The Ingratitude of Kings

NARRATIVE OF CAPTAIN ADAMS "Detective-Diplomat"

By H. M. EGBERT

IN looking over my diaries I find that I have little more to tell concerning my relations with His Majesty Edward VII., and my service as his courier among the courts of Europe. And yet it might be well to narrate the circumstances under which I relinquished this post, in the holding of which I had so frequently received the royal encomiums. The manner of my resignation is an eloquent commentary upon the uncertain fortunes which he must expect who puts his faith in princes.

The dominant feature of my period of service was the intense hostility that existed between the royal houses of England and Germany, and was reflected between the two nations. Yet the time came when Edward and the Kaiser did in some measure settle their differences. If rivalry remained, they at least gave up the rather dubious methods that they had been constrained to use, in the fulfilment of which I had been the weapon ever at King Edward's hand, as Stapfhaus was that of the kaiser.

The enmity between Stapfhaus and myself reached such a point that it was bound to be settled once and forever between us. On more than one occasion—on that of the North sea adventures, and that of the czar's drive—Stapfhaus had outwitted me. He had brought the prestige of England low and exalted that of Germany. Yet I, too, had won from him at times; altogether, each of us feared the other and felt that in him his country had its most dangerous enemy.

In other words, both Stapfhaus and I had determined that we would kill each the other, whenever our paths crossed again.

I think King Edward recognized and understood this, for his face was more than usually grave when he called me to appear before him at St. James' palace one morning, upon that occasion of my service as his courier, which was to prove the last—though this I did not guess.

"Captain Adams," said the king, in a very kindly way, "I have selected you out of all my representatives because I have the most confidence in your ability, and because you alone can checkmate the designs of our cousin across the North sea. I want you to start for Washington immediately.

"As you know, the ex-president and the kaiser are men possessing a vast admiration for each other, and they draw the bonds uniting the two countries exceedingly close. Nevertheless, the kaiser could not induce the president to form an alliance. One president shrewdly saw that this would, in the end, strain the ties of friendship between his country and England. But the present executive has been less cautious.

"He has not, indeed, been willing to enter into a hard and fast treaty, but he has been induced to execute a preliminary agreement for joint action against China, in defiance of the clear treaty rights of England. This document, containing the signature of the kaiser, is on its way to Washington. If we can lay hands on it, the more threat to publish it will abort the whole scheme. But we must have the document. It is in the pocket or wallet of Stapfhaus, the chief German agent. You know him. He sails on the Kaiserin Augusta from Hamburg today, direct for Baltimore. It is not the commonest route, and Stapfhaus has chosen it to avoid the chance of detection. The Kaiserin Augusta is rather an old and slow boat, and she will call at Southampton tomorrow morning. Stapfhaus will be on board. Follow him, and secure the treaty before the ship touches port across the water. Then open the sealed orders—" he handed me an envelope—"and folow instructions that they contain. That is all that I need tell you, except to reiterate that the whole future of England depends upon your success."

He shook hands with me and wished me well. I have never seen him from that day to this. But how was I to know what manner of mission this was upon which he was sending me? I went in good faith and carried out his comands, so far as I could, loyally.

Early the next morning I was at Southampton, waiting for the Kaiserin Augusta to enter port for her brief stay of an hour. My plan was a very simple one; I was going aboard in a double capacity. Firstly, I had secured a private stateroom under an assumed name; secondly, I had been accepted as a first cabin steward under another alias. This was done through the medium of the home secretary, inasmuch as the Kaiserin Augusta was licensed to carry English mail, and consequently a hint to the London board sufficed to have instructions regarding me sent to the captain. It was an unpleasant way in which to cross the Atlantic, and entailed disagreeable services; but in no other manner, I felt sure, could I obtain an opportunity to examine the cabin of Stapfhaus.

I quickly discovered my quarry when waiting upon the first saloon table. He was traveling under the name of Reich. So little did he expect that he would be followed that, beyond the change of name, he had not taken any trouble to disguise himself, whereas I had shaved off my mustache and assumed a wig of hair different from my own by at least two shades. I was content the first couple of days to discover the location of his cabin. I was delighted to discover that he occupied a stateroom alone. He had no servant; all was propitious, and it was only necessary to enter and take what I needed.

My plan, in brief, was this. The cabin which Stapfhaus occupied, under the name of Reich, was not very far distant from that which I had engaged under an assumed name. At midnight I would arm myself, put on my steward's coat, and boldly enter his cabin and search for the treaty, cowing Stapfhaus with my revolver. When I had found it—and I did not doubt that it would be about his person or under his pillow—or, if it should unhappily be necessary, when I had taken his life, I would run with all haste to my cabin, doff the steward's coat, throw it through the porthole, and assume the role of the wealthy gentleman whom the agonies of sea sickness had hitherto prevented from leaving his cabin. The plan was perfect and could hardly fail me.

At midnight on the third night I put my plan into execution. It was my turn off duty. The lights were low; the passengers, not yet acclimatized, were all in bed, except a small group in the smoking room. Wearing my steward's coat I went noiselessly to the door of my enemy's room. It was not closed, being fastened by the interior hook that permits about two inches of space for the purpose of admitting air. I listened stealthily outside. There was no sound from within—not even the sound of breathing. Very cautiously I thrust my hand within the aperture and pulled out the hook. The door swung open with the lurch of the ship. A light was burning inside. Still there was no sound. I looked in; the cabin was empty!

Yet, only 20 minutes before I had seen him, dressed in his pajamas and a dressing gown, returning to his room from the bath. Had he dressed and gone up to the smoking room? There seemed no other solution of the mystery. But I had no time for speculation. In an instant I had securely locked the door from within and was down upon my knees, delving into his cabin trunk, his grips, pulling apart the bedclothes, rummaging under the mattress, beneath the carpet, everywhere that I thought the ingenuity of man could have devised as a hiding place for the treaty which meant so much to both of us. I searched the pockets of his clothes, the lining of his shoes—I even tore apart the stitches of his garments in my futile efforts. And when, 15 minutes later, I arose, bitterly disappointed, I had at least the consolation of knowing that the treaty could not be in his cabin. The only solution then must be that it was about his person. He must carry it upon his body, day and night.

My first plan then was to lie in wait for him upon his return. But what if he should discover me? There was no place within the cabin to hide, except under the bed, and that afforded only the most cramped quarters. Besides, should he stoop to his trunk, he must discover me. And then—I could never rearrange his clothes. I must escape at once, and leave him to think that a thief had been in his cabin. Would he suspect my presence? Somehow I must waylaw him and get what I sought—perhaps next night in the dark of the deck. I opened the door and hurried down the corridor toward my room. As I went I noticed that the air had grown uncommonly cold, as though icebergs were in the vicinity, which, at that period of the early summer, was a thing to be prepared for. The ship was plunging along under an increasing gale. I turned the corner, saw my room before me, and, just as I was about to enter, the door opened, and out stepped Stapfhaus!

He smiled at me in an evil way when he saw me. My hand went to my pocket, but the German was the speedier. In an instant I was looking into the muzzle of an automatic pistol. My hands dropped to my sides. When one is helpless and at the mercy of another, there is nothing to be gained by a show of bravado. And Stapfhaus was not reputed to be slow with his weapon.

He motioned me into my cabin, and I went in first, Stapfhaus following. In the mirror in front of me I could see that his aim never wavered. To my astonishment the place had been ransacked even as I had ransacked his. Stapfhaus motioned me to be seated upon the bed. He himself took the chair.

"Where have you been, Adams?" he asked, grimly. I could see that my life hung upon only the flimsiest thread. I answered promptly.

"Ransacking your room, Stapfhaus."

He started. "Ransacking my room?" he cried. "What the devil for?"

"What for?" I reiterated, bitterly. I felt bitter toward him. Even if he spared my life, at least I knew that my career was over. I could never face my sovereign again. And here he was mocking me.

"I ransacked your room," I replied, "to find the treaty. Why do you suppose I came?" I saw him start. The pistol quivered in his hand. "Do you think I followed you for a jest, or to play puss-in-the-corner?"

I do not know what he would have done. He seemed to take deliberate aim at me. Then I heard wild, desperate cries from the deck above. A blast of icy air seemed to strike me—and suddenly there came a tremendous shock which flung us from our seats with terrific violence. I heard the pistol explode as it left Stapfhaus' fingers. Then, stunned and dazed, I picked myself up from the floor, to find that the sea was pouring through the porthole and that I was wading in a foot of water, which swilled from side to side of the cabin as the ship rolled heavily in the trough of the sea. Above me I heard orders being shouted, hard and clear; heard the stamping of feet; then Stapfhaus and I were running along the passage side by side, and making for the deck.

Water was pouring down the companionways. Passengers of either sex, in night attire, were screaming, praying franticaly, and rushing hither and thither in wildest terror, which gradually yielded before the orderly precision of the officers and the sailors. When we had forced our way to the deck we found that the vessel had struck an immense ice floe, clearly discernible in the bright moonlight, and toppling like a drunken thing 200 yards on the bow side, rolling heavily in the surge, and almost split in twain by the force of the impact.

What damage we ourselves had sustained was uncertain. The engine room was flooded, the engines had ceased working, the electric lights had gone out. Everywhere through the vast, black hull resounded shouting and screaming. From beneath, passengers, with a few hasty wraps around them, were running up to the deck, their numbers constantly augmenting, while they carried with them such trifles as they had been able to save or had snatched up in the confusion—often of the most incongruous nature. From abaft came curses and groans. From time to time the boards would resound with the confused trampling of bare feet; then these sounds would cease suddenly and the shouts would be resumed. Looking down, I became aware that these cries were from the steerage passengers. At each ladder which led to the decks from this region of the ship two men were posted; and each held a pistol in either hand and guarded the approaches.

"To defend yourself," he cried back at me.

The burly figure of the captain appeared. There was a concerted rush for him. For a moment passengers and crew struggled together. Then his voice rose clear and clean above the medly of sounds:

"There is no immediate danger. Lower the life boats and be ready to cast off."

Hardly had the words left his lips, however, when a thrill seemed to run through the ship. The stern rose perceptibly in the air. "She is sinking!" cried a hundred voices. All discipline was lost. The sailors, lowering the boats, had the ropes snatched out of their hands by frantic passengers. The mob was gaining control. And, at the critical moment, suddenly there came a renewed rush from the steerage against the ladders. I heard a revolver crack, a man cry. Then, with the roar of a single beast, the steerage passengers had swept over all obstacles and no further semblance of order was possible. Suddenly I felt Stapfhaus thrust a pistol into my hand.

"What for?" I cried in astonishment. We stood a little aside from the fighting, furious mobs, helpless to prevent their deeds. Women were being thrust aside; I saw a boat swing clear, descend to the water head first and grind against the ship, spilling out its helpless occupants among the waves. Cries of horror arose. All this passed before my eyes like a panoramic vision. My brain was back in the little cabin, and Stapfhaus was threatening me with his pistol. Then I looked down and saw the weapon in my own hands.

"What for?" I cried again.

"To defend yourself," he cried back to me. You are a man of honor. I give you equality with me. I have lost my advantage. Afterward we will fight out our quarrel."

Then, seeing that I still did not understand, he shouted:

"We will fight our way toward one of the boats. We must live. It is our duty to live. I want you to live—so that I can get that treaty."

"What?" I cried, astounded.

"It isn't in your cabin. And you brought it on board. Therefore it is upon you. I will not lose sight of you as long as either of us lives."

Had the disaster unhinged his mind, that he, the treaty bearer, should accuse me of being in possession of it? Stay! Why had he ransacked my room? Was it credible that Stapfhaus was under the delusion that I, too, had a treaty? Before I could turn my mind to the consideration of this problem the vessel lurched forward and sidewise, her stern rising until almost perpendicular. It was evident that she might sink at any moment. I can hardly describe the terror and the confusion—the plunging waves that covered us with spray first, and then drenched us, the formidable floes that ground against one another with a noise as of colliding trains, the black heaving waters, and the pandemonium of confusion and evil passions aroused by fear. I saw women clubbed and struck down upon the deck, men fighting with tooth and claw for admission to the boats, which hung all ways in the air and either never reached the water or were launched only to be pounded to fragments against the vessel's sides. And, even as I watched this final scene, with a final shudder the vessel began to sink beneath the waves. I stood still, clinging to the stern rail, in a kind of lethargy. I no longer felt the bitter cold of the icy billows that roared, waist-high, around me. Suddenly I felt Stapfhaus grasp me by the arm. I could not hear his words amid those awful cries of despair that went up to the heavens. Dimly I felt that his will, stronger than my own at this supreme crisis, demanded that I should plunge with him into those foaming, churning depths. With a last despairing shriek I leaped; I felt the black waters close over my head, and went down, down, for an interminable period, until the breath pent in my lungs seemed about to rend me. Then—I felt my head struck violently by some floating object; I emerged above the surface, gasping and choking, and found myself clinging to a deck chair, one of those which had been in occupation only a short hour before, in the lee of a deck shelter. The current created by the sinking ship had, most luckily, carried me away instead of drawing me under. All around me, under the full moon, was the black, heaving sea, rimmed with ice floes that seemed to have withdrawn to leave a clear space in which the vessel might sink to her ocean bed. Now, where she had been there was no ripple to show, nothing but the dark, leaping waves, spume-flecked beneath the wind, and on their breast there floated spars, chairs, debris of every kind.

I clung to my chair and shouted wildly. No call came back across the waters. If any had escaped, they had pulled away from the danger spot. The entire company and crew seemed to have perished. I felt that I could not keep my senses much longer. Benumbed by the icy water, spent, exhausted, my strength fast leaving me, I put all my powers into one last, desperate cry. Then came an answer. I knew the voice. I plunged onward desperately through the waters. The hail came more loudly. All at once there drifted into view, separating itself with mysterious suddenness from the waste of the sea, an empty life boat. And, clinging to its edge, making desperate efforts to enter it, was Stapfhaus. With the last vestiges of my rapidly waning strength I pulled myself together; the heavy boat slowly dipped toward us till her edge was level with the waves. One last endeavor, and Stapfhaus and I lay on her bottom, side by side. But whether we were friends or bitterest enemies, neither of us was able to lift a finger toward the other in friendship or enmity.

How long we lay there helpless at the mercy of the winds and waves, I do not know. Luckily, the promise of the storm had not been fulfilled, or we should have been swamped many times before morning. When the sky lightened I was able to sit up and look wearily round me. We had drifted beyond the circle of treacherous ice floes, which had vanished utterly, as though, having fulfilled their deadly purpose, there remained nothing more for them to do. We were adrift upon the breast of the immense Atlantic.

Stapfhaus hauled himself into a sitting posture and regarded me. When he spoke his voice was nothing but a shaky whisper. I wonder, now, whether mine was, too.

"Adams," he said, "I have no weapons here. But, for all that we have gone through and escaped from, I swear that one of us shall never live to be picked up by any ship unless—unless you hand to me the Anglo-American treaty."

"I stared at him awhile; then answered:

"Stapfhaus, when you accused me of having a treaty in my possession last night I thought that the disaster had turned your brain. Yet now I recollect that you actually ransacked my room, even as I did yours, apparently under the influence of that same belief. Stapfhaus, I have no treaty. But you have one which is upon you—round your waist or about your neck. And I swear that one of us shall go plunging down into this depths of sea, unless you deliver it to me."

"Why did you ransack my room?" he demanded, huskily. "Why did you take ship with me?"

"To get the treaty."

"I have no treaty," he shrieked out at me. "I took ship to intercept you at New York because I heard that you were on your way to deliver your treaty to the American president."

"Who told you that?" I demanded.

"My sovereign, the kaiser," he answered, proudly. "And you?"

"His majesty, King Edward VII.," I answered. "Well, shall we strip?"

"Wait!" he said, thoughtfully. "Have you no papers upon you?"

"Yes," I answered. "I have an oilskin bag round my waist. But it contains no treaty—merely sealed instructions which his majesty handed to me in person, with instructions that I should open them after I had obtained the treaty."

Stapfhaus stared at me incredulously. Then he began to tremble.

"Dare you open it?" he muttered. "See—" From beneath his clothes he produced a similar bag. "This, or its contents, rather, his imperial majesty the kaiser handed to me before my departure," he said, "with instructions that I should open it when I had obtained the treaty from you."

I said no more, but boldly unripped the sewn oilskin. The water had penetrated not at all. Simultaneously Stapfhaus ripped his own open. We laid them in the bottom of the boat and stared at them.

They were identical. Each contained a single note of the Bank of England to the value of £500. And, with each, was a formal discharge from the civil service of our respective countries, and a regret that future employment was not to be expected.

I think it was some time before I understood the tenor of this. Then I heard some one sobbing near at hand. I looked up; Stapfhaus was weeping unrestrainedly. And a tear fell on my own hand.

"I served my emperor," he cried. "I gave my life for him—I would have died for him gladly at any time. But I did not think the day would come when he would make a jest of me, sending me on an impossible mission to obtain a treaty when there was no treaty. Why should he mock at me—or your sovereign at you?"

Then a dubious thought came into my brain.

"Perhaps it was not done wholly as a jest," I said.

"What do you mean?" cried Stapfhaus.

"Perhaps our sovereigns thought—that we had been too serviceable—that we knew too much—that if we met, each bent upon his fatal purpose, and shot or stabbed each other—our deaths might remove two men who knew more of the politics of Europe than was good for them."

"And if we lived—"

"That fate had chosen so."

Stapfhaus was silent for awhile. Then he raised his hand to the salute.

"My emperor's will be done," he said. His eyes wandered into the offing. Then he gave a cry and pointed.

A large steamship was bearing down on us.

SURELY HAD A BUSY DAY

And With All the Excitement Perhaps They Were Not to Blame for Their Oversight.

"I am awfully tired," sighed Loretta as she dropped heavily into a chair. "But I have had a very good day of it. Mrs. Dingle and I went shopping to get some toys for the bazar. The church women decided that they would have a booth for inexpensive toys to catch the children's pennies and perhaps a fishpond."

"What's a fishpond?" asked her brother. "A matrimonial booth?"

"It's a place where the children have fishpoles and fish over a curtain behind which we hang toys on the hooks. Of course we had to have lots of small toys that didn't count up in price, so Mrs. Dingle and I decided we'd go to the five and ten-cent stores and select a number.

"We were rather late getting started because Mrs. Dingle couldn't find the list that the president of the Aid society gave her, but at last we set out. It was after 12 when we got downtown, so Mrs. Dingle took me to a tea room for luncheon. It isn't the quickest place in the world to get waited on; but really we were rather slow ourselves. We had a lot to talk about, and I think we discussed everything under the sun.

"Then Mrs. Dingle wanted to go to a matinee, even if it was late, and we tried at two or three places, but we couldn't get seats. So we went over to a vaudeville performance and it was really quite good."

"And such a help to the bazar!" her brother murmured. "No doubt you two will be put on every available committee on account of your faithful and conscientious labors. I always said you were a wonderful worker when you once got started."

"We didn't stay for the whole performance," Loretta explained. "You see, Mrs. Dingle remembered that she wanted to match some ribbon and, anyhow, the last part of the program was not new. I would have stayed if I had been alone, but I was Mrs. Dingle's guest, and I couldn't very well say I didn't care particularly for her errand. Now, could I?"

"Hardly. I am proud to see that you have the right spirit and recognize duty when it stands in your path and waves its arms."

"You needn't make fun of me," Loretta said. "We matched the ribbon all right, though we had to go to seven places. It was last year's ribbon and the stores never carry the same colors two years in succession."

"No apology is necessary. I understand perfectly."

"After we got the ribbon we went to the ten-cent stores and bought the toys."

"The plot thickens!" cried the brother. "Now we come to the climax."

"There isn't any climax," Loretta said. "We went to all the stores and by the time we had finished we had a lot of small packages of the prettiest toys you ever saw. Fire engines, dolls, blocks, puzzles—everything a child could wish. They were so attractive that we played with them ourselves on the counter before they were wrapped up."

"Where are they?" her brother asked. "I'd like to see them and renew my youth. The fire engines particularly will charm me."

Loretta's face fell. "I haven't them," she confessed. "I suppose Mrs. Dingle took them. Still I am not sure."

"Here at last is the mystery," said her brother, "'Where Are the Toys? or the Adventures of an Empty Fishpond.'"

"Don't be foolish," said Loretta nervously. "I wish I knew—"

"Invention has given us a handy instrument," her brother suggested, "through which we can converse with friends at a distance. This is called a telephone, derived from the words—"

But Loretta did not wait for derivations. A moment later her brother heard her talking to Mrs. Dingle. The conversation lasted for some time and was evidently spirited, so he waited to hear the outcome. When Loretta came back, however, she was not talkative, and it required skill to enable him to discover what was wrong.

"Well, if you must know," Loretta said at last desperately, "Mrs. Dingle thought I had everything."

"Rather a heavy load for one."

"And I thought she had the toys. We both remember seeing the large parcel on the wrapping counter of some store, that's all. We must have gone and left them there. Mrs. Dingle is actually ill-tempered about it."—Chicago Daily News.

"Whigs" in History.

The party in the colonies which promoted and backed the revolution took the name Whigs. Their principles were the same as those of the Whigs of England, only they were made applicable to this country. In 1834 the name was revived, the Federal party having come to an end in 1817. From that time all American politicians were simply Republicans. But soon different views were held by the various members of the party with the results that factions were formed under their own leaders. Adams, Clay and their followers believed in a policy of protection and federal internal improvements and a broad or loose construction of the constitution. Others, who construed the constitution strictly, opposed these things and found a leader in Jackson. The former took the name of National Republicans. After his defeat their chief leader was Clay, whom they nominated for president in 1831. Their opposition to Jackson drew to them various elements, and, as opponents of executive usurpation, in 1834 the coalition took the old name of Whigs. The Whig body always formed a coalition rather than a party, there being two divisions, the northern and southern Whigs.