he was very much worried."

"Do you yourself believe," Duncombe asked, "that it was a political affair or an ordinary robbery?"

"I think that it was the former," Lord Runtun answered. "Those people were not common adventurers. By the bye, George, have you got over your little weakness yet?" he added, with a smile.

Duncombe shrugged his shoulders. "Nearly as a fool of myself, didn't I?" he remarked, with a levity which did not sound altogether natural.

"She was an uncommonly fascinating young woman," Lord Runtun said, "but she didn't seem to me very old at the game. She was clever enough to fool De Rothe, though. He admits that he told her that he was expecting a special messenger from Berlin."

Duncombe seemed to have had enough of the subject. He got up and filled his pipe.

"Is Jack coming down this week?" he asked.

"No! He wired this morning that he can't get away. Sefton isn't coming either. Between ourselves, George, something seems to be going on at the foreign office which I don't quite understand."

"What do you mean?" Duncombe asked. "There has been no hint at any sort of trouble in the papers."

"That's just what I don't understand," Lord Runtun continued. "It is certain that there is an extraordinary amount of activity at Portsmouth and Woolwich, but even the little halfpen-

ny sensational papers make no more than a passing allusion to it. Then look at the movements of our fleet. The whole of the Mediterranean fleet is at Gibraltar, and the channel squadron is moving up the North sea as though to join the home division. All these movements are quite unusual."

"What do you make of them then?" Duncombe asked.

"I scarcely know," Lord Runtun answered. "But I can tell you this: There have been three cabinet councils this week, and there is a curious air of apprehension in official circles in town, as though something were about to happen. The service clubs are almost deserted, and I know for a fact that all leave in the navy has been suspended. What I don't understand is the silence everywhere. It looks to me as though there were really going to be trouble. The Baltic fleet sailed this morning, you know."

Duncombe nodded. "But," he said, "even if they were ill disposed to us, as no doubt Russia is just now, what could they do? One squadron of our fleet could send them to the bottom."

"No doubt," Lord Runtun answered. "But supposing they found an ally?"

"France will never go to war with us for Russia's benefit," Duncombe declared.

"Granted," Lord Runtun answered, "but have you watched Germany's attitude lately?"

"I can't say that I have," Duncombe admitted, "but I should never look upon Germany as a war seeking nation."

"No, I dare say not," Lord Runtun answered. "No more would a great many other people. Every one is willing to admit that she would like our colonies, but no one will believe that she has the courage to strike a blow for them. I will tell you what I believe, Duncombe. I believe that no great power has ever before been in so dangerous a position as we are today."

Duncombe sat up in his chair. The weariness passed from his face, and he was distinctly interested. Lord Runtun, without being an ardent politician, was a man of common sense and was closely connected with more than one member of the cabinet.

"Are you serious, Runtun?" he asked.

"Absolutely! Remember, I was in Berlin for two years, and I had many opportunities of gaining an insight into affairs there. What I can see coming now I have expected for years. There are two great factors which make for war. One is the character of the emperor himself and the other the inevitable rot, which must creep like a disease into a great army kept always upon a war footing, through a decade or more of inactivity. The emperor is shrewd enough to see this. Nothing can possibly exist at its best which is not used for the purpose to which it owes its existence. That is why we have this flood of literature just now telling us of the gross abuses and general rottenness of the German army. Another five years of idleness and Germany's position as the first military nation will have passed away. Like every other great power, it is

rusting for want of use. The emperor knows this."

Duncombe for many reasons was fascinated by his friend's quiet words. Apart from their obvious plausibility, they brought with them many startling suggestions. Had chance, he wondered, really made Phyllis Poynton and her brother pawns in the great game? He felt himself stirred to a rare emotion by the flood of possibilities which swept in suddenly upon him. Lord Runtun noted with surprise the signs of growing excitement in his listener.

"Go on, Runtun. Anything else?"

Lord Runtun helped himself to a cigarette and leaned across to light it.

"Of course," he continued, "I know that there are a great many people who firmly believe that for commercial reasons Germany would never seek a quarrel with us. I will agree with them so far as to say that I do not believe that a war with England would be popular among the bourgeois of Germany. On the other hand, they would be quite powerless to prevent it. The emperor and his ministers have the affair in their own hands. A slight break in our diplomatic relations, some trifle seized hold of by the press and magnified at once into an insult, and the war torch is kindled. Today war does not come about by the slowly growing desire of nations. The threads of fate are in the hands of a few diplomatists at Berlin and London—a turn of the wrist, and there is tension which a breath can turn either way. You ask me why the emperor should choose England for attack. There are many reasons. First, because England alone could repay him for the struggle. Secondly, because he is intensely and miserably jealous of our own king, who has avoided all his own hot headed errors and has yet played a great and individual part in the world's affairs. Thirdly, because England is most easily attacked. I could give you other reasons if you wanted them."

"Quite enough," Duncombe answered. "What do you suppose would be the 'casus belli'?"

"The progress of the Russian fleet through English waters," Lord Runtun answered promptly. "Russia's interest in such a misunderstanding would be,

of course, immense. She has only to fire on an English ship, by mistake, of course, and the whole lot would be in the fire. England probably would insist upon the squadron being detained. Germany would protest against any such action. We might very well be at war with Russia and Germany within ten days. Russia would immediately either make terms with Japan or abandon any active operations in Manchuria and move upon India. Germany would come for us."

"Is this all purely imagination," Duncombe asked, "or have you anything to go on?"

"So far as I am concerned," Lord Runtun said slowly, "I, of course, know nothing, but I have a strong idea that the government has at least a suspicion of some secret understanding between Russia and Germany. Their preparations seem almost to suggest it. Of course, we outsiders can only guess, after all, at what is going on, but it seems to me that there is a chance to-day for our government to achieve a diplomatic coup."

"In what direction?"

"An alliance with France. Mind, I am afraid that there are insurmountable obstacles, but if it were possible it would be checkmate to our friend the emperor, and he would have nothing left but to climb down. The trouble is that in the absence of any definite proof of an understanding between Russia and Germany, France could not break away from her alliance with the former. Our present arrangement would insure, I believe, a benevolent neutrality, but an alliance, if only it could be compassed, would be the greatest diplomatic triumph of our days. Hello! Visitors at this hour! Wasn't that your front door bell, Duncombe?"

"It sounded like it," Duncombe answered. "Perhaps it is your man."

"Like his cheek, if it is!" Lord Runtun answered, rising to his feet and strolling toward the sideboard. "I told him I would telephone round to the stables when I was ready. I suppose it is rather late though. I shan't apologize for keeping you up."

"I hope you won't," Duncombe answered. "I have never been more interested in my life—for many reasons. Don't bother about your man, Groves will see to him."

There was a knock at the door, and the butler appeared.

"There are three gentlemen outside, sir, who wish to see you," he announced to Duncombe. "They will not give their names, but they say that their business is important or they would not have troubled you so late."

Duncombe glanced at the clock. It was past midnight.

"Three gentlemen," he repeated, "at this time of night! But where on earth have they come from, Groves?"

"They did not say, sir," the man answered. "One of them I should judge to be a foreigner. They have a motor car outside."

Lord Runtun held out his hand.

"Well, it's time I was off, anyhow," he remarked. "Come over and have lunch tomorrow. Don't bother about me. I'll stroll round to the stables and start from there. Good night."

Duncombe hesitated. He was on the point of asking his friend to stay, but before he could make up his mind Runtun had lit a cigarette and strolled away.

"You can show the gentlemen in here, Groves," Duncombe said.

"Very good, sir."

The man disappeared. Duncombe, after a moment's hesitation, crossed the room and, opening an oak cupboard, slipped a small revolver into his pocket.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

ONE of his three visitors Duncombe recognized immediately. It was M. Louis. Of the other two, one was a Frenchman, a somewhat somber looking person in a black beard and gold rimmed eyeglasses, the other was unmistakably an Englishman of the lower middle class. His broad shoulders and somewhat stiff bearing seemed to suggest some sort of drill. Looking them over, Duncombe found himself instinctively wondering whether the personal strength of these two, which was obvious, might become a factor in the coming interview.

The baron naturally was spokesman. He bowed very gravely to Duncombe, and did not offer his hand.

"I must apologize, Sir George," he said, "for disturbing you at such an inopportune hour. Our business, however, made it necessary for us to reach you with as little delay as possible."

"Perhaps you will be good enough to explain," Duncombe answered, "what that business is."

The baron raised his hands with a little protesting gesture.

"I regret to tell you, Sir George," he announced, "that it is of a most unpleasant nature. I could wish that its execution had fallen into other hands. My companions are M. Ridalle, of the French detective service, and our other friend here, whom I do not know, is a constable from the Norwich police court. My own connections with the police service of my country you have already, without doubt, surmised."

"Go on," Duncombe said.

"I regret to say," M. Louis continued, "that my friends here are in charge of a warrant for your arrest. You will

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find them possessed of all the legal documents, French and English. We shall have to ask you to come to Norwich with us tonight."

"Arrest!" Duncombe repeated. "On what charge?"

"An extremely serious one," the baron answered gravely. "The charge of murder!"

Duncombe stared at him in amazement.

"Murder!" he repeated. "What rubbish!"

"The murder of Mile. de Mermillon in her lodging on the night of the 7th of June last," the baron said gravely. "I need not make any remarks before these men. The evidence against you is already sufficiently strong."

Duncombe laughed derisively.

"What sort of a puppet show is this?" he exclaimed. "You know as well as any man living how that poor girl came to her end. This is a cover for something else, of course. What do you want of me? Let's get at it without wasting time."

"What we want of you is, I am afraid, only too simple," the baron answered, shrugging his shoulders. "We must ask you to accompany us at once to Norwich castle. You will have to appear before the magistrates in the morning, when they will sign the extradition warrant. Our friend here, M. Ridalle, will then take charge of you. Perhaps you would like to look through the documents. You will find them all in perfect order."

Duncombe mechanically glanced through the French and English papers which were spread out before him. They had certainly a most uncomfortable appearance of being genuine. He began to feel a little bewildered.

"You mean to say that you have come here to arrest me on this charge? That you want me to go away with you tonight?" he asked.

"It is not a matter of wanting you to come," the baron answered coldly. "It is a matter of necessity."

Duncombe moved toward the fireplace.

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