Chapter One

The Knight turned towards the Holy Hitler chapel which in the orientation of this church lay in the western arm of the Swastika, and with the customary loud impressive chords on the organ and a long roll on the sacred drums, the Creed began. Hermann was sitting in the Goebbels chapel in the northern arm, whence he could conveniently watch the handsome boy with the long fair silky hair, who had been singing the solos. He had to turn towards the west when the Knight turned. He could no longer see the boy except with a side-long glance, and though gazing at lovely youths in church was not even conventionally condemned, any position during the singing of the Creed except that of attention-eyes-front was sacrilegious. Hermann sang with the rest in a mighty and toneful roaring of male voices, but the words of the Creed made no impression on his ear or his brain. They were too familiar. He was not irreligious; the great yearly ceremony of the Quickening of the Blood, from which all but German Hitlerians were excluded, roused him to frenzy. But this, being only an ordinary monthly worship, was too homely and dull to excite any particular enthusiasm, especially if a man was annoyed about something else. Not once had he been able to catch the eye of the new solo singer, who with the face of a young Hero-Angel, so innocent, so smooth-skinned and rosy, combined a voice of unearthly purity and tone.

I believe, sang all the men and boys and the Knight in unison,

in God the Thunderer, who made this physical earth on which men march in their mortal bodies, and in His Heaven where all heroes are, and in His Son our Holy Adolf Hitler, the Only Man. Who was, not begotten, not born of a woman, but Exploded! (A terrific crash from the organ and the drums, and all right hands raised in the Salute acknowledged that tremendous miracle.)

From the Head of His Father, He the perfect, the untainted Man-Child, whom we, mortals and defiled in our birth and in our conception, must ever worship and praise. Heil Hitler.

Who in our need, in Germany's need, in the world's need ; for our sake, for Germany's sake, for the world's sake ; came down from the Mountain, the Holy Mountain, the German Mountain, the nameless one, to march before us as Man who is God, to lead us, to deliver us, in darkness then, in sin and chaos and impurity, ringed round by devils, by Lenin, by Stalin, by Roehm, by Karl Barth, the four arch-fiends, whose necks He set under His Holy Heel, grinding them into the dust. (With a savagery so familiar that it could hardly be called savagery all the male voices growled out the old words.)

Who, when our Salvation was accomplished, went into the Forest, the Holy Forest, the German Forest, the nameless one ; and was there reunited to His Father, God the Thunderer, so that we men, the mortals, the defiled at birth, could see His Face no more. (The music was minor, the voices piano and harmonised, with a sweet and telling effect after the long unison.)

And I believe that when all things are accomplished and the last heathen man is enlisted in His Holy Army, that Adolf Hitler our God will come again in martial glory to the sound of guns and aeroplanes, to the sound of the trumpets and drums.

And I believe in the Twin Arch-Heroes, Goering and Goebbels, who were found worthy even to be His Familiar Friends.

And I believe in pride, in courage, in violence, in brutality, in bloodshed, in ruthlessness, and all other soldierly and heroic virtues. Heil Hitler.

The Knight turned round again. Hermann turned round and sat down gratefully to resume his contemplation of the golden-haired chorister. He was a big boy to have still an unbroken voice. He must be above fourteen. But not a glint of golden down had yet appeared on his apple-cheeks. He had a wonderful voice. Good enough for a Munich church, yes, good enough for a church in the Holy City, where the Sacred Hangar was, and in it the Sacred Aeroplane towards which all the Swastika churches in Hitlerdom were oriented, so that the Hitler arm was in the direct line with the Aeroplane in Munich, even though thousands of miles lay between the Little Model in the Hitler chapel and the Thing Itself.

Hermann thought, " What's the boy doing here, then? On a holiday, perhaps. He is not a Knight's son. Only a Nazi. I can make acquaintance with him without risk of a snub. Except that he is certain to be popular and rather spoilt."

The old Knight, after a few preliminary coughs (he was inclined to bronchitis), was now reading in his pleasant knightly German the fundamental immutable laws of Hitler Society. Hermann hardly listened. He knew them by heart, and had done since he was nine.

As a woman is above a worm,
So is a man above a woman.
As a woman is above a worm,
So is a worm above a Christian.

Here came the old boring warning about race defilement. " As if any man would ever *want* to," thought Hermann, listening with half an ear.

So, my comrades, the lowest thing,
The meanest, filthiest thing
That crawls on the face of the earth
Is a Christian woman.
To touch her is the uttermost defilement
For a German man.
To speak to her only is a shame.
They are all outcast, the man, the woman and the child.
My sons, forget it not !
On pain of death or torture
Or being cut off from the blood. Heil Hitler.

In his pleasant old husky voice the Knight delivered this very solemn warning, and went on to the other laws.

As a man is above a woman,
So is a Nazi above any foreign Hitlerian.
As a Nazi is above a foreign Hitlerian,
So is a Knight above a Nazi.
As a Knight is above a Nazi,
So is Der Fuehrer (whom may Hitler bless)
Above all Knights,
Even above the Inner Ring of Ten.
And as Der Fuehrer is above all Knights,
So is God, our Lord Hitler, above Der Fuehrer.

But of God the Thunderer and our Lord Hitler
Neither is pre-eminent,
Neither commands,
Neither obeys.
They are equal in this holy mystery.
They are God.
Heil Hitler.

The Knight coughed, saluted the congregation, and lifting the sacred iron chain that no man not of knightly blood might move, he went up the Hitler arm and, turning sharp to the left, disappeared into the chapel. The worship was over.

The men and boys moved in an orderly drilled way out of the church. Hermann suddenly wished it was the custom to hurry and barge and jostle. That boy was going to get out long before he was. Then he'd have vanished, or be surrounded by other men. What hair! Down to his waist nearly. Hermann wanted to wind his hands in it and give a good tug, pulling the boy's head backwards. Not to hurt him much, just to make him mind.

Somebody near the door barked out an order:

" Come on, men. The church is wanted for the Women's Worship. Hurry. Don't dawdle there."

Hermann was very willing. He was not now in the least curious about the Women's Worship, when once every three months they were herded like cattle into the church, tiny girl-children, pregnant women, old crones, every female thing that could walk and stand, except a few who were left behind in the Women's Quarters to look after the infants in arms. The women were not allowed to go further into the church than the Goering and Goebbels arms; they were not allowed to enter even these less holy hero chapels; they had to stay jammed up in half the body of the Swastika, and they were not allowed to sit down. Even now two Nazis were busy clearing away the chairs the men had used. Women's rumps were even more defiling to holy places than their little feet, and they had to stand while the Knight exhorted them on humility, blind obedience and submission to men, reminding them of the Lord Hitler's supreme condescension in allowing them still to bear men's sons and have that amount of contact

with the Holy Mystery of Maleness; while he threatened them with the most appalling penalties should they have any commerce with the male Untouchables, the Christian men, and with milder punishment should they, by word or weeping, or in any other way oppose that custom, that law so essential to Hitler Society, the Removal of the Man-child.

Hermann, when a light-hearted youth of thirteen, had once hidden in the church during a Women's Worship, impelled partly by curiosity, and partly by a wicked un-Nazi feeling of resentment at exclusion, even from something very low and contemptible. He would have been severely punished had he been caught; publicly shamed and beaten to unconsciousness. He was not caught, but the sinful act brought its own punishment. He was terrified. The mere sight of so many women all in a static herd and close by him—not just walking along the road from the Quarters to the church—with their small shaven ugly heads and ugly soft bulgy bodies dressed in feminine tight trousers and jackets—and oh, the pregnant women and the hideousness of them, and the skinny old crones with necks like moulting hens, and the loathsome little girls with running noses, and how they all cried! They wailed like puppies, like kittens, with thin shrill cries and sobs. Nothing human. Of course women have no souls and therefore are not human, but, Hermann thought afterwards, when his boyish terror had given way to a senseless boyish fury, they might *try* to sound like humans.

The small girls cried because they were frightened. They didn't like going to church. It was a quarterly agony which they forgot in the long weeks in between, and then it seized them again. They were terrified of the Knight, though that particular one was mild enough. He never bellowed and stormed at them as some Knights did in some churches. But he had such power over them—more than the Nazis to whom they must render such blind obedience. The Knight could order them to be beaten, to be killed. And then nearly always their mothers were crying at this quarterly worship, and that made the daughters worse. Perhaps one had just had her little boy taken away from her at the age of eighteen months, fetched by the Father in the usual ceremonious way (" Woman, where is my son? " " Here, Lord, here is your son, I, all unworthy, have borne——"), and where was he

now? his baby limbs in the hard hands of men, skilled men, trained men, to wash him and feed him and tend him, and bring him up to manhood. Of course women were not fit to rear men-children, of course it was unseemly for a man to be able to point to a woman and say " There is my mother "—of course they must be taken away from us, and never see us and forget us wholly. It's all as it should be, it is our Lord's will, it is men's will, it is our will. But though a woman might go through the whole ceremony of Removal dry-eyed and not make a moan, and even utter the formal responses in a steady voice, and though she might refrain from weeping afterwards, yet, when she got into the church at the next Women's Worship, she would be certain to break down. All together, women fell into a sort of mass grief. One worked on another, and a woman who had not suffered from a Removal for several years would remember the old pain and start a loud mourning like a recently bereaved animal. The more the Knight told them not to, the harder would they weep. Even the bellowers and stormers among the Knights could not stop women crying at their worship. Nothing could stop them, short of killing them all.

The Knight came out from the Hitler chapel and stood watching the women and girls being driven in by a Nazi. Already the sniffles were beginning; already some of the younger children, at the mere sight of him, before he opened his mouth, set up loud cries of terror. With perception clouded by traditional fear, they could not see that his face was benign and rather noble, with the possible cruelty of his large hooked nose offset by a large calm forehead and sane gentle eyes. They could not see that with this face and his nearly white hair and beard he looked handsome rather than martial in his sky-blue tunic with the silver swastikas on the collar, in his black full breeches, with his Knight's cloak, black lined with blue, shaking gracefully back from his shoulders.

All the women in, the Nazi went out, banged the big door behind him, and locked it according to the custom. The crash of the door caused more loud yells. A woman burst into deep low sobbing. The Knight remembered a saying attributed to the Lord Hitler: " Germans, harden your hearts. Harden your hearts against everything, but

above all against women's tears. A woman has no soul and therefore can have no sorrow. Her tears are a sham and a deceit."

The Knight pinched his lip under his moustache, looking at his congregation and thinking, " I think someone else must have said that. Poor cattle, there comes more and more for you to cry for."

For the Knight knew, what the women themselves did not know, that all over Germany, all over the Holy German Empire in this year of the Lord Hitler 720, more and more and more boys were being born. It had been a gradual loss of balance, of course, but now it was causing acute uneasiness. The end of all things was not accomplished. There were millions of Japanese heathens unconverted, and millions of the Japanese subject races who had not yet had much chance to see the light. And yet, if women were to stop reproducing themselves, how could Hitlerdom continue to exist? It seemed as if, after hundreds of years of the really whole-hearted subjection natural under a religion which was entirely male, the worship of a man who had no mother, the *Only Man*, the women had finally lost heart. They wouldn't be born now. There might be a physical reason. But no one could find out what it was. This particular old Knight, who knew a good deal, more than those of the Inner Ring, more than der Fuehrer himself—this old mild-faced German grey-beard, sunk in a depth of irreligious cynicism that since the death of his three sons was now known only to himself, looked at his women worshippers with a most unmanly un-German feeling of pity.

" It's all wrong," he thought. " There are things men can't do, not to go on for long in the same rigid way. Not for five hundred years without any change or relief. Poor cattle. Poor ugly feeble bodies. Nothing but boys. Women's only reason for existence, to bear boys and nurse them to eighteen months. But if women cease to exist *themselves*? The world will be rid of an intolerable ugliness."

For the Knight knew, what no other man knew, and what no woman ever dreamed of in the most fantastic efforts of her small and cloudy imagination, that women had once been as beautiful and desirable as boys, and that they had once been *loved*. What blasphemy, he thought, curling his lips a

little. To love a woman, to the German mind, would be equal to loving a worm, or a Christian. Women like these. Hairless, with naked shaven scalps, the wretched ill-balance of their feminine forms outlined by their tight bifurcated clothes—that horrible meek bowed way they had of walking and standing, head low, stomach out, buttocks bulging behind—no grace, no beauty, no uprightness, all those were male qualities. If a woman dared to stand like a man she would be beaten.

"I wonder," thought the old Knight, "that we didn't make them walk on all fours all the time, and have each baby-girl's brain extracted at the age of six months. Well, they've beaten us. They've destroyed us by doing what we told them, and now unless the Thunderer can throw the whole mass of Germans out of his head we're coming to an inglorious end." With this blasphemy, a crowning one, the Knight finished his private meditation.

"Women, be quiet," he began, frowning at them as a matter of form. "Do not disturb the sacred air of this holy male place with your feminine squeakings and wailings. What have you to cry for? Are you not blessed above all female animals in being allowed to be the mothers of *men*?"

He paused. In dreary little scattered whispers came the formal response: "Yes, Lord. Yes, Lord. We are blessed." But a renewed burst of weeping followed as the women wondered where were the men they had borne. He is twelve now—he is twenty-five and Rudi twenty-one—if Hans is still alive he's seventy this summer, with a white beard like the Knight. But this last thought was in the mind of a very old and incredibly repulsive hag, far too old to cry.

The Knight went on with his homily. It was always of necessity much the same. There were so few things one could talk to women about. They had hardly more understanding than a really intelligent dog, and, besides, nearly everything was too sacred for them to hear. Anything that had to do with men's lives was banned, and naturally it was impossible to read to them, out of the Hitler Bible, the stories of the heroic deeds of the Lord and His friends. Such matters, even at long distance and second-hand, were far too holy to be spoken of into unclean ears. The most important thing was to get it firmly fixed in the heads of the

younger women that they must not mind being raped. Naturally the Knight did not call it this, there was no such crime as rape except in connection with children under age. And this, as the Knight knew, was less, far less for the sake of the little girls than for the sake of the race. Very young girls if just adolescent might bear puny babies as the result of rape. Over sixteen, women's bodies were well-grown and womanly, that danger was past, and as rape implies will and choice and a spirit of rejection on the part of women, there could be no such crime.

"It is not for you to say, 'I shall have this man or that man,'" he told them, "or 'I am not ready' or 'It is not convenient', or to put any womanish whim in opposition to a man's will. It is for a man to say, if he wishes, 'This is my woman till I am tired of her.' If then another man wants her, still she is not to oppose him; he is a man; for a woman to oppose any man (except a Christian) on any point is blasphemous and most supremely wicked."

The Knight coughed, and made a pause, an impressive one, to allow this to sink in.

"She may tell the man who temporarily owns her about what has happened, and there her responsibility ends. The rest is Men's Business, not on any account to be meddled with by females. And for you girls," he rolled his mild eye towards the sixteen- and seventeen-year-olds, "be submissive and humble and rejoice to do man's will, for whatever you may think in your empty brains at moments, it is *always* your will too, and be fruitful and bear strong daughters."

The women instantly stopped crying, except three or four who were not even half listening. They all gaped at him. The shock of being told to bear strong daughters was equal to a half-stunning blow on each little shaven bristly head. They couldn't believe their ears. The Knight couldn't believe his, either. He had been used for so many years to thinking one thing and saying another; his whole life was such a complicated pattern of secrecy and deceit, that he could not credit himself with at last making such a crashing mistake. It was true that it was vital women should bear more daughters, true that every German of the literate knightly class had night-mare dreams of the extinction of the sacred race, but it was a truth that most not be spoken freely, above all not spoken to

the women themselves. All they knew was that in their particular Women's Quarters was born a remarkable number of young males, but not that the condition was general. If they once knew that the *Knights*, and even der Fuehrer, wanted girl-children to be born in large quantities; that every fresh statistical paper with its terribly disproportionate male births caused groanings and anxieties and endless secret conferences —if the women once realised all this, what could stop them developing a small thin thread of self-respect? If a woman could rejoice publicly in the birth of a girl, Hitlerdom would start to crumble. Some did, he knew, rejoice secretly, for the girls at least could not be taken away from them, but these were only the more shrinking, the more cowardly, the more animal-motherly kind of women. For, even where all were shrinking, cowardly and animal, yet some managed to shrink more than others and fail even in the little unnatural and human feeling allowed them, the leave to be so passionately proud of a male child, that not even the pain of losing him outweighed it. But whatever women might think and feel in private, in public there was no rejoicing whatever at the birth of a female. It was a disgraceful event, a calamitous accident which might of course happen to any woman but did not happen to the best women, and as for a woman who had nothing but daughters, she was only one half step higher than that lifelong hopeless useless burden on Hitler Society, the woman who bore no children at all. " Yet actually," thought the Knight, pinching his moustache and stroking his nearly white beard, and looking mildly down at his stunned flock, " a woman who had ten daughters and wasted no time whatever on sons would be, at this juncture, a howling success." Meanwhile he had made a howling error. " It's age," he thought; " I'm losing grip. One can walk on ledges at twenty, where one would fall over at seventy." But he was in no hurry to cover up his error with words. He knew silence is alarming to women. So he was silent, looking at them, and they went on gaping. But at last they began to shuffle uncomfortably.

" Something is troubling you? " he asked them, as politely as if they had been men, or even Knights. His courteous manner terrified them. They shrank away from him like a wind-blown field of corn.

" No, Lord, no," they whispered. One, a little bolder, or possibly more hysterically frightened than the rest, gasped out, " Lord, we thought you said——"

" What did you think I said? " asked the Knight, still in that very polite way.

All but one woman knew then that they had misheard. They had actually thought, with appalling and yet quite typical feminine stupidity, that he had told them to bear strong daughters. It was all a dreadful blasphemous mistake. He had, of course, said " Sons ". " *Sohnen.*" The word was like the deep tolling of an enormous bell. The Knight was thinking it hard, vigorously, like the man pulling on the bell-rope. The women felt so deeply guilty that they even blushed, all but one. They recommenced crying. All was as it had been before. The Knight coughed, and resumed his discourse. But afterwards, when he had thankfully dismissed them, and signalled with a little bell for the Nazi outside to unlock the door and let them out and drive them back to their cage, there was a certain amount of astonishingly bright chatter.

" Shut up," said the Nazi gruffly. This waiting on the Women's Worship was a tedious and humiliating duty. He kicked at one or two of them as if they had been tiresome puppies, not savagely, just irritably. The women scuttled out of his way and were quiet for a moment, but presently they began again: " How *could* we have thought—did you? I did, but of course it wasn't—*I* didn't, I don't know what you're talking about—but I did *think* he said—yes, well—oh, how could anyone *think* such a thing? "

But old Marta, hobbling very slowly on two sticks, said, " He told you you were to bear strong daughters."

Perhaps she was so old she was no longer a woman at all, and therefore out of reach of all womanly feelings of shame and humility. She was not free, but perhaps by mere age had passed out of reach of psychic subjection. She was not a man, no, but not a woman either, something more like an old incredibly ugly tree. Not human, but not female. At any rate the Knight's hypnotism had rebounded from her. But all the other women despised her. Ugly as they were they could see she was uglier. A revolting dirty old woman, speaking an awful toothless German—she *said* she had had sons—a hundred years ago—but no one knew.

" He never said that—*never*. We only thought it. He said we were to have *sons*. Of course. Sons. *Sons*. Marta, do you hear? "

" I'm not deaf," said Marta. It was a fact, she had every unpleasant attribute of old age except deafness—and senility. " He said you were to bear daughters—*strong* daughters."

" It's a lie. Why *should* he say such a thing? "

" I don't know. It doesn't matter. That was what he said."

They jeered at her and left her to hobble along by herself, quite convinced and completely uninterested: as convinced of the Knight's words as she was that the hard thing that occasionally poked her in the back was the herding Nazi's thick cane, and as uninterested as she was in his stick or in him or in anything in the world except food (of which she got very little) and the faint memory of Hans, her first child. The Knight would have found himself in a certain amount of sympathy with her, had he been in psychic contact. Marta's cynicism was as deep, no, far deeper than his own, though arrived at in an entirely different way.

Chapter Two

Hermann got out of the church at last, but the golden-haired singing-boy was gone. Plenty of men were loitering; the women were being formed up at the Women's Gate of the enclosure which surrounded the church; there were numerous lads and youths hanging about, but that particular one was nowhere to be seen. Hermann started to walk very quickly down the path which led to the Men's Gate, for already groups of men and youths were crossing the big village parade-ground outside the church enclosure, when he saw something that made him wholly forget his purpose. A man, with his hands in his breeches pockets, was standing on (right on with both feet) the beautiful level clipped lawn which filled the church enclosure. The man was idly gazing at the huddle of women being pushed into some sort of order by their shepherd.

He was brown-haired and not very large. Hermann's heart bounded with a shock of joy. Brown curly hair, brown beard, grey eyes, standing on the grass, hands in pockets, quiet, aloof—it must be he!

" Alfred! " he cried.

The Englishman, for such was this nonchalant person who stood so firmly where he was not supposed to set his boots, turned round. He smiled in a very pleased way, and yet his greeting was undemonstrative. He did not even withdraw his hands from his pockets.

" Hullo, Hermann! " he said. " Is this your village, then? What luck! "

" Ja, ja! " said Hermann, longing to throw his arms round the older man's shoulders, but restrained, as he always had been, by something reserved in Alfred's manner, or in his character. Hermann never knew which it was.

" Well, well," said Alfred, at last holding out his hand. " Heil Hitler, Hermann."

Hermann hastily saluted and grasped the hand. He did not notice that Alfred had failed to salute. It would not have upset him if he had noticed. Englishmen were funny, informal, queer people altogether. And yet Hermann's two years in England when he had done his military training with the permanent army of occupation had been the happiest of his short life. At least, after he had met Alfred, a man of thirty then, a ground mechanic in one of the huge aerodromes on Salisbury Plain. Alfred was an interesting person to have for a friend. He was a technician and therefore had been allowed to learn to read. Hermann could not read, as when his military training should be finished he was going back to the land-work in Germany that had been his boyhood's labour. He never thought this extraordinary, that an Englishman should be able to read and that he, a Nazi, should be illiterate. It was part of the general plan, the Holy Plan of life in the German Empire. There were not enough Germans of suitable abilities to supply technicians for the whole Empire; some of the subject races must be taught to read. And they had nothing much to read but their technical books and the Hitler Bible. News was always broadcast. One didn't miss anything by not being able to read. But it was Alfred's type of mind that made him interesting to

Hermann, the contented rustic. Alfred was urban, quick-witted, a machine-man skilled and rejoicing in his skill; Hermann was slow-brained and bucolic, half-skilled, strong and rejoicing in his strength. In the army he had often pined for the land, and it was the more surprising that for Alfred's sake he had so often pined for the army in Germany.

"How's the farm-work going?" Alfred asked, when Hermann had done shaking his hand. "You look bigger than ever, mein Junker."

"*Get off the grass there!*" roared a harsh voice.

Hermann leaped, and Alfred walked.

"Bigger than ever," repeated Alfred, looking up at his young friend. "A fine German. You like the land as well as you did as a lad?"

"Oh, yes, yes," said Hermann slowly in English. "I like *that*. Do come on. Let's get away from all these people."

"You there!" said the bull's bellower, now on top of them. "What's your name? No, not you, Hermann. What's *your* name?"

"Alfred, E.W. 10762, English technician on pilgrimage to the Holy Places in Germany," said Alfred, holding himself a little more stiffly before this Nazi in authority, but still in a far from soldierly manner.

"Ach, Englander," said the Nazi, nodding in a sort of disgusted comprehension. "Let's see your pass, then," he added, in a milder manner.

Alfred showed it.

"All right. Remember now you're in Germany that when it says 'Keep off the Grass', that *exactly* is what it means. The grass round our churches wasn't put there for herds of Englishmen to gallop over. Verstehen?"

"Ja, Herr Unter-offizier."

"Heil Hitler!" said the Nazi, and saluted.

This time Alfred saluted in return.

"Let me see, you must be twenty-five now, Hermann," he went on as if there had been no interruption.

Hermann did not answer. So many memories were half painfully filling his mind—Alfred was so exactly the same—his curly short hair which would not grow even to touch his shoulders, his quiet level grey eyes, his nonchalant manner—all things Hermann had never really expected to see again,

though they had sometimes joked about Alfred coming on pilgrimage—and there had never been any German to take Alfred's place. Hermann frowned savagely and bit his lip. Alfred glanced at him and took his arm.

"All you Germans are so emotional," he murmured.

And Hermann, who had just heard the Knight declaim the Laws of Society, which put him, Hermann, as far above Alfred as a man is above a woman, muttered in broken German, "I never thought I should—see you again. It's only now I realise how lonely I've been—since."

"Let's go for a walk," suggested Alfred. "Or have you got to go back to work? I'd forgotten the name of your village and your number, and couldn't remember anything but the district, Hohenlinden. But I should have dug you up somewhere."

"I needn't go back till this evening," said Hermann, recovering himself. "Have you got any food with you?"

"Yes, in my sack. I left it by the wall over there."

"Is there enough for me, too? You ought to have taken your sack into the porch."

They were talking now as they used to, each in his own language, understanding, but not straining themselves to form foreign words.

"What, in *Germany*?" asked Alfred, raising his eyebrows. "Common thieves in a German church enclosure?"

"Ach, boys, you know. It's there all right."

"But, Hermann, are you very hungry? Shall we go back to your farm and get some more for you? Your government, though paternal, and I've nothing to complain of, doesn't allow for luxuries, or more than one man's food."

"If *you* don't mind, 'nearly nowt' is enough for me," said Hermann, laughing delightedly as he put the sack on his own broad shoulders. "Do you remember the man you called the Tyke? Everything was nearly nowt. And why was he called the Tyke? What is Tyke? I've forgotten everything."

"A generic name for Yorkshiremen. Well now, Hermann, don't tell me you've forgotten *my* generic name. I shall be upset."

"Ach, nein, nein!" cried Hermann. "Du bist der Moonraecher!"

"That's right, the man who rakes der Mond out of die

Pond. But why? But why, I don't know. That's one of the things I'd *like* to know. Those old names. Hermann, let's go and bathe. It's very hot."

"We'll go in the woods. I know a lovely pool. I've been there sometimes at night, Alfred, and if any Wiltshire men had been there they'd have set to raking as fast as we do in the Knight's garden when he's in a hurry for something tc be sown and has given us no notice. It's all open, the pool. The moon shines right in. But I was always by myself. Alfred, are you really glad to see me?" Hermann said uncertainly, a little wistfully.

"Very glad," said Alfred seriously. But still Hermann felt something reserved in Alfred's manner, and on their walk to the woods he was silent and withdrawn.

"A queer people," the young German thought, after he had given up trying to make Alfred talk. "No one really understands them, and yet plenty of Germans like them." He knew that of all the numerous foreign stations where the Knights had to put in administrative and religious service, the English ones were the most generally popular. A Knight was only supposed to be absent from Germany for seven years. After that he governed a German district for two or three years, then he might be sent abroad again. There were plenty of Knights who having served once in England would pull all possible wires to get sent there again. This Anglophile feeling was not encouraged, but nothing seemed to damp it down. Of course some Germans hated the English, and never forgot that to them belonged the disgrace of being the last rebels against the might and holiness of the German Empire. There had been, a hundred years before, an English, Scottish and Welsh rebellion, a hopeless affair, sporadic and unorganised and very easily crushed by the Knights and the army of occupation. After it, by order from Berlin, one-tenth of the male population had been coldly executed. The permanent army of occupation had been enlarged (though the former one had proved amply big enough to deal with men who had no artillery and no aeroplanes) and the number of Knights had been increased, giving each Knight a smaller district. Since then there had been no trouble. But the English had remained just as queer as ever, sloppy and casual and yet likeable. He had once overheard a Knight say that

they were fundamentally irreligious, and that that was what was the matter. They were conventional enough in their treatment of women and Christians; their women (and probably their Christians) were exactly like any others. But —Hermann suddenly caught himself wishing that Alfred was a German. Not because he would or might then be able to see more of him. His emotions had received a clarification owing to the shock of suddenly meeting his friend, and he now knew what he certainly never had *known* before, that he admired Alfred more than any other man in the world. "I look up to him," he thought uncomfortably, "as if he were a Knight. I do. I can't help it. I ought to be able to help it. Because he's not even a Nazi, not even my equal, only an Englishman. So I'm as high above him as a man's above a woman. That is absurd. Yes, yes, it is utterly absurd. *It's not true!*" At this first wholly conscious break in his racial-superiority feeling Hermann was shocked and at the same time excited. There was a thrill in the mental acceptance of what he had always felt, that Alfred was not only older and more experienced than himself, but a higher type of man. That his Englishness made no difference. Of course, Hermann thought, trying to excuse his treachery to Germany, Alfred is a *special* Englishman. They're not all like him. But he knew this was no excuse at all. You couldn't admit exceptions in the divine doctrine of race and class superiority. It must be in the Holy Blood. The blood of Germans or of Knights. If *all* Knights, all the numerous descendants of the original three thousand Teutonic Knights consecrated by Hitler, were not superior by *birth*—if there could be exceptions among Nazis, raising one here, one there, to a level with the Knights, why then a Knight *as* a Knight might not be superior at all. And he must be, *all* must be, or Society would crack. Hermann had pondered so deeply and with such painful unaccustomed logic that he felt a whirling in his head. He turned to watch Alfred walking, grave and aloof, at his side. They never could walk in step. Alfred was so much shorter. Sometimes Hermann would deliberately shorten his stride for a little way until it got too tiring, but Alfred would never try to lengthen his by a quarter of an inch. He didn't mind being out of step. It was a typical English untidiness. Hermann was overcome by a wave

of emotion in which love, irritation, fear and a wild sort of spiritual excitement all mingled. He felt as if anything might happen at any moment. He had forgotten the interesting chorister as if he had never existed. And Alfred, apparently, had forgotten him.

" Alfred ! " Hermann suddenly yelled in his ear, " if you don't take some notice of me I'll knock you down ! "

Alfred started slightly.

" Ja, Herr Nazi," he said disagreeably.

Hermann turned and left him, making away back down the path along which they had come. Alfred ran after him, grinning, and caught him by the arm.

" Come, come," he said, " I will talk presently. Don't be angry. But you are a Nazi, you know."

" It's the way you say things," grumbled Hermann, still flushed with anger. But he allowed himself to be turned round.

" Germans shouting at me always has some kind of bad effect," said Alfred apologetically. " Either my leg muscles go wrong and won't act or I let things drop."

" And what happens when an Englishman shouts at you ? " asked Hermann.

" I blow him away. Hermann, have you any sons ? "

This was such an unexpected question that Hermann gaped. Then he said, " No."

" I have three now," Alfred said. " I had two when you were in England. Now I have another. But they're very young. One's older. One is seventeen. Why haven't you got any? Have you had bad luck and had girls ? "

" No. I can't stick women."

" But as you are a Nazi, if you haven't had any children at all by the time you're thirty you'll be punished. It's only the subject races who are allowed to omit begetting children if they like."

" I've got five years yet."

" But you ought to have come round to a normal attitude towards women at twenty-five. Don't leave it too long, Hermann. You may find yourself in difficulties."

" I can't stand them ! " said Hermann violently. " Oh, for Hitler's sake don't let's talk about women ! "

" All right. But I'm glad I'm a normal man. I've got a use for my sons. Women are neither here nor there."

" They're too much there," said Hermann, misunderstanding the English idiom.

" Oh, well, never mind," said Alfred, and he fell silent again.

But when they had bathed and frugally fed, and were lying in delicious ease in the shade of a huge tree listening to the sound of water falling, Alfred suddenly said, " Hermann, I am going to destroy your Empire."

Hermann chuckled sleepily. A stupid thoroughly English joke in Alfred's quiet rather deep voice was better than anything really funny from anyone else.

" How ? "

" The way the acorn made this big oak."

" It was probably planted as a sapling. All this piece of the forest was planted."

" Well, like one of the oaks in the Holy Forest, the German Forest, the nameless one."

" Have you been there yet ? "

" As far as I was allowed to go in, being only an Englishman. It's a lovely place. So hushed and silent. A man could think there."

" A man is supposed not to think, but to feel there. I suppose you'll be *thinking* when you see the Sacred Aeroplane. Or have you already been to Munich ? "

" Not yet. Can't you get leave for a day and come with me ? "

" I might. I'll try, anyhow. Our Knight, the Knight of Hohenlinden, is our own Knight."

" How do you mean ? "

" He's our own family Knight, von Hess. He owns all the land and villages and towns for miles round and he lives in *our* village."

" Oh. That sounds hopeful for leave. Well, I shall still be thinking when I see the Aeroplane, partly technically no doubt, though I'm acquainted with the design of the thing from the Little Models, and as far as I can make out there's been no real change in aeroplanes at all. But I shall be thinking partly about the destruction of the German Empire. Of course I am only the acorn, you understand. The oak will grow out of me. I myself shall be dead."

Hermann grew faintly uneasy. He *must* be joking—and yet—" You'll be dead very soon if you blaspheme in public."

" You needn't wait for that. You can report my blasphemy."

Hermann rose on his elbow.

" Alfred—you—you aren't at all *serious*, are you? "

" Deadly."

Hermann knew it was so.

" But then you've gone mad."

" Well, have I? Look at me, Hermann. Am I mad? "

" No, you're not. But then—all this—why do you tell *me* about it? "

" You'd never betray me, surely? "

Hermann said earnestly, " I could, Alfred. You're making a mistake. I might kill myself afterwards, but I can see even you killed, for Germany."

" Well, that's very right and proper, but actually it doesn't matter. You can go and say I've said such and such, but even though I'm an Englishman you'd have to produce a wee bit of proof to have me killed. I should only perhaps have my pilgrimage cut short and be sent out of the country. I'm going to tell you all about it."

" But *why*? "

" The time has come for me to know how the thing strikes a decent ordinary lad of a Nazi. Do you, first of all, understand why an Englishman should want to destroy this Empire? "

" Not if he believes in Hitler. There's no reason at all."

" Perhaps some Englishmen don't believe in Hitler."

" *Alfred!* Don't you—you can't mean *you* don't believe Hitler is God? "

" Lots of us don't," said Alfred calmly.

" Then the Knight was right," muttered Hermann.

" What Knight? "

" Von Eckhardt. He said Englishmen were fundamentally irreligious. He didn't seem to mind."

" Perhaps he knew it didn't matter—from his point of view. Von Eckhardt was always more on the administrative than the religious side, wasn't he ? Armed rebellion against Germany will always fail."

" I'm glad you realise that," said Hermann with some relief.

" Because," Alfred went on, " the Germans are the greatest exponents of violence the world has ever seen—except, of course, the Japanese. They are the greatest soldiers—except, of course, the Japanese."

" We're just as good as the Japanese! "

" Then why don't you go and eat them up and convert the last heathen by force? The peace between the German Empire and the Japanese Empire has deafened everyone for more than seventy years."

" We're still getting ready."

" Well, I won't tease you. I don't want to have to fight the Japanese myself, because I've got something better to do, and I hope if there is another war that Germany will win."

" You are loyal to a certain extent, then? "

" My calculations are based on German character, not Japanese character. I don't know what that is—though it's probably got the same rotten spot! "

" Rotten spot! "

" Rotten spot, I said. Now, Hermann, are you interested, or are you just going to be violent? If you want to fight me, say so; if you want to listen, be quiet."

" I *ought* to fight you. Beat you, rather. You can't *fight* me, you're too small. Oh, all right, go on."

" It seems to me it must have been like this," Alfred said, turning over on his back again. " After the Twenty Years War, when Germany finally came out on top of everyone, the beaten nations must have been all damned tired. They'd tried to meet force with force and had failed, and were ashamed of themselves and humiliated, but worst of all completely exhausted. So, as it is a much better thing to be beaten by God than by a company of men, however large and well armed, they all started to believe in Hitler, the divine representation of victorious force. It was suggestion working on exhaustion. Here and there, as the nations started to recover a little, there were rebellions, armed rebellions (or quarter-armed rebellions), always failures, but the nations went on being Hitlerians. They were rebelling against their Knights or the army of occupation (most of them), not against the

German *idea*. They were too tired still to do without religion, and they still wanted the appeasement of being beaten by God, not only by men."

"But you weren't *civilised* then," said Hermann. "You were only savage tribes, you and the French and the Russians and everyone. There is no shame in being beaten by civilised men."

"Well, there is a great darkness about our origins," Alfred admitted. "It's true we don't know quite what we were, say a hundred years before Hitler. But I believe we once had a great Empire ourselves."

"Nonsense. How could savages have had a great Empire? You didn't know how to build ships or anything."

"Why do so many of the Japanese subject races speak English? The Americans, the Canadians, the Australians, and some of your subject races too, the South Africans?"

"They were just English tribes, but all disconnected."

"I'm not sure of that, and I've got reasons for doubting other things you tell us, too. But never mind that. It's what *I* am now that matters, not what they were *then*. I am a man who knows that while armed rebellion against Germany must fail, there is another rebellion that *must succeed*."

"What?" asked Hermann breathlessly.

"The rebellion of disbelief. Your Empire is held together on the mind side of it by Hitlerism. If that goes, if people no longer believe Hitler is God, you have nothing left *but* armed force. And that can do nothing but kill people. You can't make them *re-believe* if they don't. And in the end, however many people you kill, so long as there are some to carry on, the scepticism will grow. And you can't ever kill all the unbelievers, because, though you can search a man's pockets or his house, you can't search his mind. You can never spot all the unbelievers. The scepticism will grow because it's a lively thing, full of growth, like an acorn. It will attack Germany in the end, Germans themselves will get sceptical about Hitler, and then your Empire will rot from within."

"It couldn't," said Hermann, under his breath.

"If Hitler is not God, there is no *reason* why Germany should rule Europe and Africa and part of Asia for ever. And if Hitler is God, why can't you beat the Japanese?"

"We shall. There's plenty of time."

"You've wasted your time. You had about five hundred years or so to beat the Japanese in, and all you've done is to have a series of completely indecisive wars. Air raids, and pinching bits of Russia away from each other and then losing them again. You've never looked like *really* beating the Japanese. And now you've hardly any time left at all. When I say no time, I mean you've only got about another seventy years. And you've had seventy years of peace."

"Well, and suppose your madman's dream was a reality, and the Empire did—did break up, would you like it any better to be ruled by the Japanese?"

"We shouldn't be. We don't believe the Japanese Emperor is God, you see. You can't rule men permanently except through an idea. *Men*, I say. You can rule boys—and perhaps Germans. Perhaps not. But as no German ever has been or ever can be a man it's difficult to say."

Hermann leaped to his feet, but, as Alfred did not, he didn't quite know what to do. Suddenly, beside himself with racial fury and a strange unacknowledged personal terror, he kicked Alfred savagely. Alfred then did get up, but slowly and calmly. His control was perfect.

"Come on then," he said, taking off his coat. "If violence it must be. If I don't go for your eyes, will you leave mine alone?"

Hermann, red and trembling, looked at Alfred's eyes and knew with despair and perplexity that the fight was off before it had started. The mere thought of gouging out Alfred's grey eyes made him sick, though he had watched without a tremor many a fight that had ended that way. And apart from eyes, he couldn't touch him, not even to give him a light flick. He had kicked him, but now he could do nothing more.

"Sit down again, Junker," Alfred said kindly.

"Why can't you leave me alone?" Hermann said thickly. He sat down, however.

"It's important," Alfred said. "Promise not to kick me again, or I shall have to sit the other way round. Two on the same place might lame me."

"Why do you say no German is a man?" asked Hermann, unable to attend to anything but the insult.

"They don't get a chance to be. It's the system. Look here, Hermann, what *is* a man? A being of pride, courage, violence, brutality, ruthlessness, *you* say. But all those are characteristics of a male animal in heat. A man must be something more, surely?"

"He's able to think, and control the violence and direct it."

"So can a woman. If a woman wants to beat her daughter and the girl's up a tree she doesn't run round and round roaring like a mad cow, she waits till the girl comes down for food. So there's nothing particularly manly in that."

"A man's able to die for an idea."

"So is a boy of twelve. Any German boy would go into the army at twelve and go to a war if he were allowed to. No, Hermann, you'll never get what a man is because you don't know. I mean the real difference there is that divides men from beasts, women and boys. A man is a mentally independent creature who thinks for himself and believes in himself, and who knows that no other creature that walks on the earth is superior to himself in anything *he can't alter*."

"What? I don't understand."

"It's difficult, I know. But I mean I might meet an Englishman who was more independent and spiritually stronger than I was. Then I should say, 'There's a better man *now*.' And I'd make myself as good. But you see a Knight coming along and you say, 'That man's a better man *by blood*. He's superior, whatever I do, for ever and ever; I must salute him, now and always.' Another time you see an Englishman coming along, and you say, 'That man's inferior by blood, I must kick him.'" Alfred looked round with a grin.

"Anyone would have. And I didn't kick you for being an Englishman but for being insulting. And it's no good talking, for Blood is a Mystery, and a thing no non-German can understand. It's ours."

"Yes, and as long as Blood is a Mystery none of you will ever be men. You hide behind the Blood because you don't really like yourselves, and you don't like yourselves because you can't be men. If even some of you were men the rest would like themselves better. But it's a circle. If there's going to be Blood there'll be no men—never. And while

you're still boys, you'll think that violence and brutality and physical courage make the whole of a man. You'll have no souls, only bodies. Only men have souls."

"Do you mean, Alfred——" Hermann spoke calmly because under Alfred's influence he really was trying to think, and he found he could not be shocked or angry and have anything left in his mind to think with. "Do you mean that you believe in *softness*? In gentleness and mercy and love and all those foul things?"

"Don't you believe in love, Hermann?"

"Oh, friendship," Hermann muttered, turning his eyes away from Alfred's quizzical glance. "Yes. That's different. But *gentleness*?"

"It must be right because Hitler said it was wrong," said Alfred promptly. "I reject the Creed entirely as I reject Hitler and the Hitler Book and Germany and the Empire."

"And God the Thunderer?"

"I reject the idea that God lives in Germany or likes Germans better than anyone else. God, God, oh, well, I don't know. I mean I don't know *always*. But *men-gods*, no. No man is any more the son of God than I am. If Hitler is God, so am I. But it's obviously more sensible to think neither of us is. More modest too."

"What do you think Hitler was, then? Or do you deny His existence altogether?"

"I expect he was a great German soldier and a very brave man. But he wasn't independent, because he had to hide behind Blood. He wasn't *a man*. Now if you read the Hitler Book carefully—oh, I forgot, you can't read. Well, there's very little of it that's Hitler's own sayings."

"How do you know?"

"I've had nothing much to read except technical books and the Hitler Book, and I'm fond of reading, so I've studied it very carefully with a mind unclouded by belief in it as divine. It's quite obvious that a lot of the teaching has been put in later. And even all the Blood stuff, you don't know whether that was Hitler himself or a lot of people. It's an unsatisfactory book. Something wrong somewhere. It leaves you empty."

"Because you're not a German, not even a Hitlerian."

"Maybe. I wish," said Alfred, with a sigh of immense

desire, " that I had some other books to compare it with. There's so much darkness. So much mistiness. Nothing but legends. England's packed with legends. I expect all the subject countries are. It gives the people something to talk about besides their work or their wages or the misdoings of their Knight. There's a legend about a great English Leader called Alfred, who had a huge statue in Winchester (you remember Winchester? we went there once together); it was as big as the hill behind, and he had a knife and a shrapnel helmet, but he wasn't only a soldier, because he wrote a book. Now if I had *that* to compare with Hitler's! And a man called Alfred is to deliver England from the Germans."

" So your dream is based on your name? "

" I'm not only going to deliver *England* from the Germans. I'm going to deliver the world," said the junior Alfred with a perfectly modest air.

" What about the Japanese? "

" Oh, —— the Japanese. When the German idea cracks we can all get together and crack their idea. It's only the same one a bit different, I feel sure. But don't you see, young Hermann, I'm not so mad as I seem, nor so vain. I am the repository, the place where a very old numan idea is kept. There must be some idea that's the opposite of the German one, and it must be as old as the German idea. Do you see? And so it's not *me* that is going to do all this, but the idea. And if you kill me it'll go to other men."

" And where's it been these last seven hundred years? "

" It's been homeless perhaps, for want of a place. Or resting. Or hibernating. But never, never dead. What is seven hundred years? Why, one man can live through a hundred. Seven hundred years is no time at all. History is only just begun—again."

" What do you mean? " Hermann asked.

" I don't know," Alfred said. " I'm going to sleep. Wake me up when we ought to be going somewhere or doing something."

Chapter Three

Hermann did not go to sleep. He watched Alfred. The slow even rise and fall of his chest, an occasional flicker in his eyelids, the relaxed look of his strong rather small hands, all gave the young man an intense quiet pleasure. He did not think at first at all of what Alfred had been saying. It was so wonderful to have him there, the real bodily Alfred, instead of the weakening gradually blurring mind-image he had held through the last five years. But after a while, a long while, feeling gave place to thinking, and his thinking was no longer bound by the hard heavy grip Alfred's mind had on his, and on his whole personality. When Alfred was awake Hermann thought almost like an individual, though a very weak individual with a longing for personal dependency, but now Alfred was alseep with his heavy influence relaxed Hermann started to think like a Nazi. A dreadful idea took shape in his mind. Alfred was a self-confessed traitor, an infidel, a blasphemer, an enemy more vicious and inveterate than any Japanese. And more dangerous. If there really was in England a collection of men of the same way of thinking—of course they could never *do* anything—but things might happen—Hermann didn't know what—and then Alfred must be the head of this ridiculous but horrible mind-conspiracy against Germany, against Hitler—yes, there was no doubt he would be the Leader. For a few moments Hermann left off Nazi-thinking and went back to personal feeling. Oh, if only Alfred had been by some miracle born a German and of knightly class, how he, Hermann, would have adored to serve him, to be his slave, to set his body, his strong bones and willing hard muscles, between Knight Alfred and all harm—to die for him. . . . Hermann's phantasy faded in a heat of shame. Even to think of an Englishman being a Knight was a sin against the Blood. No, but Hermann's duty, his obvious German duty here and now, was to kill Alfred where he lay. To stop his brain, his mouth, his wicked treacherous heart with one swift stroke of his knife on which was inscribed *Blood and Honour*. Alfred's blood, steaming out over the old last year's oak leaves, puddling and soaking the sacred soil of

Germany, was the only thing that could save Hermann's honour. If he betrayed him—but how betray a traitor?—he might not be believed. Alfred's whole idea, unless heard from his own lips, was too absurd. It was absurd, anyway, but it had a dreadful *sound* of sense in Alfred's cool voice. And in that same cool voice he would deny everything, and simply state that this young Nazi was mad, and that his insanity was patent in the extraordinary phantasies he had managed to invent. And Alfred's record would be looked up and found to be excellent. It must be because he had been given a pilgrimage. No, that was no good, but if he *killed* Alfred, then there was certainty. No German would hesitate for a minute. No German would condemn him, knowing all the facts. To stab a sleeping man, to stab one's own friend, the man from whom Hermann had had nothing but comfort and aid and kindness—but where the welfare of Germany was concerned there was no friendship, no personal love; no gratitude could exist in opposition. Had not that lesson been driven into Hermann's childish mind ever since he could understand speech? *Nothing is dishonourable, nothing is forbidden, nothing is evil, if it is done for Germany and for Hitler's sake.* Well then he must do it quickly before Alfred woke up. Alfred's helplessness in sleep was inhibiting, but at any rate he himself—his soul (but then he had no soul) was temporarily absent. To kill Alfred awake—no, that would be impossible. This he *might* do. But as Hermann drew the knife from the sheath he knew he would fail in resolution. He could take the knife out, he could read the holy German words on it, he could remember his Oath taken at eighteen when he entered the Army, he could watch the sun-splashes flickering on the bright steel, he could imagine it dulled with blood, his duty done, his oath fulfilled, his friend lying dead—but he could not, he *could not* make his arm obey him to strike downwards into Alfred's body. Personal love did still exist, and Alfred even sleeping had still a stranglehold on Hermann's will. So, he was a traitor, a bad German; he was *soft*. Hermann put the knife away and sat in a trance of shame.

Suddenly not far away a terrific clamour broke out: a small boy screaming, madly, desperately, for help, another boy laughing—"Noisy little devils," Hermann thought,

with half a mind to go and kick them for making such a row; a bit of hazing, he supposed—but then—*was* the hazed one a boy? There was something thin, a light shrill sound in the vigorous yells. It was a girl! Then they must be both Christian girls, for it was miles from any Women's Quarters. And why should one girl laugh and another scream? Was it possible that girls should bully each other as the noble sex did? Hermann was disgusted at the idea of Christians being so close to him, and had it not been for his deep repugnance, which amounted to a fear of women, he would have got up there and then to drive them off. Alfred slept on unmoved. The screams went on and on, there was a crashing of undergrowth, the other girl, the older laughing one—Hermann jumped to his feet. *Was* that older one a girl? There was a queer timbre about the laugh and the occasional words, more like a boy whose voice is near breaking. A boy! Hermann hurled himself towards the sound with the impetuosity of a mad bull, and there in a little clearing he came upon the angel-faced golden-haired chorister making a determined attempt to rape a well-grown little girl of about twelve. The child had not reached the age of submission and was therefore within her rights in putting up a sturdy resistance. And as Hermann stood for an instant, watching them rolling and tumbling, clawing, kicking and biting, he caught sight of a large red cross on the breast of the little girl's jacket. So it was a Christian! Hermann's whole body filled with delicious thundering warming floods of rage. He loathed the boy for being even interested in girls—with his lovely face, his unmasculine immaturity—Hermann was physically jealous; he was shamed; he had not killed Alfred, but here was something at last that he could smash and tear and make bleed and utterly destroy. He reached the struggling young animals with two jumps and seizing the boy by his long yellow hair he pulled him off the girl with such force that his neck was nearly broken. He then picked him up and threw him with every ounce of strength in his body at the nearest tree trunk. The boy, perhaps unfortunately for himself, hit the tree with his shoulder, not with his head. The little Christian girl got up and ran away, clutching at her disordered garments. Her passage was almost noiseless; she vanished in the wood like a wild animal. The boy came staggering back towards

Hermann, not with any heroic intention of putting up a fight, but because he had not enough sense left to run away from him. He was used enough to rough treatment, but the wrench on his neck and the crash against the tree had been too much even for his hard young body. Hermann jumped at him again, and with his fists beat him into insensibility. He took special pleasure in spoiling his face. When the boy was lying unconscious at his feet he started to kick him, in the ribs, on the head, anywhere, and would most probably have left him, not unconscious, but dead, had not Alfred, who had at last awakened and come to the scene, intervened.

" Stop that, Hermann! You'll kill him if you kick his head with those heavy boots. Well now, I thought I heard something."

Hermann had stopped on the word of command. He looked at Alfred. He was red-faced, sweating, wild-eyed, a grim sight. The boy was a grim sight too. His face was already so swollen as to be unrecognisable. Alfred picked up a lock of his hair.

" It's that boy who sang so well in church this morning. I know him by his hair. Hermann, you monster, you've pulled a lot of it out. He was such a pretty boy."

" He won't be again," Hermann growled, and spat on the ground.

Alfred was going over the body. " Not dead," he said. " Collar-bone broken, probably ribs, internal injuries perhaps. His skull doesn't seem to be *broken*.. He must have an iron head. What shall we do with him? "

" Leave the —— lying till he rots! " said Hermann viciously.

" What made you attack him? "

" He was trying to rape a Christian girl. I wonder you didn't hear her scream."

" H'm. A Christian? Well, of course it would be a Christian. I did hear something, but I think it was the boy moaning when I woke up. Well, let's get him back to the water and try chucking some on him."

" I won't touch him."

" Then I must take him myself."

Alfred arranged the boy's clothes decently and picked him up. But when he got him to the stream the cool water with

which Alfred bathed his head did not bring him back to consciousness. He lay like a corpse except that he was warm, and still breathed.

" We shall have to carry him somewhere," said Alfred at last, looking up.

" To the lock-up in the village."

" Oh, don't be a fool. Whatever he did he'll have to go to hospital before he can be punished, or even tried. Come, get him on to my back if you won't help with the transport."

" I won't touch him," said Hermann again, with sullen obstinacy. " It's nothing to do with you. If I choose to leave him here it's my business. I tell you, he was trying to rape a Christian, and even if she'd been a German she was under age. It was quite a little girl."

" I suppose you aren't at all annoyed because the *boy* is under age? " asked Alfred sarcastically. " Because he's a pretty lad who ought only to be interested in *men*? "

" You can do what you like and go where you please, I'm going home! " Hermann said furiously. " Heil Hitler to you and good-bye."

" Heil a donkey! " said Alfred, rather annoyed. " I don't see why even a Nazi should be such a stupid savage as you are just now."

Here the boy created a diversion by trying to sit up. He fell back with a stifled moan, and out of the corner of one hideously swollen eye looked at Hermann.

" Do you feel better? " Alfred asked in German.

The boy painfully turned the bit of eye he could see with to Alfred.

" Yes," he whispered.

" Can you stand? "

" I might."

They got him to his feet, and this time Hermann did help, impelled by a very sober glance from Alfred. The boy made no sound except a little grunting, though the process of getting up must have been torture.

" Can you walk? " Alfred asked him.

" My legs are all right," whispered the boy through his swollen lips. " I expect I can."

Alfred made a pad from the spare clothes in his sack to

go under the boy's arm where the collar-bone was broken, and strapped the elbow with his belt. The strapping pressed on the boy's broken ribs. He gasped, but said nothing.

"Now, march, my lad," Alfred said, taking him by the comparatively sound arm. "We've got about two miles to walk to the main road unless we meet a cart."

The boy stopped to be sick, and after the intense pain of the vomiting had to lie down again for a little while. Then he was helped up, and walked along fairly well, supported by Alfred. He said nothing. Occasionally small grunts and sighs escaped him.

"German boys are marvellously tough," Alfred said in English to Hermann.

"This one'll need it," said Hermann grimly. "He's not through yet."

"You've got no witness," Alfred observed. "Christians aren't allowed to give evidence against Nazis. Or even against Englishmen."

"You're a witness."

"Indeed I'm not. I don't know there was a girl there at all except from you."

"He'll confess all right. If he doesn't I'll give him another lamming later on."

"In violence, in brutality, in bloodshed, in ruthlessness, *and* in self-deceit," murmured Alfred. "You don't care if a child is raped. You don't really care if a Nazi has to do with a Christian. You beat this boy because you were jealous and angry. The boy is foul because he's been brought up to be so, but he has been at least honest. You're not even that."

"He's not brought up to defile himself with Christians."

"Christians," said Alfred, "are quite curiously decent people. I know some. *English* Christians."

"*What?*" cried Hermann. "You know some?"

"Yes. Wouldn't you like me to repeat that in German? You'd have a witness then."

But the boy was not in a condition to take notice of what was said, even had the conversation been in a language he could understand. He took each step with agony, gritting together what remained of his teeth to prevent groans coming

out of his mouth. He did not even find it odd that his aid on this *via dolorosa* should be the arm of a foreigner. He was in a nightmare of pain and shame, not shame for his cruelty and lust, but at being caught by a Nazi with a Christian. His life it seemed was finished, and yet only that morning he had been so happy singing (he adored singing) amid the admiring glances of men. Now all men would despise him, no one would love him any more, and his voice must very soon break, anyway. Meanwhile, set one foot somehow in front of the other, and don't groan. He managed two miles, in a condition in which a man of a less physically resolute race could hardly have moved a hundred yards, and then fainted. But now they were nearly out of the woods and the main road to the village was only a little way off. Alfred put the boy on his back and carried him to the road. They waited till a lorry came along.

"Where's he to go to?" asked the driver, looking at the mangled body with the usual brutal indifference to pain or bloody sights.

"The hospital or his own home," said Alfred.

"The lock-up," said Hermann. "Oh, dump him down anywhere in the village. We don't know where the little brute lives. He was in church there this morning and that's all I know about him."

"Sling him up on the sacks, then. I can't have him in front here, flopping all over the place."

The lorry was a small one-man affair with a tiny little driving-cab, and no place for a second man. Alfred and Hermann put the boy up on the hard full sacks, and the driver went on. After it had started Alfred let out a yell: "Stop! Stop!" But the driver either didn't hear or wouldn't stop.

"What's the matter?" Hermann asked, in sulky curiosity.

"Why, I ought to have gone with him."

"You're very tender of that boy," Hermann said suspiciously. "You saw him in church too, of course."

"Oh, shut up, Hermann. I'm sick of you. The lad's got my only jersey under his arm and my only belt round his elbow. When I get to the village he may have been sent on to a hospital in Munich or anywhere. I can't afford to lose clothes. *I'm* not a Knight owning land and factories and

ships and private aeroplanes. *I* don't dress in blue silk and eat turkey every day. A jersey *is* a jersey to me."

"Oh, I suppose you think a Knight ought not to own land now?"

"I think a lot of things," said Alfred, walking very fast towards the village. "But I'm not going to talk about them now. Are you coming back to the village? Where do you live?"

"I work on the Knight's home farm. I've got a room by myself now over the cowshed. You can share it for to-night if you like."

The invitation was not gracefully given, but Alfred accepted it in a friendly way. They went on to the village in silence. When they got to the parade-ground they saw a small knot of men gathered in one corner. The lorry was not there, but all the men were looking at something on the ground.

"That's our boy probably," said Alfred. "Why don't they take him into a house?"

They went over to the group and found that it was indeed centred round the wounded boy. He was in a bad state, still faint or in a coma, and bleeding a little from the mouth.

"I thought so," Alfred muttered in English. "You've smashed him up inside somewhere. We oughtn't to have made him walk."

But he knew he couldn't suggest anything to this knot of Germans. They'd soon shut up the foreigner if he started taking charge. A Nazi official arrived presently, not hurrying exactly, but walking at a brisk pace. One of the other men had fetched him.

"Who's this lad?" he asked.

"No one knows. He's a stranger."

Someone said, "The Knight must know him if no one else does."

"Why?"

"Because he sang the solos in church this morning and the Knight arranges the music himself."

"It's a hospital case," said the Nazi official, who had experience of the results of brutal fights. "Fritz, go and telephone for the ambulance. How did he get like this?"

"I beat him," said Hermann.

"Why?"

"I'd prefer to make a deposition before the Knight's Marshal."

"Against him, this boy?"

"Yes."

"Oh, very well. But why you're such a bloody fool you can't see what a boy of that age can stand and what he can't —ach, Herr Marshal!"—this apologetically to a man who had been trying to attract his attention.

"Our highly born the Knight Friedrich von Hess desires you to tell me why this group is gathered here."

It was the Knight's Marshal, a Nazi of great importance in the district, who had happened to be passing across the parade-ground with his noble master. A little way off the Knight stood, too dignified to come nearer in case the group had something trivial as its centre. He stood leaning on his black staff of office with a graceful and somewhat bored air. His black cloak hung in soft folds from his shoulders; his head was bare, and his still thick silvery-gleaming hair lifted and fell a little in the gentle wind.

"Tell the noble one, please, that it's a boy hurt. We don't know who he is."

The Marshal carried back the message, and the Knight then approached. All the men were standing at attention. They saluted, and stood more stiffly than before, if that were possible.

"At ease," said the Knight absently. He looked down at the boy, not greatly interested at first, then with close scrutiny.

"Hitler!" he said. "What savage barbarian has done this?"

"I did, my lord," said Hermann, a note of hurt surprise in his voice.

"This is the very best soprano singer from the church of the Holy Teutonic Knights in Munich, and you've broken his chest by the look of it. Well, his voice would have cracked soon, I suppose. Have you sent for the ambulance, Adalbert?"

"Yes, sir. I've sent a man to telephone."

"He must have every care, though I don't suppose it'll be any good. He'll either die or his voice will break before he

recovers. It was unfortunate he came here for his holiday. Hermann, fall out."

Hermann went a little way from the other men and stood again at attention. Alfred went with him.

"You were not ordered to fall out," said the Knight.

"No, my lord, but——"

"Then go back."

Alfred had to go.

"Hermann, why did you beat that boy half to death?" the Knight asked.

"Sir, may I make a deposition before the Marshal?"

"Against the boy?"

"Yes, sir."

The Knight meditated.

"I think you had better come and make it before me," he said. "Who is that Englishman?"

"A man I knew when I was on military service in England, sir."

"Was he there when this whatever it is you've been doing took place?"

"Yes, sir. Partly."

"Then bring him to the Court-room with you, at once."

Hermann saluted and went back to Alfred.

"Come on," he said savagely.

"Where to?"

"We've got to go to the Court-room and *he* wants to hear the deposition."

"Naturally. If the boy recovers and hasn't lost his voice they'll try to hush it up. Chief singer at the H.T.K. in Munich! You have cracked a nightingale. I've heard them on the broadcasts in England. What a pity you aren't a musical German."

"He can't hush it up," said Hermann sulkily. "That boy will never sing there again however much he lives and his voice doesn't break. I'm glad."

"Is your Knight a religious or a musical Knight?"

"Of course he's religious. Oh, yes, he's very musical too. But he can't prevent me making any deposition. And when he hears what it is of course he won't want to," added Hermann defiantly.

"It'll be interesting to see. But I've been aware for a

long time that the one crack in your armoured tank blood-ethic, the only place you get any air through, is music."

Hermann used an impolite word meaning nonsense.

They waited in the Court-room for a little while, standing rigidly to attention, until the Knight came in and sat down in the big raised seat. He took a pen in his hand and put a piece of paper before him.

"The oath, Hermann."

Hermann swore on all sorts of sacred things and his honour as a German to speak the truth, then blurted out, "Sir, he was trying to rape a Christian girl of not more than thirteen."

The Knight's pen dropped from his hand. He picked it up again and said calmly, "Any witness besides you?"

"Well——" Hermann began, and looked at Alfred.

"Take the foreigner's oath," the Knight said.

Alfred began the oath in English, then stopped.

"I understand English. Go on."

The oath taken, the Knight asked, "Were you a witness of the attempted rape?"

"No, sir."

"Then what were you a witness of?"

"Hermann beating the boy, sir."

"Could you swear a rape had been attempted?"

"No, sir. It looked as if it might have been."

"Could you swear it was a Christian girl?"

"I never heard or saw the girl at all."

The Knight sighed gently.

"Well, Hermann, I will take your deposition, but if the boy does not admit it there is no proof."

"He can't deny it, sir," said Hermann sullenly.

"Are you certain it was a Christian girl?" the Knight asked sharply.

"It couldn't have been any other kind of girl, sir. It was at least three miles from any Women's Quarters."

"That does not make certainty. The younger girls do sometimes escape from the Women's Quarters and wander about until they are found and taken back. They get lost and wander for miles. And twelve or thirteen years old is just the right age. They are old enough then to be out of the direct personal control of their mothers and not old enough to

have much idea of their duties as women. It might very well have been a German girl."

"My lord, I saw her cross!" said Hermann with deep indignation tempered in its expression by his respect for the Knight.

"What were they doing—rolling, tumbling, fighting on the ground?" asked the Knight, unmoved.

"They were on the ground."

"And you can swear you saw a cross, not a red handkerchief in her jacket pocket or something of that kind?"

"I do swear it."

"It's a serious accusation," said the Knight. "Almost the gravest that one German can bring against another. There must be *absolute certainty*. Do you still want to make a deposition against this boy?"

Hermann hesitated. The will of the Knight was now set in its full force against the young Nazi's. He even began for the first time to be a shade doubtful of what he *had* seen. *Could* it have been anything but a red cross on the child's jacket? No, he was sure it was a cross. But the Knight didn't want the deposition made. Everything in Hermann told him to give up this impossible conflict and yield to the man who was his born superior, his officer, and the lord of the land. How could a mere Hermann run counter to the known wishes of a von Hess? No vindictiveness or wish to justify oneself could help now. Such motives had faded away under the Knight's steady gaze. But something not in Hermann, but in Alfred, who stood close beside him, almost touching his shoulder, made him pull himself together on the very edge of surrender. Alfred was telling him to stand firm and hold on to the truth.

"Yes, my lord," said Hermann, very respectfully. "I will make the deposition."

Von Hess, a man of remarkable psychic sensitiveness, was keenly interested in his defeat. He felt no anger and not the smallest twinge of humiliation, he was too sure of his own standing, both public and personal, for that. For a Nazi to set his will against the known wishes of a Knight was shocking, but this particular nobleman was incapable of being shocked, owing to the secret and really shocking fact that he happened, in face of his supposed religion and the whole plan of his

society, to be an individual. But how had that ordinary clod Hermann—perhaps not quite *ordinary*, the Knight had noticed one or two queer little things about him, a glumness, a permanent overcast look—but a clod, for all that—how had he managed to develop such a stubborn power of resistance? The Knight's gaze shifted quickly from Hermann to Alfred. The men's eyes met fair and square. Alfred knew he was doing what ought to be a very risky thing, comparable perhaps with trying to stare down a vicious bull, but he also was very sensitive. He didn't know why, but he had a strong feeling that the risk was not what it seemed to be. He offered the Knight a long cool stare which said, as plainly as if he had spoken aloud, "Hermann is right, you are wrong." The Knight understood. It was not really Hermann who was opposing him; it was this stocky Englishman. The clod was animated by a fiery and most resolute spirit emanating from the unholy flesh and bones of a foreigner.

"Here," thought he, electrically thrilled, "in the face of all probability, is a man. Or is it in face of? Is it not rather exactly what one would expect, if one hadn't been foolish? Men among the English, or among the French, or among the Russians, but not, no of course not, among the Germans. This is a most fascinating thing that has happened." He meditated on it in unbroken placid silence, his eyes still in harmonious contact with Alfred's. The mysterious flow, strengthening and ebbing and strengthening again, of two human spirits which are joined in sympathy, passed between him and the Englishman, excluding Hermann entirely, leaving him in a dark uneasiness. Alfred thought, "This old German knows something. Something that has nothing to do with Blood and Mystery and Knightliness. By God, this old German knows everything. Ah, lucky stars that shine on me!"

When the silence had lasted for what seemed to Hermann like an hour, he shuffled his feet on the floor. It was a most undisciplined thing to do, as he was still standing at attention, but he could not help it. His feet shuffled themselves; it was like a sneeze or a cough, involuntary and uncontrollable. The Knight turned his head.

"Stand at ease," he said.

Hermann relaxed. Alfred was relaxed already. Soldierly poses did not suit exciting mental adventures.

" Well now, the deposition," the Knight said. " Speak slowly, Hermann."

The Knight wrote down the accusation unhurriedly in his beautiful rather small hand, making the German letters meticulously as if he loved them. It was a work of craft, as clear and even as printing, yet individual and full of character.

" You are no good as a witness," he said to Alfred, when he had it all down. " You *know* nothing at all, except that Hermann beat the boy, which will not be in dispute."

He then wrote down that this deposition of Hermann Ericsohn, H.D.B.H. 7285, against Rudolf Wilhelmsohn —— (space left for the boy's official number, which the Knight did not know), had been made before him, Freidrich von Hess zu Hohenlinden, Knight of the Holy German Empire, day, year. Heil Hitler. He blotted the last sheet and laid down the pen. He folded the deposition and put it in his inside tunic pocket.

" Hermann, attention! Salute. Right about. Half left. March."

Hermann strode out, his boots clumping on the wooden floor. The Knight fastened up his tunic and gazed pleasantly at Alfred.

" I should like to know more about you, Alfred Alfredson, E.W. 10762, English technician, of Bulfort Aerodrome, Salisbury Plain, province of England." The Knight prided himself a little on his memory. Alfred had rattled off all these details when he took the foreigner's oath. The Knight had forgotten none. " First, what are you doing here? Pilgrimage, I suppose."

" Yes, sir. I have been graciously permitted by the Holy German authority in England to travel in Germany for the space of one month to see the Holy Places. Heil Hitler. My expenses are all paid. Shall I show the highly-born my pass? "

" No. How long have you been here? "

" In Germany, a fortnight. In this place, nearly twenty-four hours."

" Have you been to Munich yet? "

" No, sir."

" The Command in England must think well of you to allow you a pilgrimage of a month at your age."

" The highly-born is very gracious. I suppose they do."

The Knight thought, " And what a set of blind donkeys and outrageous idiots they must be. He may be the world's best technician, but he's an unsatisfactory subject or I'll swallow my ring."

" What kind of technician are you? "

" A ground mechanic for aeroplanes of any kind."

" You understand aeroplanes thoroughly? "

" Yes, sir. I believe I could make one that would get up if I had the tools and the time."

" Have you been up? "

" On test, sir, many times."

Alfred's eyes gleamed, literally. He had a trick of opening them much wider when any thought excited him, so that more light struck on the balls. The Knight saw this gleam and a dangerous look that went with it. " Naturally," he thought, " it must annoy *a man* past everything not to be allowed to acquire certain skills he knows he could acquire. And yet if we let the dangerous men learn to control the dangerous weapons of war where should we be? This fellow goes up on test, and he watches the pilot like a hawk, no smallest movement escapes him. I'd bet anything he thinks he can fly an aeroplane, and *knows* he can fly a gyroplane." A very fantastic idea was forming in the Knight's mind. He thought of his secret, of his three dead sons, and of his father, who had all shared it with him at different times. All dead. No one now. And this man thought he could fly an aeroplane, but he probably couldn't. Leave it to God—if the Thunderer strikes—then good. If not, if there is no God, or if God doesn't mind, or if God is with that old von Hess, then——

When the Knight spoke again his manner had changed. It was the manner of an old man to a younger one of his own class.

" I know Salisbury and Bulfort and all that part well," he said. " A long time ago I was the Knight of Southampton. I used often to go up to the Knights' Table in Salisbury, and sometimes to Bulfort. For some reason they had much better food, and they were very pleasant men, the Army Knights. The Army always seems to get the best food, do what one will."

Alfred said nothing, but he thought, " *I* wouldn't mind

dining in the Knights' Table at Southampton for a change. I could do without Salisbury with an effort."

"And it was at Bulfort," the Knight went on, "that you met that young labourer, Hermann?"

"Yes, sir."

"And you made friends with him?"

"Yes, sir."

"He was a most fortunate youth," murmured the Knight.

"Sir?" said Alfred, not quite sure if he had heard correctly. He might have, but it was as well to make sure.

The Knight smiled.

"*I* know that it might be fortunate for a German youth to make friends with a certain kind of Englishman. Other people might see in it nothing but a condescension, caused by lust or idle curiosity or some other rather trivial motive, on the part of the German. But when I say he was a fortunate youth, perhaps I ought to add that he may be of all German youths the most deplorably unlucky. From one point of view, yes. Alfred, why is Hermann always so gloomy? He works on my own home farm, I am interested in the farm, I see him often. He's a good worker, he likes his work, and yet he's always overcast. Why is that?"

"I haven't seen him for five years, sir."

"You mean he could go on missing you for five years?"

"I don't know, sir. Perhaps in a vague way he could. He was pleased to see me."

"I can understand that. And you are aware of nothing in your friendship in England—nothing you told him, talked to him about—that might affect him adversely, even for five years?"

Alfred said very formally, "Most gracious highly-born, how could anything that an Englishman could talk of affect a Nazi adversely for five minutes?"

"Come, Alfred, there's no need for all this fencing, you know really there is not. I give you my Knightly word of honour——" The Knight stopped. Alfred was looking at him in a strange way, almost pitying.

"Sir, where there is no liberty of judgment, there is no honour. '*Nothing is dishonourable.*' If there is in a man's mind *any* overriding idea, *any* faith, that can make all things honourable, however cruel, however treacherous, however

untrue, in that man's soul there can be no honour. Your word as a Teutonic Knight is no good to me."

The Knight received this bitter stroke in silence, apparently unmoved. For an instant the old hot imperious blood leapt up, thundering in his ears, trying to drown with its clamour the small cold sound of this truth which he now for the first time heard from the lips of another man. *He* had always known it. But that he should hear it said! That the shame should be spoken aloud! And yet, what was he, Friedrich von Hess, for, if it were not to hold on to the truth? Hundreds of thousands of Knights, but only one von Hess. Literally now, only one. Suppose he did give way to the old savage desire to sweep away what *opposed*, what was alien, what dared to criticise; suppose he had Alfred beaten or tortured or murdered, the truth would still be where it was before, in his own mind. "If no one knows it at all," he thought, "if he is dead and I am dead, it will still be there. If there were no men at all, still certain things about men's behaviour would be *true*. 'Where there's no liberty of judgment there is no honour.'"

The Knight unclasped his hands. He laid them side by side on the desk before him and looked down at them. He took off his Knight's ring and put it on the desk. It lay between the two men like a great red shining eye.

"I give you my word as a man," he said.

Alfred was moved and embarrassed.

"O.K., sir," he said. "Well, I never talked to Hermann at all about anything *I* think. He was only a boy, anyway."

The Knight sighed, and put his ring on again. His finger felt cold and forlorn without it, and until he died he must wear it. Curious to think that that might be so soon.

"I think," Alfred suggested, "that Hermann is partly in trouble because he can't do with women. But that was nothing to do with me."

"It's not uncommon. Well, I have decided," said the Knight, getting up. "We'd better do it now."

"Do what, sir?" Alfred asked in astonishment.

"You think, don't you, that you can fly an aeroplane?"

" I'm sure I can," said Alfred stoutly, still quite at sea.

" Then you shall now take me up and fly over Munich and come back, and if we land safely I may have some more to say to you."

Alfred's first reaction was one of wild excitement and pleasure. To fly! To have the thing, the lovely sensitive thing, in his own mechanical control and under his own personal will! Dangerous? Horribly, really. Death in an hour or two, a few minutes, what did it matter? To fly ! To fly! Then he sobbered down a little, his eyes grew thoughtful.

" Would you tell me why, sir? " he said.

" I can't. I can tell you that I am to a small, but deplorable extent still superstitious. This is a superstitious fancy."

" We *may* be killed," Alfred reminded him.

" I think it more likely than not. But you will perhaps admit that though a Teutonic Knight has no honour, yet he is not likely to be panickily afraid of death."

" Of course. But why do you want to kill *me*? I'm longing for the chance to fly, it isn't that, and I'm not afraid. But why? "

" A dangerous man will be dead if you're killed."

" I see. And if you are? "

" Another, still more dangerous. But now I shall tell you no more. When we get to the hangar I shall send off the men on duty and say I'm going to fly the machine myself."

Alfred shivered with excitement.

" Suppose I turn us over before we get up? And we're just bumped or something and can't get out? They'll find me in the pilot's seat. An Englishman."

" We must take some risks."

" Is it a gyroplane? "

" No. A two-seater Hertz. Just a baby private plane."

Alfred whistled.

" Do you still think you can do it? "

" I'm sure I can. Only I mean I'd have been surer still about *landing* a gyroplane. Why is it that when gyroplanes are just as efficient and far safer, we always go on making so many of the old-fashioned planes? "

" There's no danger left anywhere in the Empire except in learning to fly old-fashioned planes or in flying them in bad weather. If there is no danger there are no brave men. We must have a hero's military funeral now and then. I shall get one. You, however, will not."

" I'll do without that," said Alfred, laughing delightedly. " Whatever your motives are, sir, I thank you very much. You don't know what it means to a man not to be ever allowed to fly when he spends his whole life with aeroplane engines."

" Those in power can always give curious and unexpected pleasures," said the Knight sardonically. " Now if I had you tortured for the open insult you offered me you'd feel aggrieved, but as I merely give you a good chance of being burnt to death you're very grateful. Now march."

On the walk to the hangar the Knight strode along in front, easy, graceful and very upright, while Alfred followed as suited his lowly status, ten yards behind. At the hangar the Knight's pilot on duty and two mechanics sprang to attention.

" I'm going to take the machine up myself," said von Hess, deigning no further explanation, though he had not piloted a machine for several years. " I may be back to-night, or I may not. All you men can go off duty. Dismiss."

They saluted and turned on their heels, walking smartly across the landing-ground.

" Who is going to start it for him? " a mechanic said.

" That fellow, I suppose."

" Who's he? "

" Don't know."

" Do you think the old Knight will be all right? He hasn't flown for ages."

" It's nothing to do with us. Obey orders, ask no questions. I hope he *will* be all right," added this correct Nazi anxiously. " He can get up, but is he in good enough form to come down again? I think in spite of what he said we'd better hang about near the ground. What d'you think, Willi? "

Willi nodded.

" Yes. He may find he doesn't like being up and come down at once and land all of a sprawl and we might be able to pull him out or something. We'll stay about for a bit."

Alfred meanwhile had run the machine out of the hangar. It was very light and easy to handle. The Knight got into the back seat.

" Shall I start it, sir? "

" One minute. If we come down not too well but not too badly try to get us out of our seats."

" Yes, sir."

" And just get into your seat a second and see that these speaking-tubes are working all right. When we're up I'll give you the course and you can fly on the compass. It'll be easier for you than looking for landmarks, and you don't know the country. There, did you hear that? I whispered it."

" Yes," Alfred whispered back down his tube.

He got out again, started the engine and tuned up. Everything was in perfect order, of course. A lovely thing, Alfred crooned, listening to the roar of the engine with an expert's perfectly trained ear. Not too new. Ah, you little beauty, you're mine, mine! Now then! He was not very much astonished that he got the aeroplane into the air without mishap. That was easy really. And yet when he stopped bumping and knew he was in the air he couldn't repress a bellow of triumph.

" Hoorah! " he yelled. " We're up, sir! "

" Go how you like," said the Knight's voice through the speaking-tube, " until you're well up. Then I'll give you the course. Remember this isn't Salisbury Plain. It's hilly country and you must be well above it."

Alfred rose farther and then started to bank. The little aeroplane was very sensitive.

" It's too easy! " Alfred shouted. " Oh, its gorgeous! It's heaven! "

" Get more height as quick as you can," was the Knight's reply to these boyish exclamations. " It'd be silly to hit a mountain when you're enjoying yourself so much."

Alfred went on up, as fast as he could make the machine climb. He was intoxicated. He wanted to get about a mile above Germany and then lay the course straight for England, and fly till he got there, and then hide the aeroplane in some secret place. And what should he do with the Knight? Kill him, kill him! Kill every Knight and every Nazi that dared to stop a man flying! Kill them all !

" That'll do now," said the Knight's voice, cutting through the roar of the engine. " Get on your course." He gave the course and Alfred managed to come round and keep fairly well on it. " You're a natural pilot, Alfred. I've hardly felt a lurch."

" Yes," thought Alfred, " I am a natural pilot, and half your clod-fisted Nazis are most unnatural ones." And to his dismay it seemed only a minute or so later that the Knight told him to look down. There below them lay the Holy City of Munich, quiet and white in the afternoon sun. Alfred would have liked to drop a bomb on it, particularly and specially on the Sacred Aeroplane.

" Some day," he thought viciously. " Smash it all up *somehow* ! "

" Now go back," the Knight ordered. " Come round in a wide sweep and I'll give you the course again."

Alfred shouted very loudly down his tube.

" *I'm not going back !* "

" Don't roar like that," the Knight said. " These tubes have amplifiers and it makes nothing but a buzz if you shout. Speak quietly. What did you say? "

" I'm not going back! " repeated Alfred in a quieter but extremely vicious tone.

But the only answer from his passenger was a faint cynical laugh. Alfred flew straight on, but the Knight said nothing more, and Alfred began to feel ashamed of his childishness. He hadn't the faintest idea where he was going or how much petrol there was in the machine.

" Can I go on a bit farther before we go back? " he asked soon.

" Who can stop you? But you've been up long enough for the first time. Far longer than a new Nazi pilot would be allowed. There's a nerve strain even if you don't feel it. You've got to land yet. You're doing well, but don't forget that."

Alfred started to come round. The Knight gave him the course, and again Alfred seemed to have hardly any time to enjoy himself before the Knight said, " Now look down. Can you see the landing-ground, over there to half left? Now spiral down to it and try not to get too far away. Land with your nose towards the hangar,

that's right for the wind. Now I'm not going to say another word."

Alfred came down rather well, and had the plane in nice position for landing, when he became aware of a group of men running over the ground towards the hangar. He went up again.

" Afraid? " asked the Knight.

" Those blasted fools! " said Alfred breathlessly.

" They'll get out of the way. Now do it this time no matter where they are."

" But the idiots are standing *still* now! " cried Alfred in agony. " If they'd only keep on *running*! "

" They're wondering what on earth I'm doing. Don't worry about them. Pretend they're not there."

Alfred circled again, came down, flattened out and rushing over the heads of the mechanics landed far beyond them. Bump—hop! Bump—hop! Bump, bump, bump, safely down—now nothing can happen but a tip-over—oh, Hitler, the hangar! He had left himself too little room for the run up. It seemed as if the hangar was rushing at him with enormous speed and mouth wide open to devour him. He switched off and tried to turn the plane; nothing happened, he ran straight on into the hangar and fetched up with a splintering crash against the further concrete wall. He hit his head on something and was half dazed, but he was aware of the Knight's voice a long way off speaking out of the deafening thick silence, " Get out, man. Quick."

He scrambled out, surprised to find all his bones whole. Gradually his head cleared. The aeroplane was much battered about the engine and propeller, but there was very little human damage. The Knight was standing on his feet holding a handkerchief to his nose and a hand to his left ribs.

" Are you all right, sir? " Alfred asked, feeling his own head.

" A bruise or so. You weren't really going very fast."

" What ploughboy work! " muttered Alfred, in disgust with himself. " I've smashed the lovely little thing up. What ingratitude! I'm so sorry, sir; it was rotten. But I believe I'd have done it all right if it hadn't been for having to miss those blasted fools."

" You should have gone at them as I told you. Then you'd have had plenty of room."

The mechanics now came tearing in to see what had happened. Their relief at seeing the Knight on his feet outside the aeroplane was very great. They looked at him sheepishly, for all of them had disobeyed his orders to go off duty, and tried to control their noisy panting. The Knight's dignity was in some rather miraculous manner unimpaired by his bleeding nose. He waved his disengaged hand at the huddled aeroplane.

" I've smashed that machine up," he said coolly. " I don't think you can do much with it here. You'd better get another one sent down at once from the works. Telephone. And by the way, am I forgetting things or did I tell you men to go off duty? "

" Yes, highly-born, you did," they said, standing like a little row of stone statues.

" Then what did you come back on to the ground for? "

No one replied. Then Wilhelm, the pilot, an oldish man, said, " My lord, we were wondering—we were afraid——" He stuck, not liking to say that they all thought he might make a mess of his landing, and possibly set the machine on fire. The Knight looked at them over the top of his handkerchief until they couldn't help wishing that he had hit his head just hard enough to be unaware of their disobedience, then he swung round and walked out of the hangar, turning his handkerchief to find an unreddened patch. In a few steps he swung round again and called out sharply, " Alfred! Have you a clean handkerchief? " Alfred jumped forward, fumbling in his pockets. No, he hadn't one. There were two in his sack, which was still in the lobby of the Court-room.

" It doesn't matter," said the Knight. " It's stopping, I think. Report to me to-morrow morning at ten o'clock at my house."

" Yes, sir."

" Dismiss."

" Sir—may I say something? "

Von Hess took no notice of him but walked on about fifty yards. Alfred followed a little doubtfully. He didn't know