

CHAPTER VIII

A LITTLE TOUR OF EUROPE

FOR some time after Sir Bussy had left him the Lord Paramount remained staring out of his window in Whitehall, in a state of some perplexity.

He was like a reader who has lost his place in a story and omitted to turn down the page.

He had forgotten himself.

He had argued.

He had forgotten himself, and some subtle magic in the queerly formidable little creature, Sir Bussy, had called the suppressed and assimilated Mr. Parham. Something, at any rate, of Mr. Parham. For a moment or so it had been almost as though he were Mr. Parham. Instead of just telling Sir Bussy of his task and his danger he had disputed, had listened to what the fellow had to say and for some moments allowed it to weigh in his mind. Indeed, it still weighed in his mind.

Lords Paramount should not do things in this fashion. They know. They know altogether. They are decisive at once. Otherwise what right had they to assume a lordship over their fellows? At any cost their prestige for instant rightness must be upheld. It had been a queer incident, and it must not recur. The memory of one of the late

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Mr. Parham's dinner-table arguments, of that late Mr. Parham with whom his own being was so mysteriously linked, had taken on a monstrous disproportion. He must recover scale.

He turned sharply. Hereward Jackson had entered the room noiselessly and then coughed.

There was something extraordinarily reassuring about Hereward Jackson. He was a born believer; he radiated faith; his mental deference, his entirely unquestioning loyalty was like a perpetual tonic to the Master. And a perpetual example to everyone else about him.

"All is ready," he said. "You can lunch in the air with a flask and a tin of sandwiches, and the new Dictator in Berlin will be awaiting you about three."

For the Lord Paramount had arranged to make a brief circuit of Europe, to marshal the strong men of the Continent about a common policy. They, too, masters indeed in their own houses, were still manifestly in need of a leader to unite them for a common control of the chaotic forces of this age. That leader the Lord Paramount proposed to be, a dictator among the dictators, master of masters, the leader of the new Crusade that would reunite Christendom.

He made the circuit in open military aeroplanes. Before his incorporation with the Lord Paramount Mr. Parham had had no experience of flying except for one or two fine-weather crossings in the big Paris-London omnibuses. Now, muffled to the eyes, with the sweet fresh air whipping his

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cheeks and chin and the tip of his nose, mounting, beating the air, swooping like a bird, he realized for the first time what a delight and glory flying may be. Accompanied by companion planes carrying his secretarial staff, and escorted by a number of fighting planes, which ever and again would loop the loop or fall headlong like dead leaves and recover miraculously within fifty feet of the ground, fly turning over screw-like, pattern in squares and long wedges, chase each other in interlacing circles, and perform a score of similar feats for his diversion, the squadrons of the Lord Paramount swept over the pleasant land of Kent and the Channel, coasted by Dunkirk and athwart mouth after mouth and green delta after green delta of the Rhine, and so, leaving the sleeping law courts of the Hague to the left, turned eastward over the plains to Berlin. Berlin was his first objective, for in strict accordance with his forecast to the Council of the Empire the smouldering and resentful nationalism of Germany had broken out, and the Dictator Von Barheim was now effectual master of Germany. He had to be talked to a little, and assurances had to be won from him. Then to Paris to revive the spirit of Locarno. Afterwards Rome. And then, before the week was out, a scythe-like moving of the outer edge, King Paramitri, Count Paroli, Paraminski, and then a spectacular flight at a great height to Madrid and Parimo de Rivera. For Parimo was still at Madrid it seemed. All kindred-spirited men. All patriot master spirits, devoted to the honoured traditions

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of mankind; to flag and fatherland, to faith and family.

At every European capital the aeroplanes rose like swarms of autumnal starlings to greet the great conservator. Once he was within twenty feet of a collision, but his airman displayed astonishing quickness and skill. A youthful and too ardent Italian got out of control and nose-dived into the crowd on the Pincio at Rome, and there was a slight ground accident which burnt out two bombers at Warsaw, but no other misadventures.

The exhilaration of circling over one great capital after another, over its parks, towers, bridges, and bristling buildings, its encircling hills and clustering suburbs, and the banking and curving about to come down in a swift, clean rush was immense. What ancient conqueror ever made such a hawk's swoop into an allied city? Then followed the bumping rush up to the aerodrome, and then it was the proudly impassive marble face relaxed for the smiling descent from the machine, the greetings, the cameras, the applause.

The vigour of the Lord Paramount's personality, which had been a little impaired in his wrangle with Sir Bussy, was entirely restored by this European tour. His interview in Berlin was pure dominance. There had been street fighting, and the south-east region of the city was said to be in a mess with bombs and machine guns; there was still a little shooting audible in that direction, but Unter den Linden was packed with a patriotic crowd in a state of exalted delight at this imme-

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diate personal recognition of the new régime by the master mind of Britain. Everywhere the old imperial flag had reappeared.

The room in which these two dictators met was furnished with Prussian severity; everything was very simple, very necessary, and very, very big and heavy. Intimate relics of Frederick the Great occupied a position of honour in a glass case. The snuffbox would have carried through a long campaign, and there was room for luggage in the boots. Both men wore military uniforms. Von Barheim aped the still venerated figure of Bismarck and was none the more flexible in mind or manner for the compression of a tight cuirass; the Lord Paramount wore the simple yet effective service dress of a British general. The cap with its gilt-edged peak, the red band with its richly simple adornments, the well-tailored uniform suited his tall figure extremely.

For a time it was a little difficult to get Von Barheim away from the question of war responsibility. He came back to it again and again, and he betrayed a regrettable resentment on account of the post-war policy of France. He harped upon the Rhine. When will Europe forget that ancient dispute? When will Europe look forward? Well it is to be traditional, historical, national, and loyal, but one should not be too rigidly and restrictedly traditional, historical, national, and loyal. If only one could give Europe English eyes!—to see the world. The Lord Paramount perceived that willy-nilly he must play the schoolmaster. “ May I put

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my conceptions of the world situation to you?" he asked.

Germany's man of iron nodded a joyless consent.

"Here," said the Lord Paramount with a sweeping gesture of his hand over the table, "in the very centre of the Old World, illimitably vast, potentially more powerful than all the rest of the world put together—" he made a momentary pause—"is Russia. Consider Russia."

"Their ally in 1914," said Von Barheim.

"But not now."

"Which is just why they ought to be reasonable and not make themselves intolerable to us."

"They have Poland at their beck and call."

"*Poland!*"

The Lord Paramount said no more about Poland. He came back to the unalterable certain greatness of Russia in the future and so proceeded to unfold the standard British conception of world policy in the light of that fact, using almost the same phrases as those he had employed in the recent council, making indeed only one or two modifications, dictated by consideration for the patriotic feelings of Von Barheim. "What part will Germany play in this?" he asked. "Germany, the heart of Europe, the central nation? If she is not the forefront of Westernism against Asia she becomes the forefront of Russia against Europe."

"She can be her own forefront," said Von Barheim, but the Lord Paramount disregarded that.

He felt he was winning and enlarging Von Bar-

heim. The lucidity of Mr. Parham and the magnetism of the Lord Paramount made indeed an irresistible combination. Strange to think how badly that comprehensive exposition had been received when first it had been given to mortal ears at Sir Bussy's table. Slowly but surely this sturdy German mind was turned away from its sombre preoccupations as the new conceptions opened out before it. Von Barheim seemed to breathe a fresher air.

The Lord Paramount came to his climax. "If I could go from here to Paris with some definite proposal," he said and laid a firm white hand on Von Barheim's arm, "if I could restore the Frank to his eastern kindred in friendship and co-operation, I feel I should not have lived in vain."

"Danzig," said Von Barheim compactly. Then added: "And the other points I have explained to you."

"And why not Danzig? Between the Polish border and the Pacific there is room for compensation."

"If it is *that* sort of proposal," said Von Barheim and turned about to face his visitor squarely. "I did not understand at first. . . . If we can re-arm freely. A big honest enterprise."

They had come to business.

Von Barheim clapped his hands in Oriental fashion, and a secretary instantly appeared. "Get a map of the world," he said. "Bring a big atlas."

And before eleven next morning the Lord Paramount was in Paris closeted with M. Pareme. M.

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Parème wore the frock coat without which all French statesmanship is invalid, and the Lord Paramount had assumed a dark lounge suit of the most perfect cut.

M. Parème was sceptical, realist, swift, and epigrammatic. His manner was more hostile than his matter. For Frenchmen all bargaining is a sort of quarrelling. One side must give in. And this was bargaining of the most elaborate sort. Slowly the Lord Paramount unfolded his vast designs. Slowly and with much resistance M. Parème assimilated those designs. But always with safeguarding conditions.

“Germany goes eastward to the north,” said Monsieur Parème. “Good. In the country to the north of Moscow there ought to be excellent scope for German energy—particularly in the winter. Later compensations may come in South America. Again good. France does not touch America. She did all she wished to do over there in the Mexican expedition. We are to go southward and eastward, following out our traditional destinies in Syria and North Africa. Again—good. But it is clearly understood that in the final settlement there is nothing in this arrangement to exclude France from additional—indemnifications in Central Asia or North China?”

Leaving a number of issues open in this region, M. Parème turned suddenly to other possibilities. Suppose the Lord Paramount’s proposals collapsed. Such things had been known to occur. Suppose that at the eleventh hour Germany did not abide

by this bargain but were to attack France in alliance with Italy, would Britain bind herself to come in on the side of her ancient ally? He was very insistent that Britain held to that. These negotiations must not be supposed to set that older understanding aside. On the other hand, if Italy were to attack France while Germany, through a counter revolution or any other cause, failed to support Italy so that Italy was left alone vis-à-vis to France, then France would be free to deal with Italy and her boundaries and her African possessions without any interference from Great Britain. That was understood? It was to be a simple duel in that case, and all Great Britain would do would be to keep the ring. And in case of the joint defeat of France and Great Britain the latter Power would of course undertake to repay to France all of whatever indemnity she might have to pay in addition to such penalties as were directly imposed upon herself, and regardless of any economic difficulties in which she might find herself?

The Lord Paramount's confidence in victory made him very yielding upon such issues.

Their talk became less difficult when it turned to America.

"And across the Atlantic," asked M. Parème, "our friends the Prohibitionists seem to want to prohibit war."

"They won't intervene," said the Lord Paramount as one who knows absolutely.

"Can you even begin to understand the mental

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operations of America?" said M. Parème.

"If they *did* choose to interfere," said M. Parème, "they have an overwhelming fleet, and France has a considerable coast line. Would Great Britain undertake in that case to retain at least two thirds of her naval forces in European waters south and west of the British Channel, so as to defend the French coast?" . . .

At last the Lord Paramount had his understanding plain. France would assist and also France would share. The German ambassador, in spite of the very grave doubts of M. Parème, was called in for an informal confirmation. Then, without haste and without delay, the Lord Paramount returned to his aeroplane, and the British squadrons, with an escort of French aces, streamed, stunting gaily, up the sky. The whole sky was a pattern of aeroplanes. It was very beautiful. It had the splendour of newness, the splendour of order, the thrill of convergent power.

"Rome," said the Lord Paramount.

It was in quite a different key that he met the mighty Paramuzzi, pattern of all the militant great men of the age, a genius almost too stupendous for Italy. "This is a man," said Mr. Parham at their meeting. "*Ecce Homo*," said Paramuzzi.

It was necessary now, in the most grandiose manner possible, to offer Italy the fourth place in and the fourth share of the spoils of this mighty adventure of western Europe against the East. She had, moreover, to be a little disillusioned about her future in North Africa. Her attention had to be

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deflected to Greece, the Balkans, and (a brain wave of the Lord Paramount's) the Crimea.

The understanding was achieved.

At Rome things were done in the classical style—or perhaps if one may employ a slight contradiction in terms, the neo-classic style. The white colonnades of the Victor Emmanuel monument formed a becoming background to the scene. The Lord Paramount wore a British Court costume with the Garter and Order of Merit under a cloak of his own design. Paramuzzi met the occasion in black velvet and silver with a hat adorned with a number of exceptionally large ostrich plumes. They met in the focus of a great semi-circle of cameras.

“Hail, Cæsar Britannicus!”

“Hail, Cisalpine Cæsar!”

There was some tremendous saluting by serried Fascisti. They were patterned across the Piazza Venetia. Never was saluting carried to higher levels than in Italy under Paramuzzi. They did marvellous things with their hands, their chests, their legs and knees, their chins and noses. They brought down their hands with a slap so unanimous and simultaneous that it was as if the sky had cracked.

“Hail, Cæsar Britannicus!” and then the Fascist cry. London cannot do things in this style.

When the two great men were alone there was a moment of intense spiritual communion. Paramuzzi thrust his face with intense dilated eyes close to the Byronic visage of his visitor. He thrust



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a tightly clenched fist even nearer: "*Power!*" he said. "*Power!*" The other fist came to help in a sort of wrenching gesture.

"Exactly," said the Lord Paramount, backing a little with Anglo-Saxon restraint and then bowing stiffly.

Paramuzzi englobed a planet with extended hands. His eyes devoured the Englishman.

"The world," he said. "And what we are! *Virmy!* The forces of life!"

"Yes," said the Lord Paramount. "Yes."

"I love life," said Paramuzzi, "I love life with an exorbitant passion. And death and danger, the red essence of life. Discipline, yes—but death and danger. I delight in untamed horses. Attempts at assassination amuse me."

And then, with a lapse into great tenderness: "And music. Our Italian Scarlatti. . . . *And love!* Sincere, passionate, headlong love! The love of disciples and devotees! Realized."

"For me," said the Lord Paramount succinctly, "my duty."

He perceived he had scored a point. Paramuzzi would have liked to have said that.

To the Nordic mind of the Lord Paramount this encounter had a slight flavour of extravagance, and a certain anxiety invaded his mind as to the outcome of their negotiations; but when it came to business Paramuzzi proved to be a very reasonable man. He was lavish with his assurances and quite ready to accept the fourth share as if it were the first. It was evident the Italian people would

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receive it as the first and triumph. For there was glamour about this Paramuzzi. He could bring all the glory of Rome out of his sleeve; he could make an old hat look like empire, and a swarming and swelling population of illiterates adequate security for limitless loans. . . .

The King of the House of Savoy was something of an anticlimax. . . .

In such fashion it was that the Lord Paramount wove his net of understandings and gathered his allies together for his Asiatic war, the great effort of Europe against Asia. Europe versus Asia. He felt like Herodotus preaching Hellenic unity; a greater Herodotus preaching the unity of Christendom; he felt like King Philip of Macedonia preparing the campaigns that Alexander led. He felt like Cæsar marching southward. Like Peter the Hermit. Like John the Baptist. Like—— But indeed all history welled up in him. He believed all the promises he extorted. He perceived indeed that these promises were made with a certain resistance, with implicit reservations, but for a time he was able to carry on and disregard the faint flavour of unreality this gave his great combination. He was convinced that if only he held his course his own will was powerful enough to carry the European mind with him.

His squadrons throbbed over Europe, and above him was the blue sky—and above the blue that God of Nations who surely rules there, though so many pseudo-intellectual men have forgotten it. The Lord Paramount, in an ecstasy of self-confi-

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dence, waved his white hand aloft.

The God of Nations grew real again as the Lord Paramount recreated him. The God of Battles came back reassured and sat down again upon the Great White Throne.

"My God," said the Lord Paramount.

Whatever obsessions with local feuds might cloud the minds of his kindred dictators, whatever sub-policies and minor issues (from a world point of view) might be complicating their thoughts, surely there was nothing so comprehensive and fundamental and profoundly and essentially true as his own statement of British policy. After all, he owed something to the vanished Parham's intelligence. It was unjust not to admit something brilliant about poor old Parham. The Parham that had been. The man had had penetration even if he had had no power. He had been too modest and inaggressive, but he had had penetration. The more often his admirable summation of the international situation was repeated the more clear and beautiful it seemed.

"The lines of the next world struggle shape themselves," said the Lord Paramount to Paramuzzi, "rationally, logically, inevitably. Need. I explain the situation to your Latin lucidity? Here—" and he made a sweeping gesture in the air before them, for now he could do it without a table—"here, illimitably vast, potentially more powerful than most of the world put together, is Russia . . ."

Et cetera.

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And so to the aeroplane again, droning loudly over the mountain crests, a god of destiny, a being history would never forget.

Europe became like a large-scale map spread out beneath him. It was as if he sat in Mr. Parham's study at St. Simon's and had lapsed into daydreams with his atlas on his knee. How often had Mr. Parham passed an evening in that very fashion! And so soaring over Europe, he could for a time forget almost altogether his dispute with Camelford and Sir Bussy; the paradoxical puzzle of the gas supply he could ignore almost completely, and those queer impish doubts which scuttled about in the shadows of his glory.