

whether the Knight was being genuinely official, or was only ignoring him because of the men in the hangar.

"Well, what is it?" The Knight had turned round and was waiting for him. No one could hear them now.

"Are you going to tell me to-morrow why you wanted me to take you for a flight?"

"Yes."

"Are you going to tell me anything else?"

"Yes."

"May I make a condition?"

"You can try."

"I want Hermann to hear it too."

"Why?"

"He has more right to hear it than I have. He must have more right."

"It isn't a question of rights, it is a question of mind and stability. Hermann hasn't much of either."

"I can make him stable."

"Can you? Can you make him hold his tongue until you say he can speak? If that time ever comes."

"Yes," said Alfred, as confidently as he had said he could fly.

"You don't know what you're letting him in for. Take him into a war, smash his limbs, pull his intestines out, blind him—he'd stand all that—but I don't know about this."

"I want him to believe something. He'd believe you."

The Knight thought for some time, drawing vague patterns on the grass with his long black stick.

"I agree," he said at last. "He shall be told. But truth is an intolerable burden even for a grown man. I shall be glad enough myself to throw it off."

"You're old, he's young. Some young German ought to take it from you."

"As you like, Alfred. It shall be as you wish. There may very well be physical danger in telling Hermann, but I expect you don't mind that."

"I've had to mind too many things in my life to mind anything *particularly*."

"Except not being allowed to fly?"

"Oh, well——" Alfred laughed. "I know that's rather childish really."

"When did you begin to mind things?"

"At sixteen I lost my faith."

"And you're now——?"

"Nearly thirty-six."

"Twenty years of seeking light in darkness and harmony in confusion. You get very tired of it sometimes, I expect."

"Yes."

"So that you'd like to die, just to be able to stop thinking?"

"Oh, occasionally one feels like that."

"Men are admirable sometimes. Aufwiedersehen, Alfred."

Without a salute, or a Heil Hitler, and with a very pink nose and aching ribs, the old Knight took his way home.

## CHAPTER FOUR

ALFRED limped back to the Court-house to collect his sack and stick. His head was aching and one knee was so severely bruised that he could only hobble, but he was gloriously happy. Now he had something that no one could ever take away from him, not if they tore him into little strips—he had flown. And there were other things too to make him content; at last some of the darkness was to be dispersed, some of his perplexities resolved; he was to *know* something instead of guessing, guessing until, strong and tenacious man though he was, he thought he must go mad. And yet, though he laughed at himself, with the intoxication of the air still upon him, he thought most of the flying.

At the Court-house the pious and blood-conscious Nazi on duty at the door was sullen and contemptuous of him.

"What do you want, Kerl?" he snapped, in mere average crossness as Alfred made to hobble past him into the entrance lobby.

"My sack and stick, please."

At the sound of Alfred's accent the Nazi's eyes brightened.

A dirty foreigner. Let him whistle for his sack and stick. The Nazi had only been on duty for half an hour; there were two hours yet to go before the Court-house would be locked for the night. He could while away a few minutes in pleasant conversation.

"And why did you leave your nice clean wholesome foreign lousy —y sack and stick in our Court-house?"

Alfred was far too happy to take offence, even inwardly. Indeed he hardly heard what the Nazi said.

"The Knight told me to go with him at once."

"The Knight!" said the Nazi, aiming a swinging clout at Alfred's head. "'The highly-born' from you, you scum."

Alfred ducked the blow with the neatness of incessant life-long practice. The sudden movement sent a sickening pain through his bruised knee. He winced a little and backed away from the Nazi, who laughed disagreeably.

"You yellow Britisher," he said. "Can't you stand up to a tap? All right, Lieblein, I won't hurt you, sweet little boy. I should have to go and wash my hands if I touched you, anyway."

"The highly-born called me to go with him at once, so I had to leave my sack and stick," Alfred explained again.

"Please may I get them?"

"No."

"Could you let me have the stick?" asked Alfred, still politely. (He had flown, he was going to know things, what did this lout matter? As much as a rat or other unpleasant but individually powerless animal.) "I'm lame."

"Dear, dear, what a pity that is! I'm afraid you'll have to borrow the Knight's for the evening. I'm sure he'd be delighted to lend it to you."

Alfred burst out laughing, this amusing phantasy of the porter's was so near the truth. Probably old von Hess would lend him his staff if he could.

"What's all this bloody row about?" This interruption, an angry one, came from behind the Nazi, as the Knight's Marshal who had been busy inside the Court-room, came striding to the outer door. "This isn't a Boy's Nursery. Oh, it's you again!" he said as he saw Alfred. "What do you want?"

"My sack and stick, please, Herr Marshal. I had to leave them here because the highly-born the Knight wanted me to go with him at once."

"Then why the hell don't you get them without all this palaver? I'm perfectly aware you had to go with the Knight. I saw you come out of here."

Alfred said nothing more, but limped inside the entrance and collected his gear. He saluted the Marshal and grinned at the Nazi. "Heil Hitler!" he cried cheerfully. "Good night."

"Why didn't you let him get his things?" the Marshal asked severely.

"He's only a dirty foreigner, Herr Marshal," said the Nazi uneasily.

"Just because he's a foreigner you ought to have known that he couldn't have been in here at all without some serious reason. You be careful and let him alone. He's got some kind of business on with the Knight. You can't help having a face like a turnip-lantern, I dare say, but you can help opening it."

The Marshal banged back into the Court-room leaving the Nazi abashed.

Alfred found out the way to the Knight's home farm, which with his magnificent house was not far from the hangar and landing-ground. He wandered about the empty farmyard for a little till he found a man in the dairy. Alfred asked him the way to Hermann's room. This German was a cheerful person without any open contempt for foreigners. "Up over the cowshed," he said. "Through that door and you'll see some stairs. Supper will be in about three-quarters of an hour in the farmhouse dining-room. If you want to wash there's the pump."

"Can I have supper with you?" Alfred was surprised.

"Well, you're Hermann's English friend, aren't you? He said you'd be coming when the Knight had done with you. What did he want you for?"

"Oh, he talked about England. He used to be the Knight of a big port close to where I live. Oh, damn that boy!" Alfred had suddenly remembered that his jersey had gone careering off to some destination unknown to him, still under the sick boy's arm. Hermann would have no extra bedding,

naturally, and the boards of the loft would be hard. However, it was not going to be cold. He stripped off his coat and shirt and had a refreshing swill under the pump. He combed his hair and beard and asked the friendly dairyman for a bit of rope or an old strap.

"My breeches won't stay up properly, and the boy's got my belt as well as my jersey."

"What boy?"

"You'd better ask Hermann about that. Thanks, that'll do fine. Will Hermann come up to the loft before supper?"

"There'll be a whistle for supper if he doesn't. Come straight into the house. It's all right, you know. You may be only an Englishman, but you're Hermann's friend on this farm. Be civil to the foreman, though. He's a small man with a very black beard."

Alfred thanked him. He went up to Hermann's room and lay down on the narrow hard pallet, relieved to rest his knee. Hermann had already made some preparation for his guest, as a pile of sacks was arranged in bed form in the least draughty corner of the loft, but Alfred thought there would be no harm in using the bed until his host came in. In spite of the aching of his knee he grew drowsy and presently was sound asleep.

He was roused by Hermann's laugh.

"What a fellow to sleep you are!" he said, looking down at his friend. Alfred blinked up at him.

"Is it supper time?"

"Nearly. I say, Kurt said you were very lame and couldn't walk without a stick. What's happened?"

"Oh, lots of things. But I think I'd better tell you afterwards. I'm glad you sleep out here by yourself and not in the house."

"I like it out here better," said Hermann. He had entirely recovered his temper, and his pleasure at finding Alfred in his own room, lying on his own bed, had given his face a temporary charming radiance. But now it clouded over into its usual dark unhappiness.

"That's the thing I like best. To be by myself and hear the cows underneath when they're in in the winter. They're out in the fields at night now. I should hate to sleep in the house. Have you got a headache?"

Alfred was feeling his head with his fingers and then shaking it as if he were rather doubtful about it.

"No, it's much better. But it was a fair crack."

"Have you been fighting?"

"I never fight unless I absolutely have to. There's the whistle, Hermann. Will it be a good supper?"

"Better than you've had many a time, I dare say. Potatoes, soup and bread, and as many apples as you like to eat. Of course you'd have done better still to have stayed and dined with the Knight."

"I could eat three Knights' Tables clean out," said Alfred, hitching up his borrowed strap. "They say that if a man sleeps a lot he doesn't need to eat so much, but I sleep all night and any time I'm at a loose end in the day as well, and I'm always hungry."

"It's soft to have all you want to eat always," said the young Nazi piously.

"Then the Knights must be jelly-fish."

"Ach, that's different. They *could* live hard if—if there was any occasion."

Alfred enjoyed his supper exceedingly. There was enough food, and good of its plain kind, and all the Germans were very pleasant to him, including the foreman, who was attracted by something in his stocky tough-looking figure and his darkish grey eyes. This man actually gave him and Hermann a little cheap cigar each to smoke after their supper. Hermann could not often afford to smoke, while Alfred's expenses on his pilgrimage were calculated to a pfennig, to keep him in good health, but to include no luxuries whatever. He had had no money saved. There was no incentive for Nazis or subject races to save money. They would be kept by the State when they were ill or too old to work, their sons were kept by the State, and women were kept by the State too, fairly well kept while immature and at child-bearing age. After that they were on a very narrow margin. Old Marta would have thought herself in the men's heaven if she could have eaten the meal Alfred had just finished. But Alfred had never worried about the ordinary day-to-day sufferings of women. He hardly realised they did suffer. It was natural and right that they should always have less food than men, and when they could bear no children why give them more

than just what would keep them alive? They had no hard work to do. So his enjoyment was not spoiled by futile thoughts of others starving, and he accepted the cigar with delight as a fitting little coronet on a glorious day.

He and Hermann went off up to their loft to savour the smokes together, outside the company of those who could hardly help being envious. Smoking was neither forbidden nor encouraged in the Empire. The Holy One, the Hero-God, of course, had never smoked, nor eaten meat, nor had He drunk beer or wine. His colossal size (seven feet tall was He) and His phenomenal feats of strength owed nothing to the coarse rich food beloved of lesser Germans. But there was no absolute necessity to try to imitate Him in His way of life, in His complete asceticism (which included never even being in the contaminating presence of a woman), and most men smoked and drank beer and ate meat, when they could get them.

Hermann switched on the electric light, which was wired from the big system in the cowshed below. Alfred said, "The moon's up, Hermann. Let's open the door in the wall and have the light off. It's very warm still."

Hermann turned off the light and opened the door through which sacks would be pushed if the loft were used for its proper purpose. They pulled the bed up near the door and sat on it side by side. They lit their cigars and drew long, delicious breaths of smoke.

"I don't believe I *would* like to be a Knight," Alfred said. "I can't believe they can ever enjoy anything, having things all the time. I haven't had a smoke since I left England."

"Good, isn't it?" Hermann grunted. "But when they're done we shall wish we had another one each, and if one was a Knight then one could just go and get a smoke out of a box."

"Well, they're not done, only just begun, so let's not think of that."

They smoked in silence, looking out on the moonlit yard, with the big barn a jetty soft black, rising up on the other side. A cat picked its way across with dainty steps as though the yard had been full of puddles. The men were too peaceful even to hiss at it. Hermann was very curious about Alfred's

doings after the Knight had sent him, Hermann, out of the Court-room, but he was quite willing to wait until Alfred was ready to tell him. And Alfred did wait, not wishing to spoil Hermann's pleasure, until the cigars were smoked to the last possible scrap, with the butts stuck on the ends of pins. They stamped the smouldering ends carefully out on the floor.

"Not a spark," Alfred said. "All gone. Quite dead. Now if I were a Knight, should I have another or shouldn't I? No, I shouldn't. I should know I could have one to-morrow morning. To-morrow morning!" he added, in a different tone.

"Is something going to happen?"

"It is. Some time to-morrow early you'll get a message to report to the Knight at his house at ten o'clock."

"About that bloody soprano singer?"

"No."

"Whatever can it be?" said Hermann uneasily. "How do you know? Do you know what it is?"

"Hermann, would you like there to be a war with the Japanese?"

"Hitler! Wouldn't I just? Is there going to be one? Hurrah!"

"There isn't. But this that's going to happen is going to be much worse than a war, at least for you. You've got to be braver than for that. Well, look here, I'll tell you something to show how strange and important it's going to be. I took the Knight up in his private aeroplane this afternoon. *I flew the plane.*"

"You flew the —! But you're only an Englishman! You can't fly a plane. Oh, don't be funny, Alfred. I don't feel like it."

"It's true, Hermann. You must believe me or you'll have an unnecessarily bad shock, I flew to Munich and back with him, and came down all right, at least I would have, but for some fools in the way—there was miles of room really, but they made me nervous—but though I smashed the plane into the hangar wall coming in too fast, it was very funny really, just like a dog tearing into its kennel, but neither of us was hurt. At least I hurt my knee and head a bit and he made his nose bleed and bumped his side."

"Made his nose bleed!" said Hermann, dazed, catching at this one point in the incredible tale.

"Yes, yes. Aren't Knights' noses allowed to bleed if they bang them? But don't you see, *he* thought we might be killed."

"He's gone mad. The von Hess family—it isn't like others. You oughtn't to have taken him, Alfred. It was a wicked thing to do when he can't be—be himself."

"He's *not* mad," said Alfred very earnestly, then added with a chuckle, "not that I'd have minded. Do you think that I'd let the life of one batty Knight stand between me and a chance to fly? Never. But he's not mad. Well now, listen. To-morrow he's going to tell me *why* he wanted to have a good chance to be killed, to leave the whole thing (whatever it is) to the, to him, improbable good luck that I *could* fly a plane for the first time without a man on double controls with me. And he's going to tell you too."

"Why he wanted to be killed?"

"To have the chance of being killed."

Hermann shook his head hopelessly.

"I don't understand."

"Neither do I. But we shall understand to-morrow. I insisted that you should be told too."

"I don't want to be told anything!" cried Hermann in a panic. "The old man's mad and you took advantage of it to fly. It's all—all lunacy."

"Hermann, it is *not*. And you've got to be a man and stand up to something more than fights and farm-work. You're probably going to have hell, but don't run away from it, and I'll see you through. The Knight will help us too."

"I don't understand," said Hermann, almost in despair. "Why should we have to be told things and then helped? Why can't he let us alone? Why did you say *I* was to be told?"

"Do you want me to hear things from the Knight that you're left out of—like a boy of twelve who's left out of men's conversation?"

"Well, no; but—why not someone else? Oh, I mean—I don't know."

"Hermann, you love me, don't you? You trust me?"

"Yes," said Hermann in a low voice.

"In spite of my being an Englishman?"

"Yes."

"Then, if you can love and trust an Englishman, can you grasp the idea that there might be something important, some knowledge, some wisdom, that's for *all* of us, for all men alike?"

"Yes—I think I see—but not, Alfred"—Hermann's voice dropped to a whisper—"not if it's *against Germany*."

"The Knight is German."

"I know—oh, I know it can't be."

"I mean the Knight never could be against what is good in Germany. Indeed, Hermann, he's a very wonderful man, your family Knight. But shall we go to sleep now? It's getting late."

"Yes," Hermann said thankfully. "You're to have the bed."

"No, no. The sacks will do beautifully for me."

"Because of your knee, please, Alfred," Hermann pleaded. "Now you might just do that for me if I've got to be made wretched in some frightful way to-morrow."

"Oh, all right, lad. Have it your own way."

Hermann took off his boots, lay down on the sacks and turned his face to the wall. Soon, in spite of his fear and anxiety, he was fast asleep. Alfred, contrary to his custom, lay awake for some time.

And in his big house, on his comfortable bed, old von Hess also lay awake with a pain in his side and icy doubt shivering up and down his spine. Emotionalism gripped him, who thought he had done with it for ever long before, and would not be dispersed. His discarded childhood religion and ethic rose up like giants, and he himself, reduced to the dimensions of a child, cowered before them in impotence. Not for many hours could he nerve himself to do battle, and when he did there was no decisive result. When at last he went to sleep, exhausted, the illusion and the doubts were still there, but when he woke up in the healing daylight they had vanished.

In the morning he looked rather hollow-eyed, and the slightly swollen pink look of his fine aquiline nose gave him

a dissipated air. But he was perfectly calm, and when Alfred and Hermann were ushered into his writing-room, Hermann knew that whatever he was, he was not insane. His grey eyes looked soberly over both men, and then at the Nazi servant who had brought them in.

"Henrich."

"My lord."

"No one is to disturb me, or to come any nearer this room than the door at the end of the passage. Stay there yourself till I send for you. You understand? *On no account* am I to be disturbed."

"My lord," the servant clicked his heels and saluted.

"Dismiss."

Heinrich went out. Hermann and Alfred were still at attention.

"At ease. No, I mean sit down, both of you."

Hermann gasped. Never before had he sat in the presence of this or any other Knight.

"Sit down, Hermann," said the Knight testily. "Do what I tell you, can't you?" His temporary irritation was the first sign he had given of any nervous strain.

Hermann hastily sat down on the chair next to Alfred's. The Knight was facing them, sitting behind a big desk, with his elbows on it and his hands lightly clasped. Hermann, painfully embarrassed by sitting before a Knight, fixed his eyes on the big ruby in the ring. Alfred watched the Knight's face with concentrated attention.

"I hardly know where to begin," he said, with a little cough. "Especially as neither of you will be able to understand all I'm going to tell you. Alfred may be able to understand about half, Hermann almost nothing. Perhaps I had better start with a personal explanation. Hermann, have you ever heard the expression in these parts, 'mad as a von Hess'?"

"Yes, highly-born, I—er—have heard it once or twice."

"My family is eccentric. It is not mad, none of them have ever been mad, though I really don't know why not, but they are eccentric, and for a good reason. Some of them," he added, "have committed suicide. Also for a good reason. A far better one than causes the very numerous other suicides among German men."

"Are there——" Alfred started, then stopped. "I'm sorry, sir."

"Yes, there are, Alfred. But I shall come to that in due course. Suicides, yes, more and more every year. Well, the reason for the von Hess eccentricity is a family curse of an unusual kind, a family curse of knowledge. It's the reason for the suicides among them. Weak men cannot bear knowledge." His eyes rested on Hermann, then passed to Alfred. "I think," he said, "that I will speak in English. Can you follow it well enough, Hermann?"

"Yes, sir."

"I want to make absolutely certain that Alfred understands everything I have to tell. I'm proud to say that most of the von Hess men have been strong. They were able to live with the curse and pass it on to their sons in due course. But though they have not let the knowledge kill them (except for a cowardly few) they have none of them passed it on to anyone else outside the family. I am the first to do so, because I am the last von Hess. Had I not been I should have evaded responsibility, like the others. But, as Hermann knows, my three sons were killed all together in an aeroplane crash many years ago, and by a curious fate none of them had at that time any male children themselves. I was not able to beget any more sons—the family in that crash came to an end. I could adopt a Knight's orphan, but I do not wish to. I never considered it seriously. It is unfair to inflict a curse on other men's blood. Besides, a family curse of this kind is a possession which happily or unhappily gives the von Hess Knights a different status from others of their order, and it was repugnant to me that another man's son should share it. Men are, fortunately, so foolish that they can be proud of a curse so long as it is a family one, and no von Hess throughout these generations and centuries has, though many of them must have been sorely tempted, destroyed the curse itself."

"Can Knights' families really maintain themselves from father to son for hundreds and hundreds of years?" asked Alfred, as the Knight paused.

"They cannot. The ranks of the Knights are constantly being filled up with Nazi male infants, for whom no particular man claims paternity. But curb your shrewdness, Alfred. I

shall come to things like that in time. The von Hess family, by some extraordinary luck, has never lacked male heirs. They have a crooked finger." The Knight raised his left hand. "It comes and goes."

Hermann was dazedly thinking, "With Nazi infants? Nazi infants, Nazi infants. It comes and goes."

"The first von Hess," said the Knight, "is supposed to have been a friend of Hitler's. But I'm not certain about that. There were two men of the same name. Rudolf von Hess is in the heroes' calendar, but *the* von Hess, the important one, lived about a hundred and fifty years after Hitler died."

("Died?" thought Hermann. "Died? Men die. Oh, Holy Thunderer, if I could get away!")

"His name was Friedrich, like mine. Well, this von Hess left two things to the family. One he acquired. One he made. He acquired a photograph, and he made a book. I think that I had better show you the photograph first."

The Knight put his hand into a drawer in the desk and drew out a hard stiff sheet of something wrapped in thin paper. He laid it on the desk in front of him, resting his hands lightly upon it.

"This is not, of course, the original print. It has been reproduced many times, and the plate itself has been renewed from time to time by photographing a particularly clear good print. But I give both you men my word that as far as I know this is an accurate photographic representation of our Lord Hitler as he was in his lifetime. You have both seen innumerable statues and pictures; you know, as well as you know your best friend's face, what his physical characteristics were. Colossal height, long thick golden hair, a great manly golden beard spreading over his chest, deep sea-blue eyes, the noble rugged brow—and all the rest. But this is he."

The Knight unwrapped the photograph and passed it to Alfred.

"Hold it by the edge," he said.

Hermann was so wildly excited he could hardly see. His eyes blurred over, he rubbed them with furious impatience and looked again. He stared and stared, panting like a man running. He saw a group of four figures, two a little behind,

two in front. The central figure of the picture was smallish (the two behind were taller than he), he was dark, his eyes were brown or a deep hazel, his face was hairless as a woman's except for a small black growth on the upper lip. His hair was cropped short except for one lank piece a little longer which fell half over his forehead. He was dressed in uncomely tight trousers like a woman's instead of the full masculine breeches of all the statues and pictures, and his form was unheroic, even almost unmale. Where were the broad shoulders, the mighty chest, the lean stomach and slender waist and hips? This little man was almost fat. He had, oh horror! an unmistakable bulginess below the arch of the ribs. He had a paunch. He had also a charming smile. Looking almost level-eyed at the young stripling beside him, his face was radiant, its ignoble rather soft features all made pleasing through happiness. The boy who basked in the sunshine of the God's favour was looking, not at him, but straight at the camera. He, though immature, had more of the holy German physique than either the Lord Hitler or the two behind. He had great thick long plaits of hair so light that it must have been yellow falling forward over his shoulders and down over his chest, a noble open forehead, large blue or light grey eyes, a square jaw and a wide mouth open in a half smile, just showing big white strong front teeth. He was dressed rather like a Knight's son at his First Blood Communion at fourteen, but the pale robe of this centuries-dead boy came down to little below his knees. His carriage was upright and graceful without being stiff. He looked, to Hermann's staring, protruding eyes, more noble, more German, more manly, despite his youth, than the small dark soft-looking Lord Hitler.

Alfred, as might have been expected, recovered himself first.

"I don't see," he said, "that it's very important really that he doesn't look like what he's supposed to. Thousands of Germans are small and dark, and if they have too much to eat they get fat. That doesn't make him not a great man."

"He was a great man. But was he God?"

"I never thought so. Not after I was sixteen."

"But there's more in the picture than just his appearance,"

said the Knight. "Who do you think he has been talking to and is smiling at?"

"A handsome boy of about fourteen, a Knight's son, but how should I know who he is? Is that Rudolf von Hess?"

"No," said the Knight. "It's a girl."

"A *girl!*" cried Alfred, wholly incredulous. Hermann merely gasped.

"A girl of about fifteen or sixteen. A young woman. Look at her breasts."

What they had not before seen, being so certain that the figure almost touching the Lord Hitler's must be male, now became plain to them. Under the folds of the soft short robe were full round feminine breasts.

"A girl!" Alfred breathed softly. A girl as lovely as a boy, with a boy's hair and a boy's noble carriage, and a boy's direct and fearless gaze. He and Hermann gazed and gazed, wholly ignoring the other people in the photograph. Alfred grew pale and Hermann very red. The Knight watched the younger men with much sympathy. He was too old to care now, but many a time when his blood was warmer had he got out his secret photograph to look at the face of that lovely German girl.

Again Alfred recovered himself first. He took his eyes with difficulty away from the photograph and asked in a low, uncertain voice, "Is it a—a special girl? A Knight's woman—daughter, something like that?"

"It's an ordinary German girl, a Nazi's daughter. Only special perhaps in being so tall. You see, she's nearly as tall as he is."

"The girls, just any girls, were like that?"

"Yes. Dressed like that, with long hair, beautiful, by no means forbidden the presence of the Holy One. All that came afterwards, and it was not his fault."

"Then," Hermann spoke for the first time in thick German, "it is a lie to say he had nothing to do with women. It's a lie, a lie."

"In the sense that he avoided their presence completely, yes. In the sense that he was not born of a woman, yes. In the sense that he excluded them from the human race and its divisions, allowing them neither nationality nor class, yes.

But you must remember that when Friedrich von Hess lived Hitler was already a legend. The records of his personal life, if there were any, were lost or destroyed. It is certain that he never married, but whether he had intercourse with women in a sexual sense or not, we do not know."

"Married?" said Alfred. "I'm sorry, sir, that's a German word I don't know."

"It's a lost word. It occurs nowhere except in von Hess's book. Being married means living in a house with one woman and your children, and going on living continually with her until one of you dies. It sounds fantastic, doesn't it? that men ever *lived* with women. But they did."

"The women were different," said Alfred. "You can see that from this photograph."

"You can," agreed the Knight. "Many a time I, and probably every other von Hess, have gone out after looking at that picture and seen how different women are. Thank God we were all very practical men. There had to be sons. There were sons. But about marriage, Alfred, you may not know it, but the Christians in their communities don't live like we do, men and women separately. They live in *families*, that is the man, the woman, and their children, sons and daughters, all together. I don't know *how* they do it, because their women look just like ours."

"I know they do," said Alfred absently. "I found out about Christians years ago. It's part of their religion to live with the women."

"I think," said the Knight, "that you had better give me back the photograph, you are not attending."

"May we see it again before we go?" Alfred asked. Hermann said nothing. He released a long breath and followed the photograph avidly with his eyes until the Knight had wrapped it up and put it away.

"Yes, Alfred. But it's no good, you know. It only makes one sad and empty and full of discontent. Perhaps a quarter of the burden of the curse on my family results in knowing what women used to be. There are none like that now, not anywhere in the world. There could be none for hundreds of years, no matter what happened. It must take generations and generations to make a woman like that one in the photograph."

"But why have they let themselves go *down* so?" Alfred asked.

"They acquiesced in the Reduction of Women, which was a deliberate thing deliberately planned by German men. Women will always be exactly what men want them to be. They have no will, no character, and no souls; they are only a reflection of men. So nothing that they are or can become is ever their fault or their virtue. If men want them to be beautiful they will be beautiful. If men want them to appear to have wills and characters they will develop something that looks like a will and a character though it is really only a sham. If men want them to have an appearance of perfect freedom, even an appearance of masculine power, they will develop a simulacrum of those things. But what men cannot do, never have been able to do, is to *stop* this blind submission and cause the women to ignore them and disobey them. It's the tragedy of the human race."

"I can't see that, sir," said Alfred. "It must be right for women to submit to men. Anything else would be unnatural."

"It would be all right," said the Knight slowly, "if men were infallible: if they always caused the women to be what best suits the health and happiness of the race. But they have made a mistake in their leadership. Little local mistakes do not matter, but a mistake which includes the whole world—for the Japanese with their slavish imitativeness copied it from us—is an appalling and ghastly tragedy. We Germans have made women be what they cannot with all their good will go on being—not for centuries on end—the lowest common denominator, a pure animal—and the race is coming to extinction. The men are committing suicide, but the women, whose discouragement is entirely unconscious, are not being born."

Hermann was gazing with his mouth open, but Alfred sat thoughtful and very serious. "Yes," he said. "There are too many men. I thought it was local. But we don't kill ourselves like you do."

"It doesn't really matter whether you do or not. Even in Germany there is not, by a long way, a woman for every man; in England the balance is worse, that's all. You will get no more children than we shall."

"I cannot think," said Alfred, after a pause, "why men should ever have wanted girls to be different from that girl in the photograph. They must have been all mad, the men."

"They had a reason. The girl in that picture, with her beauty which is like the beauty of a boy, has also the power of choice and rejection. You men think of yourselves as seeing her and having her. But she need not have you. I don't mean that she can resist you as a child can, but that the law, made by men, will protect her. She can reject any man even though he plead with her in a way that is quite outside our sense of manly dignity; she can reject every man throughout her life. She has the right to reject der Fuehrer, though probably she would not. But she has the *right* to refuse any or every man, and if any man infringes it he is a criminal. How would you like that, Alfred?"

"It's a new idea to me," Alfred confessed. "Couldn't they be beautiful and have no rejection right?"

"I don't think so. You could, of course, let women grow their hair and dress in clothes which display their intrinsically ill-balanced bodies to the very best advantage. But I think that the haunting loveliness of that German girl comes partly from her knowledge that she has the power of choice and rejection, and partly because she knows she can be *loved*. Men cannot love female animals, but they can and have loved women whom they have moulded to a more human and masculine pattern, just as we love our friends. Men in those days could love their women, could feel weary for their presence, even when they were old and far past child-bearing. It's incomprehensible, but it's true. And now I will expose one more lie, and then I will go back to von Hess. You, Hermann and Alfred, have both been taught that the Christians are a race of subhuman people, ranking even below women in general."

"I haven't believed it for ages," said Alfred. "They're queer, but not so different as all that."

"Well, they're not a race at all. They're the remnants of a pre-Hitler civilised religion. It was once the religion of all Europe, most of Russia, the Americas, and a part of Africa. Hitler in his youth was a Christian himself. They probably know very little about themselves now. I expect I know a great deal more than they do."

"Hitler a Christian!" muttered Hermann, over and over again. "Hitler a *Christian*!"

"They say," said Alfred, "that they are a people expiating a great crime. That they are segregated and spat upon because they once spat upon the race of Jesus Christ their Lord, and persecuted it, and that when their time's up Jesus is to come again and forgive them personally, and set them up above the Germans."

"And do they still know why the Christians originally persecuted the Jews, that's the race of Jesus? I wish I had had your advantages, Alfred. I have never been able to speak to a Christian."

"It's rather difficult even for me. They say that the Jews killed Jesus, but that he, this extraordinary fellow, said that they were to forgive the Jews because they didn't know what they were doing at the time. But they disobeyed Jesus, even though he was the Son of God, and gave it the Jews hot for a thousand years. So they have to be spat on for a thousand years, and then Jesus will come again."

"They have their times a little wrong. They persecuted and humiliated the Jews for nearly two thousand years, and then the Germans took on the persecution and made it racial, and after a time killed all the Jews off. That was after the Twenty Years' War. The people who wouldn't worship Hitler when he became a god were, I suppose, killed, all but a few, and those were segregated."

"But why weren't they killed?"

"I suppose it was considered better that there should be something for the subject races and the Nazis in Germany to look down on. It was a sensible idea."

"And are the Christians dying out too?"

"No. They're just about maintaining their numbers. Though their God, Jesus Christ, was born of a woman and not exploded, like Hitler, their women had to share in the Reduction, but they have advantages over ours."

"The women have no souls," Alfred said, "they live with the men, but only as a dog might live with a man. They are not to be included in the Jesus heaven, and they take no part in their religious ceremonies. But they are different from other women. They're a lot livelier."

"That is because they're in constant contact with the

men. And also because they don't have to give up their boys. The boys and men give them some of their strength and vitality. What exactly do they think will happen when Jesus Christ comes again?"

"The Sin will be forgiven, the women will disappear, the Christians who are then alive will live for ever, the other dead ones will come out of their graves quite whole and handsome, the Germans and Japanese and all other infidels will be judged and thrown into a lake of fire, and the justified Christians will live for ever in complete and utter happiness with Jesus. There shall be neither male nor female, nor any more sin of any kind. That's what they tell *me*. But they may have a lot of secrets they won't tell to an Englishman!"

"The religion has become very debased and impure, but that would be inevitable. Women had a very high place in the old Christian theology. Theoretically, their soul-value was equal to the men's. Practically, of course, it was not. They were not allowed to be priests. But they were told by men that they had souls which Jesus loved, so they developed the simulacrum of a soul and a sham conscience. But when the Reduction of Women started the Christian men acquiesced in it, probably because there always had been in the heart of the religion a hatred of the beauty of women and a horror of the sexual power beautiful women with the right of choice and rejection have over men. And when the women were reduced to the condition of speaking animals, they probably found it impossible to go on believing they had souls."

"Supposing they had not acquiesced," Alfred said, "the Christian women would still be beautiful like that Nazi's daughter. That would have been all right."

The Knight laughed grimly.

"Then they would all have been killed, however inconvenient. You cannot imagine that *that* would ever have been allowed."

The Knight put his hand again under the desk and this time drew forth a huge book of deep yellow colour. As he opened it the leaves made a peculiar thick crackling sound, unlike the rustling of paper.

"Come round here a minute, Alfred. Look over my

shoulder. Hermann, come too if you like, but you can't appreciate the beauty of this. You see," he said to Alfred, "this is written all by hand in the smallest possible German letters, but still as legible as print, every letter being perfectly formed and perfectly spaced. It is written on specially prepared thin parchment sheets. Von Hess says in his introduction that it took him over two years to prepare the book itself. And when he started to write it he had to do it all from memory. Not one book of reference did he have."

"But why?"

"Because they were all being burnt. Destroyed."

"Ha!" said Alfred, striking one fist into the other palm.

"Then there *was* some history? It wasn't all darkness and savagery? I knew it! I knew there *must* be something more than Hitler and Christians and Legends."

Alfred went back to his chair lightly, like a triumphant man. Hermann stumbled back to his like a drunkard.

"There was history," said the Knight. "Listen to what he says: '*I, Friedrich von Hess, Teutonic Knight of the Holy German Empire, of the Inner Ten, dedicate this book to my eldest son, Arnold von Hess, to him and to his heirs for ever. Keep it inviolate, guard it as you would your honour, for though what I have put down here is but the smallest fragment of the truth of history, yet I swear that, to my poor knowledge, it is all true.*'"

"He thought, you see," said the Knight, closing the book, "that the time might come when men would again seek passionately for truth, and that this, his little hand-written terribly fragmentary history, might be a faint will-o'-the-wisp light in the darkness. A glow-worm light, he says in one place. He is always in despair—'Here my memory fails me,' or 'Here I have alas no further knowledge.' He was patient and thorough, a good German worker, but he was no scholar. Simply a man who had read a good many books to amuse himself. And yet, when the final battle for Truth was joined, all the scholars among the Knights fled away, leaving this one of no particular ability alone among devils. Yet *there* is a Book, a real book, the only one in the world."

"No, no," said Alfred excitedly. "There may be others. It's only a question of finding the people that keep them. There may be some English ones."

"There can't be, Alfred. The only men free from the threat of instant search are the Knights. Von Hess only managed to write his book secretly because, though disgraced, he was a Knight of the Inner Ten. We have only managed to keep it secret because we are Knights. Some other family of Knights *may* have a book like this, but I do not think so. I'll tell you why presently. But now you understand, Alfred, why I have shown you this book and this photograph. Because when I die, as I have no heirs, all my possessions will revert to the State, that is, to the Knights. The book would be found and destroyed. It is proof against time, against a long time, at any rate. Not against fire."

"It must never be burned," Alfred said. A shiver ran through him. "Never."

"Well," said the Knight, "I think I am going to give it to you. Will you protect it as far as you are able?"

"I'll die ten deaths," swore Alfred. "Even painful ones."

## CHAPTER FIVE

"**Y**OU must not think," the Knight went on, "that this von Hess, my ancestor, was a bad German, or one who had any quarrel with Germany's destiny to rule over the whole globe. Its destiny to power far greater than the published dreams of the hero Rosenberg was proved to be right and the will of God by the accomplished fact. The Germans had proved themselves fitted to conquer and rule by conquering Europe, Russia as far as the Ural Mountains, Africa, Arabia, and Persia, by consolidating their conquests, and by ruling with such realistic and sensible severity that rebellion became as hopeful as a fight between a child of three and an armed man."

"*Armed* rebellion," Alfred amended.

"Oh, I know there is a rebellion of the spirit. So did von Hess, so did the other Germans of that date. Von Hess believed, too, that this tremendously powerful German Empire

in the centre of the world would be able, in time, to attack and crush the Japanese Empire, which at that time was still growing. And that then the full destiny of Germany would be accomplished. That has not happened. The Japanese rule over Asia, Australia, and the Americas, but they cannot crush us, neither can we crush them. The peace between Japan and Germany is permanent. The Knights know this, the Nazis do not."

Hermann groaned and hid his face in his hands. Then he looked up imploringly at the Knight.

"Not even that left, sir? A chance to die for Germany?"

"A chance to die for Germany, perhaps. For the German Empire, no. There can't be any more wars."

"But why?" asked Alfred. "I've often wondered why you didn't get on with it."

"Neither the Japanese nor ourselves can afford to lose a single man of the ruling race, that's why. Their population is beginning to decrease, like ours. We cannot send our subject races into battle and stay out of it ourselves. It's against our honour, against our religion, and besides it's the fixed policy of both Empires never to allow the subject races to obtain skill with the really dangerous weapons of war. You are taught to be soldiers, riflemen, for the sake of the discipline, but you are not allowed to handle artillery or tanks or aeroplanes. *Every* German and *every* Japanese is wanted in the armies of occupation and the ordinary life of the fatherland country, and so there can be no more war between us."

"Well, that's simple. And what are you going to do about it, sir?"

"I don't know, and neither does anybody else. The *hope* of war even is wearing very thin. A people which is conditioned for war from childhood, whose ethic is war and whose religion is war, can live, though not very happily, on the hope of war; but when that breaks down it must change its conditioning or perish, like animals which cannot fit themselves to their environment. And neither we nor the Japanese can change the conditioning without abandoning the religion and the ethic. And policing unarmed subject countries with big air fleets is not enough. No one thinks of it as remotely approaching war. We have made ourselves too strong, far

too strong, and we're dying, both the huge Empires side by side, of our own strength."

"How would it be," suggested Alfred, "if you taught us all to use the artillery and tanks and aeroplanes and ships and submarines, and gave us tons and millions of tons of war material and we had a General Rebellion?"

"It wouldn't do. You might win. And even if you didn't, the Japanese *might* take the opportunity to attack us."

"They could do the same thing with their subject races."

"We should never trust them to keep their word. Neither would they trust us. But now we have got far away from von Hess. He was not troubled by these considerations. The German population was rapidly growing and he had no terrors about its destiny. The power of Germany was unshakable from without, and the Social Order within was fixed for all time in the Three Ranks—der Fuehrer, the Knights, and the Nazis. But in the midst of all this power and glory and pride there was, so von Hess says, a spiritual uneasiness. The Germans were not yet quite happy. Old ideas, pre-Hitlerian ideas, were still in the world, even though they could reach none by individual expression. The subject races were sullen and secretly contemptuous, still always dreaming, however futilely, of freedom. The shadows of old Empires—"

"Ha!" cried Alfred, springing up. "There *were* old Empires, then? You and the Japanese weren't the only ones? It's all lies, lies!"

"The Assyrian, the Babylonian, the Persian, the Egyptian, the Greek, the Roman, the Spanish and the British. In colonial possessions—"

Alfred interrupted him. "*The British!* And you tell us all those English-speaking races were just disconnected savage tribes! As if anyone but an idiot could ever believe it. You liars! You *fools!*"

The Knight rose to his feet also, and looked at Alfred with controlled but passionate condemnation. "You're proud of having had an Empire, are you? Proud of being an Englishman for *that* reason? Look at that poor clod Hermann there—he daren't face anything, believe anything, he hardly dares to *hear* anything, he's a shrinking, shaking *coward*, not so much

because he believes in Hitler, not so much because he's a *German*, but because he's got an Empire! You ought to be ashamed of your race, Alfred, even though your Empire vanished seven hundred years ago. It isn't long enough to get rid of that taint."

"It's you who have taught us to admire Empire!" Alfred flung at him. "The Holy Ones! The Germans!"

The Knight sat down again. "No," he said quietly, "it was *you* who taught *us*. Jealousy of the British Empire was one of the motive forces of German imperialism, one of the forces which made Germany grow from a collection of little kingdoms to be ruler of a third of the world. A tremendous bitter black jealousy, so says von Hess, though when he lived the triumph had long come. Unshakable, impregnable Empire has always been the dream of virile nations, and now at last it's turned into a nightmare reality. A monster that is killing us."

"I don't want ours back," said Alfred more calmly; "only I always thought it was so, and I like to know the truth."

"That is wholly admirable," said the Knight. "I wish Hermann liked to hear it too."

Hermann muttered something inaudible, but the Knight took no notice. "As I was saying, the shadows of these old ideas and of these vast old Empires still hung over Germany, reminding Germans that Empires rise, and *fall*, reminding them also of their own small beginnings. It was not enough for them to know that they *now* ruled a third of the world, that in them rested the only true and holy civilisation; they wanted to forget that there ever had been, in Europe, any other civilisation at all. There was so much beauty *they* had not made, so many books they had not written, so many records of wars in which they had not fought, and so many ideas of human behaviour which were anathema to them. Socialism, for instance, was absolutely smashed, practically, but the idea was still there, in men's minds. No, Alfred, I will not stop to tell you what Socialism was. You can read it in the book. But if *you* were a Socialist you would think the Knights had no right to own all the land and factories and ships and houses of the Empire, you would think the people

who actually do the work on the land or in the factories ought to own them."

"Then I am a Socialist. Were there many of them?"

"It was really what amounted to the religion of Russia, from the Polish border to Vladivostok, and there were lots of them in every other country. But Russia, after the most tremendous struggle in history (or so says von Hess), was finally beaten, by the combined attacks of Germany and Japan. The home of Socialism was shattered. But do let me get on with the important things. The Germans of that time were blown up with an insensate pride, a lunatic vanity, for which of course there was a great deal of excuse. But they were still afraid. In the heart of the pride lurked a fear, not of anything physical, but of Memory itself. This fear gradually grew into a kind of hysteria (von Hess says the Germans have always been inclined to hysteria), which at last reached its expression in the book of one man. This was a typical scholar-knight called von Wied, a bookish person, says von Hess, a complete nervous hysteric, who, though bloodthirsty, had owing to physical disability to content himself with floods of ink. Von Hess says that had he known what von Wied was doing he would have murdered him without the smallest compunction. This book of von Wied proved that Hitler was God, not born but exploded, that women were not part of the human race at all but a kind of ape, and that everything that had been said and done and thought before Hitler descended was the blackest error of subhuman savagery and therefore must be wiped out. The fear of Memory reached its height with him, and he gave us the logical and Teutonic remedy, destruction. All history, all psychology, all philosophy, all art except music, all medical knowledge except the purely anatomical and physical—every book and picture and statue that could remind Germans of old time must be destroyed. A huge gulf was to be made which no one could ever cross again. Christianity must go, all the enormous mass of Christian theology must be destroyed throughout the Empire, all the Christian Bibles must be routed out and burned, and even Hitler's own book, hallowed throughout Germany, could only continue to exist in part. There was Memory there, you see. Memory of what we call the Preliminary Attack."

"In which Hitler fought at the age of fourteen, the Glorious Boy," said Alfred.

"Yes. But he was much older than that. And Germany was beaten, absolutely defeated. Von Hess doesn't mind admitting that, but for von Wied that was part of the Memory he was afraid of. You are all taught that Hitler fought in that war at fourteen, and that he had subdued the whole Empire at thirty, after which he was Reunited. But it took much longer than that. Hitler had been dead for nearly a hundred years when the Empire had grown to its present size."

"Lies, lies," muttered Alfred. "Lies, lies, lies!"

"This man von Wied might be called the Father of Lies. The arch-liar. Not that there hadn't been lies before. Von Hess admits that there was tampering with historical facts even in Hitler's lifetime. And he says, very justly, I think, that there is not the whole width of the Empire between the falsification of history and its destruction. Von Hess was all for telling the whole truth about the history of Germany and the history of the rest of the world. For, says he, surely, apart from any question of right and wrong, the truth is sufficiently glorious? But von Wied thought not, and he was willing to have his own great work destroyed so long as it was accompanied to the pyre by the other records of mankind."

"Didn't they even keep his?" asked Alfred in some astonishment.

"No. But I think some of it is incorporated in the Hitler Bible. Why, how can you keep a book which proves a man is God, or that advocates the destruction of records of other civilisations? It simply proves those things *were* there, and that Hitler was not always divine. There was plenty of Memory in von Wied's book. He screamed and snarled and foamed at it, so says von Hess, but it was still there. Not dead yet. Well, this book exactly caught the feeling of the nation at the time."

"In spite of the part about the women?"

"Because of the part about the women. I don't mean only because of that, but von Wied's theories about women were wildly popular with a large section of the men. You see, the lunatic vanity of the Germans was concentrated really in the males among them. The women hadn't beaten the world

and made the Empire. They had only borne the children, and that was no more than any English woman or Russian woman could do. And these proud soldiers, the great-grandsons of the men who really made the Empire, were beginning to feel very strongly that it was beneath the dignity of a German man to have to risk rejection by a mere woman, to have to allow women to wound him in his most sensitive part, his vanity, without the remedy of a duel. They wanted *all* women to be at their will like the women of a conquered nation. So in reality the Reduction of Women was not started by von Wied. It had begun already. Rapes were extraordinarily common compared with what they had been even fifty years before, and the sentences for rape were getting lighter and lighter. Von Wied's theory was that the rejection-right of women was an insult to Manhood, that family life was an insult to Manhood, and that it was the wickedest possible folly to allow an animal (for women were nothing more than that) to have complete control over human beings at their tenderest and most impressionable period, their infancy. He said that the boys must be taken away at the very dawn of consciousness and before memory came to endure. At a year old, *he* said. We now give the women six months longer than that. He also held the theory that the beauty of women was an insult to Manhood, as giving them (some of them) an enormous and disgusting sexual power over men. He said, though, that this beauty was not real (for he would allow women no redeeming qualities whatever) but a sham made by long hair and a mysterious half-revealing half-concealing form of dress. He advocated shaven heads for women and a kind of dress that could conceal nothing and have nothing mysterious or graceful about it. They must dress all in one colour, a dirty-brown (as they do now), and must be, after the age of sixteen, completely submissive, not only to the father of their children, but to any and every man, for such was the will of the Lord Hitler, through his humble mouthpiece Rupprecht von Wied. He said there must be no love, only lust or a desire to beget sons, and that a sexual preference for one woman over another, except in so far as one might be stronger and healthier, was a weakness and wholly unmanly. The whole pattern of women's lives was to be changed and made to fit in with the

new German Manhood, the first civilised manhood of the world."

"And what did the women do?" Alfred asked.

"What they always do. Once they were convinced that men really wanted them to be animals and ugly and completely submissive and give up their boy children for ever at the age of one year they threw themselves into the new pattern with a conscious enthusiasm that knew no bounds. They shaved their heads till they bled, they rejoiced in their hideous uniforms as a young Knight might rejoice in his Robe of Ceremony, they pulled out their front teeth until they were forbidden for reasons of health, and they gave up their baby sons with the same heroism with which they had been used to give their grown sons to war."

"They don't do that now," Alfred said, frowning.

"They cannot be enthusiastic about anything *now*," said the Knight. "It is not a new way of pleasing men, it is just part of their lives. *They* thought, those poor little typically feminine idiots, that if they did all that men told them to do cheerfully and willingly, that men would somehow, in the face of all logic, love them still *more*. They could not see that they were helping to kill love. What woman now would ever dream that a man could love her as he loves his friends? But *those* women, aware of a growing irritation with them among men, passionately hoped to soothe and please them by their sacrifice of beauty and their right of choice and rejection, and their acceptance of animal status. Women *are* nothing, except an incarnate desire to please men; why should they fail in their nature that time more than any other?"

Alfred shook his head.

"There's something wrong somewhere," he said slowly. "I don't know what it is yet. I'll have to think it out. Go on, sir. But I see I shall have to think about women seriously. I never knew they were important before."

"As long as we can't all be exploded, they certainly are. They're not important *in themselves*, of course. But I must go back a bit. When von Hess read this terrific farrago of lies and catastrophic nonsense and realised what a tremendous hold it almost immediately obtained over the ordinary Germans he was uneasy. When serious discussions of the book started among the Knights, he was frightened. When

the subject was put down for debate at the Council of the Inner Ten, he was appalled. For he knew Germany *could do it*. Could destroy all records of the truth. With German patience and German thoroughness they could, once they had made up their minds to do it, rout out and burn every book in the Empire, even if it took them a hundred years. Well, he always opposed the idea, at every Knights' discussion, and for some time several of the Inner Ten were with him, and der Fuehrer as well. But meanwhile the enthusiasm for von Wied in the country at large was getting quite hysterical. More and more people every day were shrieking and screaming for Memory to be destroyed and their dark inside panic to be allayed. There were even whispers that von Wied ought to be der Fuehrer, seeing that he was the first man who recognised openly what everybody knew inside themselves, that Hitler was divine, and that the world, the real human world, was born in His Explosion. So the Inner Knights one by one went over to the von Wied party, and at last der Fuehrer went too. Von Hess was desperate. On such a serious matter there must be unanimity among the Inner Knights, but he knew that if he opposed too long he would be murdered. Yet he made one last effort to save Truth. He was above himself, he says. He argued, he pleaded, he raged, he says he even wept. He went on talking almost for a whole night. But he made no impression. The whole weight of Germany was against him. Inside the Council Hall there were the nine Knights and der Fuehrer, with grim set faces, listening to him still courteously, but quite immovable; outside there was the rest of Germany, Knights, Nazis, and women, all fallen into a hysteria of rage and fear and desire to destroy as universal and as potent as if some physical enemy had invaded the very soil of Holy Germany. And above this storm, riding it like God on a whirlwind, was the little mean figure of von Wied, a small dark cripple (so says von Hess) without manhood, stability, or even physical courage. Von Wied outside, being hailed as the Prophet, the Apostle, the Deliverer, the Voice of Hitler, even the Voice of God. Von Hess inside, defeated. The Knights rose at last and shouted him down, and der Fuehrer closed the Council, adjourning it to the next evening. Von Hess saluted and went out. He got into his car and drove home here, not actually to this house, his castle

was up on the hill there, to the south of the landing-ground. It was summer, and beginning to get light. On the way he saw what he thought was a dead body lying by the side of the road. He stopped his driver and got out to investigate. It was the naked body of a woman, young, he thought, but the face was so mangled he could hardly tell. The eyes were torn out and the nostrils slit up. The hair had all been pulled out, leaving nothing but a ghastly red skull-cap of blood. The body was covered with innumerable stabs and cuts that looked as if they had been made with a pen-knife. The nipples had been cut off. Von Hess was no more squeamish than a good German ought to be, but he says he felt a little sick. However, that might have been fatigue after the effort of the night. He hoped that this untidy corpse was the work of some solitary sex maniac, but his hope was very faint. Next day he learned that it was the body of a girl who had laughed at a band of the new "von Wied Women", a pretty young girl who didn't mind Hitler being God but couldn't see why women should be ugly. That was the temper of Germany in hysteria. If the women were like that, how would the men bear opposition in their blown-up pride of conquest? But von Hess was hardly conscious of physical danger. He was too despairing. He says, 'I cannot waste this precious parchment in describing my sensations. I was in the blackest despair known to man, for I couldn't think what to do.'

"When the morning was far advanced a Knight brought him a message from der Fuehrer in Munich, warning him, without any threats, that he must at once cease his opposition to the von Wied plan. But still he didn't know what to do, except go on opposing and be quietly murdered. Not till he was almost in the Council Hall that evening did his idea come to him. He says, 'I never have been anything but a rather stupid man. My brain is slow, the Knights elected me to the Inner Ten, I think, for reasons of character.' But once he had his idea he was not slow. He made instantaneous and humble submission before the Knights and der Fuehrer; he said that he had been mad before not to see the beauty and holiness and truly German simplicity and strength of the von Wied plan. He acknowledged Hitler as God. He begged that his own collection of books (a fairish library, he says)

might have the honour of being burnt at once for Hitler's sake. None of the Knights believed in this sudden conversion. They thought he was afraid for his skin. They were astonished and disgusted even though they were relieved at the collapse of the opposition. And here I think we may know that there *have* been men of honour in Germany, Alfred, for this Knight, my ancestor, bore this imputation of cowardice all the rest of his life for the sake of Truth. He even refused to challenge a Knight, a personal friend of von Wied's, who a little later accused him almost openly of having given way to save himself. He wanted them to think him a coward. He also at this Council prayed der Fuehrer formally to be excused from further attendance at Council on the score of age and ill-health. A Knight cannot resign from the Inner Ten, but he can, if der Fuehrer allows it, be permanently excused from attendance. Von Hess says, 'I was not young, nearly sixty, but as healthy as a youth. However, der Fuehrer granted my plea.' They also promptly accepted his offer of his books, and because he had not succeeded quite in averting suspicion, because they did not quite think him only a coward, a small party of ordinary Knights was sent straight back with him to his castle to see the books put all in one room, and the doors and windows sealed. But before he left the Council Hall for the last time, he agreed to the adoption of the von Wied plan, and it was passed unanimously. He had to stay for the discussion of ways and means that followed, but he sat like a man ashamed, with his head down, taking no part unless he had to vote. At last he could go home with his escort of Knights, and it was then that one of them, the friend of von Wied, insulted him. He swallowed it like a little boy who has been over-bragging and daren't make his boast good. He knew from the contemptuous look in the eyes of the other men that his disgrace was complete. It would not be made public among the Knights, owing to the peculiar circumstances, but it would get round. He would be known as 'von Hess the Coward'. He would be let alone. He left home and went to England, where he bought a large sheep farm on Romney Marsh in Kent. Do you know it, Alfred?"

"No, sir. What did he go to England for?"

"It's a good place for sheep, and he wanted to be out of Germany. He let it be known that he was going to experi-

ment with sheep-breeding. That was natural enough, he had always been a bit of an agricultural expert. What he wanted to do actually was to learn to make parchment. He didn't dare to buy it, though it was used for certain things, Knights' Commissions, and so on. Before he left Germany he saw his sons, Arnold, Kaspar, Friedrich, and Waldemar, and told them that he was in private disgrace with der Fuehrer, but that he had done nothing of which he himself was ashamed. He did not tell them what had happened, but he laid on them his strictest command that none of them should fight duels on his behalf, no matter what they heard. They all swore to obey him. If all his sons were killed, you see, there would be no one he could trust with his book. He also instructed Arnold (a good lad, he says, not very intelligent) to buy for him secretly a book on the technique of parchment-making, and a supply of some special kind of ink. He thought Arnold was just intelligent enough to do this without making a mistake. When he had them he was to bring them to his father in England. When von Hess had the book on parchment-making he settled down to breed sheep and kill some of them and make the leaves of his book out of their skins. In Romney Marsh. It's a queer flat green place, Alfred, below the level of the sea, misty and damp, but curiously beautiful. Von Hess wastes two whole lines of writing on his precious parchment saying it was beautiful and that its beauty made him sometimes happy. I know it is. I went there to look. It's a very great contrast to this part of Germany. He lived there for two years making parchment leaves, with much hard work and many deplorable failures. Nearly all his labourers and servants were English, he had but one Nazi lad, a faithful lout, one gathers, who had gone with him from Germany. This youth helped him with the making of the parchment. He didn't know what it was for, but the Knight had told him to hold his tongue and not brag about. He would, von Hess says, have had it torn out rather than say anything. As for the Englishmen, they took no notice. They worked for him, very lazily, so he says, Alfred, but in good enough temper and without inquisitiveness. No one came to see him, except his sons. His wife (that's the woman he permanently lived with) was dead, long before all this trouble. No Knight on duty in England or travelling there ever came

to his sheep-farm in Romney Marsh. He says, wasting more precious sheepskin, 'I was so lonely that I began to understand about God. Not Hitler, not the god of the Germans, but about God, whatever God is, but I never could hold the understanding together. It came and went like the best part of the sunsets.' "

"Oh," said Alfred. "Oh, there is something *there*. Yes, like the best part of the sunsets. And not to be able to hold it together. Sir, this von Hess, he knew something."

The Knight said, "Great men, in their loneliness, might touch one another. Even though one was German and one English. Well, when he had made what he thought would be enough parchment leaves for his very scanty knowledge he sold his sheep-farm and moved slowly up through England, buying a little paper here and a little there on which to make the notes for his book, but never getting enough at a time to cause any remark. The Nazi boy, Johann Leder, drove his car; he had no other retinue at all. He slept at common English hostels, but this caused no surprise among the Knights who became aware of his travels. It was only disgraced von Hess, the Coward; naturally he would not care to go to the Knights' houses and Tables. He went far into the north, to the Island of Skye in Scotland, and there he settled down in a tiny house, a mere hovel, to write his book. His German estates had not been sequestered; he could have afforded to buy himself a castle, but he no longer wanted anything but a room, a table, his special ink and some food. He planned and re-planned, made notes in tiny writing with pencil on his little supply of ordinary paper, and cudgelled his memory until it sometimes threatened to fail him altogether, and he fell into fits of panic and despair. You see, he must be certain of everything he put down, it must be well arranged, and it must be concise. Yet he knew nothing of the making of books, and had never written anything in his life except one or two papers on agricultural matters and private letters. After two years of this kind of concentration and planning he thought he had pinned down everything he could remember about the history of human beings, and had it arranged so that totally ignorant men could understand it. So he started to write it down in the parchment book, very slowly, making each letter with the utmost care to save space and yet leave the writing legible.

And when he had written about half he found his eyesight was failing."

"Oh," Alfred breathed. "Oh, sir."

"Yes. He did not dare to go anywhere to have his eyes looked at. He had never worn spectacles, and the doctor, when he knew who this Knight was, might wonder why sheep-farming and hiding his shame in the Highlands of Scotland should affect his eyes so badly. Arnold bought spectacles in Germany and brought his father a selection, in fact for several years when any of his sons came to visit him they brought various powers of lenses for him to try. But they none of them knew what he was doing, for when they were there he locked his room and did nothing. He says he thinks Johann Leder knew, and indeed the lad must have unless he was a half-wit, but he said nothing to anyone. So with his spectacles von Hess got on again fairly well, but he grew blinder and blinder, and could do less and less every day. But his writing never grew less beautiful and clear: by will-power, it seems, he kept it small and even and well-formed. And in five years he had put down all the contents of his notes, and his book was finished. There were just a few leaves left at the end, but he says it was not his blindness that prevented him filling them up, but that he had nothing more to write that was certainly true. Then he sent for Arnold and told him about the book. I often have imagined him, perhaps on a fine summer evening—for the date at the end of the book is June 6th (that is the month we now call Himmler)—sitting there at the door perhaps of his little house, with his spectacles on his nose and his eyes peering, hardly able to see the expression in Arnold's eyes, and wholly unable to see the beauty of Skye at sunset. I have been there; I fancied a certain little house on the west side of the island was his. And he would perhaps be still in his Knight's tunic, very shabby and faded, with the golden swastikas on the collar that showed he was of the Inner Ring. Or it might have been inside the house by a fire in one of those incessant soaking mists that make that climate so trying for nine months of the year. Well, wet or fine, outside or in, he managed to make Arnold understand. Come here again, Alfred."

Alfred came round the desk and looked over the Knight's shoulder. The old man opened the book a few leaves from

the end. Alfred saw a few lines in von Hess's craftsman's hand, then a space, and then some more German words in a writing which by comparison looked extremely coarse, weak and untidy.

"My father, Friedrich von Hess, Teutonic Knight of the Inner Ring of Ten, gave me this book on June 19th, 2130. Then being seventy years old and nearly blind, and having nothing else to live for, but, as he said, being filled with a perfect faith in the goodness and universality of God, he took his own life on the following day, June 20th, 2130. He told me to lead him up to a certain place in some rugged hills not far off, called the Scarts of the Coolins, and there I was to leave him for three hours. When I came back again my father was dead, having swallowed some poison which he must have had with him ever since he left Germany ten years before. There was a little scrap of paper beside him on which he sent greetings and love to Kaspar, Friedrich, and Waldemar, and to me, Arnold, he wrote, Be faithful and guard the book. So I here record my oath.

"I swear to be faithful and guard this book.

"Arnold von Hess, Knecht."

Under there was a list of names in various handwritings, preceded by the words *Und Ich*.

The Knight turned over the page and the names went on. The von Hess men were nearly all called after one of the old scribe's four sons. Alfred glanced down the list till he came to the last one, written in nearly as lovely a hand as the book itself.

*Und Ich, Friedrich von Hess, Knecht.*

"And do you swear to be faithful, Alfred?"

"Yes."

"Then take this pen, dip it in this special ink in this bottle here, and write your name under these."

"I'm not much good at writing, sir," Alfred said, ruefully.

"I'll make a bad mess on the page."

"But you can write?"

"Oh, I *can*."

"You can copy the *Und Ich*."

"Ich bin nicht Ich," said Alfred. "I'm I."

Laboriously under the *Und Ich* he wrote a sprawling badly

formed "And I" in English script. Under the von Hess names he wrote "Alfred" and under *Knecht* he with toil and pain inscribed the word "Englishmun".

"You might be an English *man*," said the Knight. "Give me the pen." Deftly he corrected Alfred's faulty spelling. "I suppose you never have any occasion to write?" he asked.

"Not often. There's nothing to write about. About all I ever write is 'Passed' on a ticket for an engine."

"Don't you have to indent for stores, tools and so on?"

"The Nazi ground foreman does that. I'm the first man on that list without a surname. It looks odd, doesn't it? Just 'Alfred'."

"You could have put Alfred Alfredson."

"That's nothing. Those aren't surnames like von Hess. You are Friedrich Kasparsohn von Hess."

The ink was dry and the Knight closed the book.

"That Nazi, that Johann Leder, *he* had a surname. How did he have one? Hermann hasn't any more than me."

"I'll tell you to-morrow," said the Knight. He seemed tired. "How you lost your surnames, and anything I know about myself. I know you'll be bursting with questions. But now you must go, and though the book is yours now, Alfred, you can't have it yet. I must think of ways and means."

"Sir, how could you risk yourself in an aeroplane when you knew that if you were killed that book would be destroyed?"

"I am still a German, and a Knight. It is not so easy always to see where one's real duty lies. But I admit it was a superstitious weakness, going up with you. Hermann!"

Hermann jumped like a man suddenly wakened out of deep sleep. He sprang to attention.

"You are to go to the end of the passage, open the door and wait outside with Heinrich till Alfred comes. You are not to speak to Heinrich. Salute. Right about. March."

Hermann strode stiffly out and shut the door.

"Alfred, tell him from me he can work on the farm or not as he likes to-day. Keep with him. Look after him. He may try to kill himself, or you. Be careful and take this."

This was a small revolver the Knight drew from the desk.

"I'd better not, sir," Alfred said. "If they found it, or if I had to use it, there'd be a hell of a fuss. An ordinary fight doesn't matter."

"But he has a knife and you have nothing. You understand, Alfred, you simply must *not* be killed. Hermann has no control except under discipline. Why, ten Hermanns, a hundred of them, wouldn't pay for *you*."

"He won't kill me," said Alfred. "And he won't kill himself. I'll look after him. While I'm here," he added, rather uneasily. "I've only got another fortnight."

"You see, he *ought not* to have been told."

"No, he ought not. I'm sorry, sir. But perhaps I can get him out of his daze."

"There's a lot to be thought about," said the Knight, "so Heil Hitler, Alfred. You can come at—well, we'll say six o'clock to-morrow evening."

"Sir—" said Alfred rather dubiously.

"What?"

"Is it all right for an Englishman and a Nazi farm-worker to go on coming to see you? *Once* perhaps for a Knight's wiggling."

"It's quite all right," said von Hess, with a tired smile.

"The reputation of my family is fortunately so peculiar that I can do almost anything. Auf wiedersehen."

Alfred saluted and went.

Outside the passage door he found Hermann and Heinrich standing like two wooden figures one on each side, gazing into space, apparently unaware of each other. Alfred glanced from one to another and thought either would do well enough for models of the legendary Hitler. Both were young, huge and blond. He wondered if Heinrich's manly mien concealed a weakness, a strong desire for personal dependency, as did Hermann's. You never could tell to look at Hermann. If he had a soft chin, his fine golden beard hid it. "I dare say it's a good thing," thought Alfred. "If I can make him think only of me now, perhaps he'll be all right. Poor lad! I was wrong to let him be told. He's not even a quarter of a man."

These thoughts took no more time than a slight hesitation, when he had closed the door.

"Come on, Hermann," he said, nudging his arm. "The highly-born wishes us to potter off. March."

Hermann marched, with a jerk. He walked with Alfred in silence until they were out of the Knight's grounds and in the road that led to the farm.

"Where are you going?" he asked in a dull voice.

"Well, anywhere you like. The Knight says you can work or not, as you like. What ought you to be doing?"

"Hoeing."

"Then, if you want to work, give me a hoe, tell me which end I use, and I'll be with you."

"Did he say I didn't have to work?"

"He did."

"He said I was a coward."

"Oh, he didn't mean that. He was only ticking me off for being glad we once had an Empire."

"Is that all true?"

"What?"

"All he said?"

"Nobody could ever know. But by the way the tale came to him, I should say, *yes*. If a German was really set on telling the truth, I can't help thinking that as far as his knowledge went, he would tell it, and nothing else."

Hermann stopped walking down the farm road and turned round to face Alfred. No one was in sight.

"He did think I was a coward," Hermann said. "And so do you. You think I can't stand anything. So does he. But neither of you realise that it's worse for me than for you. He's used to it. You're glad, because you're an Englishman. I'm nothing, only a common Nazi." Hermann's voice broke. He coughed and recovered himself. "But you're both of you wrong."

"I was damned wrong," said Alfred. "I'm sorry, Hermann. I really thought you couldn't stand it. To have your God and your belief in the infallibility of Germany taken from you at one stroke. Why, of course, I couldn't stand it, if I had a belief in the infallibility of Englishmen, and if I had a personal English God. I've got all wrong over you. I never realised what it would be like."

"Did the Knight?"

"He didn't want you to be told. But no, he *doesn't* realise,

Hermann. The biggest influence in his life is old von Hess. And was *he* really a German? Yes, he was the Germanest kind of German; can you imagine any other kind of man being so single-minded, so devoted, so careless of *himself*, so patient, so strong? And yet all that Blood-stuff didn't seem to mean much. 'The goodness and universality of God', that's what he thought at the end. He thought Germany ought to rule the world, and he thought the truth ought to prevail. He was a grand man. By God, Hermann, he believed in Germany more than you do."

"You talk so much," said Hermann, "you muddle me. What I want to tell you is that I *can* stand this, that I'm not really a coward, whatever you and the Knight think—but, Alfred, you can't leave me here."

"Where?"

"In Germany. You say—*he* says that Germany is wrong—all that. Well, then, if I stay here I'll kill myself. What else could I do?"

"You could go on hoeing."

A *cri de cœur*, wholly without pride, came from Hermann's bearded lips. "Alfred, if any man I trust will tell me what to do, I'll do it. You or the Knight. I don't care which."

Alfred took his arm. "Hermann, young fellow, you've been thinking too long. Let's get some hoes."

But he was thinking, "Ought any man to be like Hermann? Would there have been men like Hermann when that girl in the photograph was alive? Is he perhaps not so much childish but rather like a *woman*, when women were different? But he's not going to kill anyone, and that's a good thing, anyway. How does one hoe?"

Hermann went to the toolhouse at the farm to get two hoes, and then to the kitchen to receive his hedge-meal. The cook gave him a portion for Alfred, when Hermann suggested it, without demur. Their long session with the Knight had raised their status on the farm to privileged men. Either the Knight was ferociously displeased with them, in which case some sympathy was due, even to the Englishman, or else he held them in some special kind of favour. The cook showed his interest and curiosity by hints, but Hermann made no response and the man had to go back to his kitchen unsatisfied.

"It's all about that chorister, I suppose," he thought. "Perhaps the Knight has heard he's dead."

In the field they found other men working, toiling up the long rows between the roots.

"You draw the hoe *so*, Alfred. Get in the next row to me and don't try to go too fast. It's hard work."

"These are mangold wurzels," said Alfred, chopping at the leaves of one of them idly with his hoe. "But they're rotten little plants."

"Well, don't cut all its leaves off to improve it. They won't really grow in this part of Germany. They don't get enough damp. It's one of the Knight's everlasting experiments with a special manure. And he thinks a lot of hoeing will make up for no rain at the proper time."

"He's an agriculturalist too then, like the old man?"

"He's a very bad one," said Hermann, almost smiling. "He does the most fantastic things. Don't *dig* so. Just draw it along through the surface of the ground."

"Heilige Nacht!" muttered Alfred presently, referring to the Night of Hitler's final disappearance in the Holy Forest. "What a hog's job this is!"

His knee hurt him, sweat poured off him and his back ached ferociously. Hermann, without any appearance of effort at all, drew fast ahead of him. But Alfred was ashamed to give in. He toiled along as fast as he could go, trying to catch Hermann up. He got farther and farther behind, for Hermann when he was in the swing of his work gradually quickened his pace. "The fellow is just a turbine-driven hoeing machine," Alfred thought, stopping for an instant to wipe sweat out of his eyes. "I hope there's something to drink in the hedge."

Fortunately for him it was near dinner-time when they had arrived in the field. Before he was quite cooked a welcome shout called them to the hedge. Alfred undid his back, which seemed to have permanently shortened itself into a hoop, picked up his coat, and staggered towards the group of hoers. He was received with friendly jeers.

"It's all very well," he said, collapsing into the shade. "I'm not used to it. If you men tried to repair an engine you'd look just the same mugs."

"That's a skilled job," said one. "Anyone, even an

Englishman, ought to be able to draw a little hoe through the ground."

"The holy soil of Germany is too thick for me, I'm afraid. Sausage! You Nazis do live high. Do all farm workers get as good food as you? Is there some water?"

"There's some beer. Pass him some, Hermann. The poor little fellow's faint."

Alfred drank gratefully. The beer was thin, but there was plenty of it and it was not sour.

"Our food depends partly on whatever Knight we work for," explained a labourer. "Of course there are lots of things we don't have except on feast days. Butter—things like that. But ours is a very good Knight. The von Hesses are mad, but never mean. It's desperate the old man has no son."

Hermann sat next to Alfred in the hedge, munching slowly. He did not speak or listen to what the other men were saying. Once he turned to look at Alfred, a strange stupid lost look, vague and yet despairing, like a woman who had just had to surrender her baby son.

"It's *all right*," Alfred murmured in English. "The Knight will look after us. He'll tell us what to do. You go on with your hoeing and don't try to think."

Hermann nodded.

"If I hoed for a year or so," Alfred asked, "should I be able to go as fast as Hermann?"

"Not likely. Seeing he's the strongest man on the farm."

"Then I shan't bother to learn. I'll do a very little more at about five o'clock, when it'll be cooler."

"Where are you going?" Hermann asked quickly.

"To sleep. And then just to the store to buy some cigarettes. You see, my hosts and all good chaps, if you keep me in sausage and beer and soup I can buy cigarettes for you. Your paternal and gracious government gives me two marks a day for expenses, besides my railway pass. What shall I get?"

"The little cigars are better value than the cigarettes. Ask for the red-seal packets. Do you get all your expenses money at once, in England?"

"I can draw on any Knight's Marshal up to a certain amount. He writes it off on the paper and gives me whatever I want."

"Then you *could* draw it all at once and have a huge feast in Hamburg or wherever you landed?"

"I could. But I should be slung out of Germany on my ear with an impaired reputation for piety. And I should have to go back to work. I'd rather stay the whole month and see all the Holy Places."

"Which have you liked best so far?"

"The Forest. And the Rhine."

"The Rhine isn't particularly holy. Only in the one place where He swam across it."

"It's beautiful," Alfred murmured sleepily. "Now don't clatter your hoes, you men, when you go back to work."

"He wants kicking, Hermann. Why don't you do it?"

"You do it," said Hermann. "But it's no good kicking him. He won't be any different afterwards. And he might not bring back your smokes."

"Why don't we just murder him and take his two marks or whatever he has, and buy the smokes ourselves?"

"Because it'd be better to torture him, and make him draw all the rest of the money from the Knight's Marshal, and then just kill him after that. They can't worry much if one odd Englishman never comes back again. Come, lads. Time."

Herman sat up and took off his coat. He pushed it under Alfred's head for a pillow.

"Odd Englishman is right," he said.

Alfred, sound asleep by this time, opened his mouth and snored.

"Are all Englishmen as lazy as he is?" someone asked Hermann, as they plodded back to their work.

"They don't just rush about looking for work, any of them. But when Alfred's on a job he's quick and clever. At his aerodrome they think a lot of him. He'd have been ground foreman five years ago if he'd been a Nazi."

Hermann went back to his lonely row. The rhythmical

hard work soothed him; he managed to reduce himself, very nearly, to an automatic collection of expertly working muscles. A peace, the peace of emptiness, came to his mind. But for all his physical absorption he was aware of it when Alfred, two hours later, woke up and moved off across the field.

He waved to Hermann, who made an answering gesture with his hoe. He hoped Alfred would come over to talk to him, but he did not. He went to the gate and vanished. Alfred was feeling as strong as ten men. All his life he had been more refreshed, not only physically, by sleep than by food or drink or love or lust or triumphs of skill. He never understood it, but however despairing and bewildered he had been by his almost life-long struggle to *think* light into the darkness of human origins, when he woke after a sleep he always felt renewed to battle, with his gloominess and dejection and fear of madness gone. It was as if something inside himself, not his brain, went on thinking, much better than he could; and though it could not tell him anything definite, yet he always had the feeling of being a little farther on than when he lay down. He would go to sleep sometimes on thoughts of suicide and eternal rest from this bitter conflict, all the worse because it was like a battle with wind and mist; but he would wake up determined to live till the last possible minute of his appointed time. "For," he thought, in these giant moods, "if I go on thinking long enough and hard enough, I *must* understand." After his sound sweet sleep in the hedge, the sounder and the sweeter for his wakeful night and his furious unskilled exertion with the hoe, he knew that the world really was a paradise. For no Valhalla or Hero's Heaven or everlasting supernatural bliss of any kind would he have changed this German landscape and himself walking in it. He had been happy when he lay down, owing to the light that had dawned with the Knight's tale; and now when he woke up he felt that his secret mind, the one that could never give him any direct message, but which was always strong and hopeful, had taken its usual forward leap.

"I shall understand *everything* now," he thought—"when I get von Hess's book to read it will all be plain. The difficult part, thinking by myself, is all done. And I was right.

There's no Blood. Men are men. Some are stronger than others, that's all. And this woman business. I must think about women. How does one do that? Do they think about themselves?" He made a serious effort to think unsexually and objectively about women, and he was, at least, successful in concentration. When he next realised his physical surroundings he had walked right through the village and was limping along the road towards the woods where he and Hermann had bathed the previous day. "It seems six weeks ago," Alfred thought, turning round again. "Damn my leg. I've walked it farther than it need have gone." But he soon forgot the discomfort again in the interest of his thoughts. Presently he stopped suddenly. He stared down at his stick. "God!" he said aloud, apparently to the stick. "What a weird idea! Has it a hole in it, somewhere?"

But his idea had no holes, logically, it was merely quite fantastic and impossible. He began to walk towards the village again. "And it is quite likely right," he thought, "for when I first began to think that I was superior to nearly all the Germans I met I thought that was fantastic and impossible too. Everything's fantastic if it's out of the lines you're brought up on. At first I must try it on the Knight. Now I mustn't go through the village again without buying the cigars. Red seal. And I ought to get back to Hermann. Six o'clock to-morrow! That'll be another six weeks. My life is lengthening rapidly."

Alfred began to sing a tune he had heard from a Scotsman, a haunting melancholy air which was unlike German music. It had come out of the tribal darkness of old time. "*Row bonny boat, like a bird on the wing, over the sea to Skye.*"

The tune had two parts and there never seemed any reason why one should stop singing it, except that the words came to an end. One part of the air slid into the next and the end of the next slid back into the beginning. The Scotsman used to play it on a wooden whistle, over and over again, until he had sunk himself into a dark Celtic gloom that always left him more cheerful next day. He had a very good whistle, and though he never admitted it, Alfred was almost sure it was a Christian-made whistle. Its tone was so sweet. Per-

haps von Hess heard that tune when he was in Skye all those years. How the poor brave truth-defender must have missed the German music! Miles from a public wireless set and unable to have one of his own, unless Arnold brought him one and kept him supplied with valves and things. There'd be no power anyway. But of course he was very rich, he could keep on ordering new ones from England whenever he wanted one. There could be nothing suspicious about the disgraced Knight having a wireless. But perhaps he didn't care to hear anything of the outside world, not even the music. Alfred was not a musical man; he could not sing well, or play a wooden whistle, not even a Christian one, which, in the Scotsman's hands, seemed almost to play itself. But he was very fond of music and at times deeply affected by it. It was hard sometimes not to have a genuine inferiority feeling when he heard a Bach chorale or cantata perfectly rendered by the Nazi choir in the great barracks church in Salisbury. The Germans had such astonishing musical ability. Why, any four bumpkins among them could sing you into happiness or despair, according to your underlying mood, with a simple little part song. And the composers themselves. Bach, Brahms, Beethoven—when one heard them, yes, it *did* seem for a little while as if the Germans had some natural born superiority. For music was important, Alfred was sure of that. Bach was great in a way no man of action was great. "If they'd said *he* was God," Alfred thought, "maybe I'd be a believer yet." A sudden pleasing notion struck him. Perhaps he was *not* German! Perhaps he was long pre-Hitler and belonged to some other lost civilisation. Perhaps he was *English*! But then he shook his head. There was no particular reason to suppose that the great composers were not German, when the Germans were so obviously an intensely musical nation. "Wagner," thought he, "is as German as the Sacred Aeroplane. But Bach—well, no, but he is above being anything really. He must be, he probably *is*, a kind of peak civilisation in general. The Nazis themselves are inclined to get much more excited over Wagner. Perhaps he really is since von Wied's time, as one's told. An expression of panic somehow, hysteria, all that violence and brutality and holy virtues. But I don't believe anything they say any more. German simply means

man-who-is-afraid of-the-truth. Except for von Hess. Perhaps at one time they were all like von Hess. Then *there* was a nation fitted for rule. But directly they started to rule they went rotten. Then power is rotting, and the more power the more rot. But I have power over Hermann, and dozens and dozens of other men, and I'm not rotten. It is *physical* power that's rotting. It all comes back to that. The rebellion must be unarmed, and the power behind the rebellion must be spiritual, out of the soul. The same place where Bach got his music from. From God, perhaps. What is God? 'A perfect faith in the goodness and universality of God. The understanding comes and goes like the best part of the sunset.' Fancy worshipping that little soft dark fat smiling thing, when they might worship Bach or von Hess. But of course they don't know about von Hess. And they don't know Hitler was a little soft dark fat smiling thing, and he must have been a great man, anyway. Perhaps it's as sensible as worshipping any other man. Now, cigars, cigars, think of cigars, or those poor bloody holy Germans will have no smokes to-night."

## CHAPTER SIX

PUNCTUALLY at six on the following evening Alfred and Hermann presented themselves before the Knight. Von Hess issued the same orders as before to Heinrich, and after the door had closed behind the servant he bade Alfred and Hermann sit down. But neither of them did so. Hermann started to speak, hesitated and stopped. Alfred helped him.

"He has something he wants to say to you, sir."

"Well, get on with it, Hermann."

"My lord," said Hermann, looking not at the Knight but straight in front of him, "if you would graciously allow me I would rather do my work on the farm and not hear any more about the book of your thrice noble ancestor. I am not, please, a coward, but I do not understand very much when you

and Alfred are talking. I would rather hear things from Alfred. So I beg, highly-born, that I may be excused."

"Of course you may," said the Knight, secretly relieved, but courteously concealing it. "I know it's all very difficult, and if you don't want to hear any more, why, it's best you shouldn't."

"I am not afraid to hear things, sir. Only I do not understand very well, and would rather do my proper work."

"Then dismiss. Oh, Hermann, how are those mangolds looking?"

"Poorly, sir. About half the size of Wiltshire ones at the same stage of growth."

"They'll be better after the hoeing," said the Knight, hopefully. "Dismiss."

Hermann saluted, turned stiffly and went out. Alfred sat down in response to a word from the Knight.

"How is Hermann, Alfred?"

"Collapsed."

"He seems all right."

"Oh, I don't mean physically. He works like a dynamo. But he didn't behave at all as we thought he would. He was violent enough when he still believed in Hitler and I didn't, but now you've knocked all his props away. He's collapsed completely into personal dependency on you and me. He's our dog now, not Germany's dog. Hermann has a very weak soul, a baby soul. But he asked me to tell you that though he considers you his father, God and Authority all rolled into one, or words to that effect, he cannot stay in Germany when I go. He says he must kill himself then. He couldn't carry on."

"Even if I tell him he's not to kill himself?"

"I still think he might. It's a great worry. If I overstay my pilgrimage leave they'll drag me back in handcuffs, and I shall be a marked man. Unless you could apply for me to be your private ground mechanic, or something like that."

"I don't want to do that. You're an army mechanic and a good one. All sorts of questions would be asked. Besides, I want that book to be out of Germany before I die. I don't know when that will be. I'm old, and I get bronchitis in the

winters. No, you must go back at the proper time, Alfred. I suppose what Hermann really means is that he can't now live without *you*."

"Well, he can't *talk* to you, sir. You're too high above him. He'd be completely alone really."

"He's always been unhappy, ever since he went to England. Even when he still had all his props. I've never seen such a worker as Hermann. The farm has been his only real hold on life the last five years. Well, I'll think of something before you go. Some way to get him to England. Back to the army, perhaps. No, that won't do. There'd be a rain of questions over that. This Empire is so damned well run no one can do anything quietly."

"He *said*," Alfred suggested dubiously, "though whether he really means it only you could tell, probably, that he would submit himself to Permanent Exile rather than stay in Germany without me."

"Oh," said the Knight. "He said that, did he? H'm."

Permanent Exile was a terrible punishment to which death was at any rate theoretically preferred. Few Nazis, given the choice, would have been so lacking in pride as to say they would choose the Exile. It was a sentence given usually only for the very gravest crimes of sedition against der Fuehrer, or religion, or Germany. No single Knight could deliver the sentence, it must be pronounced by a Knights' Court. It meant that the culprit lost his German status entirely and for ever, that his Blood was proved to be now infected and unworthy; he was expelled permanently from the Holy Land, and thereafter was treated as if he belonged to an inferior and conquered race. Alfred had never seen any of those poor outcasts, and it was a subject on which no German would dwell, talking to an Englishman.

"He has to knock a piece off the Sacred Aeroplane, or something awful, hasn't he?" asked Alfred.

"As a matter of fact they'd kill anyone who did that, in case he became wholly reckless in despair and boasted about it. It is usually for treason of some sort though. There's only one private crime that can be punished by Permanent Exile."

"What is it? Murdering a Knight?"

"No. Bringing a *malicious* false accusation against a

German of having intercourse with a Christian woman. It is considered the worst thing one German can do to another, far worse than beating him up or killing him. A mistaken false accusation would be severely punished, for the accuser ought to have been certain before he brought it, but a malicious one is a very serious crime. If Hermann really will go through with it—" The Knight paused, frowning. "I don't believe he'd face it."

"But anyway, will accusing only a boy do?"

"The Knights' Court would consider it worse to accuse a boy. A young clean creature in the first dawn of his German manhood. Trying to taint him for life with false filth."

"But what about the boy? I'm perfectly certain it was not a malicious false accusation, even though Hermann *may* have been mistaken. And I don't believe he was."

"The boy is dead. He died yesterday of internal bleeding."

"The poor silly little lout," said Alfred regretfully. "We oughtn't to have made him walk. Only he seemed to get along all right."

"This can hardly be a gentle or humanitarian age," observed the Knight. "The people in Munich are much annoyed that the boy's dead, but really only because he might have sung for six months or so longer. But though the boy, whatever his character, could hardly have let Hermann go into Permanent Exile if his evidence could save him, we needn't worry about his evidence because it can't be given. Hermann must make another deposition to the effect that he is overcome with remorse at the boy's death, that there was no girl there at all (because if there *was* a girl, there is a very strong presumption that it must have been a Christian) and that he brought the accusation in a fury of anger because he was attracted to the lad, and he rejected Hermann's advances with scorn. I dare say there *was* a bit of personal feeling in it. Hermann didn't give the lad just an ordinary hiding."

"No," agreed Alfred. "He had a tremendous access of violence and brutality and soldierly virtue. He'd have kicked the lad to death in the wood if I hadn't stopped him."

"It doesn't matter," said the Knight callously. "As far as