

THE CLEARING HOUSE OF TREASON

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IN THE EARLY MONTHS of the year the fear of war was in every capital of Europe. It was as if the continent were sapped and mined and powder-charged, awaiting only the first spark. In every state, more or less openly, troops were mobilized, the spies went — the spies and the spy-hunters.

The center of the international spy-system is in Brussels. Indeed you might say that Brussels is the clearing-house for all the treasuries of Europe. On this neutral territory the traitors of all nations meet in relative security. They frequent the great hotels of the lower town and the darker taverns and inns near the railway stations. They are in touch with their embassies and ministries and with the naval and military attachés. They may be officers of rank in their own armies, like "Leopoldus." There are women among them, adventuresses with a genius for intrigue and a love for it. All nations and all races are represented in this grim world of treason. No one of the great powers is any better than the other. Each has its organized spy-service, and one is not baser than the other. As you shall see. For it is interesting — is it not? — to go down for a little while into this somber and formidable world of infamy and intrigue, of treason and murder, with, now and then, its distorted heroisms and its dingy romances.

When in mid-January I reached Brussels there was keen activity in the spy-world, but a keener fear. No one rogue — though for years they had trafficked in treason like brothers — trusted the other. By reason of a journalistic experience that went back to the Dreyfus days — the days of Cuers — I had a number of acquaintances among them; but at first it was hard to make head-way. Never in a dozen years has fear lain so heavily on the fierce, unscrupulous band of professional spies. The reason was this: The *contre-espionage* was being relentlessly carried on by every great power; German spies were being bribed to deliver their agents to England, French spies were being bought over by Germany, and so on. What could a poor rogue of a spy do? In what agent could he trust?

IN German jails and fortresses in the month of January were five English spies. Three of them were officers in the English army. A fourth was a barrister, but also an officer in the territorials. They had gone blithely into Germany to spy out the land — its forts and dockyards, its troops and munitions of war. They had been sent by the War Office to a well accredited agent in Brussels; he had sent them on their way, and betrayed them one after the other to the German authorities. In that same month a German officer, the Baron von Schöenebeck, who was working in the interest of France, was delivered over to the authorities at the German frontier; he had been sold by the French agent in Brussels. A

This slim, febrile woman talking quite easily of desperate, criminal things

colonel of the Russian general staff was arrested at Leopel in Austria. Alfred Montillet, a French soldier who was betraying his country by running arms into Morocco, was given up to the Paris police by his "chief" in Brussels. At Leipsig, Worg, a young German acting as a spy for France, was sentenced to four years' imprisonment. Two private soldiers, who sold the lock of a military carbine to the French embassy, were caught at Dantzig. A Russian colonel of artillery was arrested at Sosnowice charged with betraying military secrets to Germany. At Ostrowa, a high railway official was captured, while trying to give up compromising papers to a German agent. And so on. I have not mentioned half the cases given me by my informant, who is at once the dean and the chief of the agents of espionage in Europe. Do you wonder that fear lay thick and cold upon the world of spies?

For no man knew who would be next given up.

Each of these men had been betrayed to the authorities by one of the professional agents of espionage. It might be as well — before we meet these men at closer quarters — to make this matter quite clear. All of the spies to whom I have referred, as well as the others imprisoned in that agitated month of January, were amateurs. Some of them, like the English officers and two German officers now in English jails, acted out of patriotism. In a way of danger and in what seemed to them a way of honor, they were serving country and fatherland. They were on duty, if you will. And that was true of the Russian colonel captured in Austria. They had been placed in touch with the professional agents of espionage who were supposed to be in the sole pay of their respective countries; and these men had sold them to the enemy — as one sells a trussed fowl in the market place. The spy-agents had taken two fees, one dirtier than the other.

As to those other men who were arrested here and there, they were amateur traitors, willing to sell any military secrets that would bring a price. They were private soldiers, non-commissioned officers, gunners, clerks in military railway service — men given to debt and debauchery. Such poor devils as they — half-fool, all-knave — form the base of the espionage system in Europe. Wily agents tempt them. If they resist the rollicking agents who offer them money and wine-bottles, they fall to those subtler agents who tempt them with kisses. And the end of them? It is always the same. Sooner or later these very agents betray them.

One night a time ago I sat in a tavern in Brussels. There were a half-dozen famous agents of espionage there — Thiessen and Schwartz and others. They all knew each other. They were supposed to represent different governments; but they hob-and-nobbed together, freely, familiarly as thieves in a cellar. Lajoux was acting for France, Cuers for Germany. And Lajoux and Cuers played a